Developmental Relationships
Creating Intentional Connections

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Handouts for
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Search Institute is a non-profit organization that bridges research and practice to help young people be and become their best selves. Our current work seeks to surround young people—particularly those from marginalized communities—with developmental relationships that put them on the path to become thriving and contributing adults.
# Relationships in Your Personal Life

For each section below, write the names of up to three people who did these things for and with you. If you don’t recall anyone for a question, leave it blank.

## Who showed you that you mattered to them?

They may have done this by . . .

- Being someone you could trust.
- Really paying attention when you were together.
- Making you feel known and valued.
- Showing you that they enjoyed being with you.
- Praising you for your efforts and achievements.

1. ________________________
2. ________________________
3. ________________________

## Who pushed you to keep getting better?

They may have done this by . . .

- Expecting you to live up to your potential.
- Pushing you to go further.
- Helping you learn from mistakes and setbacks.
- Insisting that you take responsibility for your actions.

1. ________________________
2. ________________________
3. ________________________

## Who helped you complete tasks and achieve your goals?

They may have done this by . . .

- Guiding you through hard situations and systems.
- Building your confidence to take charge of your life.
- Standing up for you when you needed it.
- Putting in place limits that kept you on track.

1. ________________________
2. ________________________
3. ________________________

## Who treated you with respect and gave you a say?

They may have done this by . . .

- Taking you seriously and treating you fairly.
- Involving you in decisions that affected you.
- Working with you to solve problems and reach goals.
- Creating opportunities for you to take action and lead.

1. ________________________
2. ________________________
3. ________________________

## Who connected you with people and places that broadened your world?

They may have done this by . . .

- Exposing you to new ideas, experiences, and places.
- Inspiring you to see possibilities for your future.
- Introducing you to other people who helped you grow.

1. ________________________
2. ________________________
3. ________________________

## Questions to share with your group:

Which person(s) did you list the most?

Which person is a surprise in thinking of their influence on you?
The Developmental Relationships Framework

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements—that make relationships powerful in young people’s lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Express Care | Show me that I matter to you. | • Be dependable Be someone I can trust.  
• Listen Really pay attention when we are together.  
• Believe in me Make me feel known and valued.  
• Be warm Show me you enjoy being with me.  
• Encourage Praise me for my efforts and achievements. |
| 2. Challenge Growth | Push me to keep getting better. | • Expect my best Expect me to live up to my potential.  
• Stretch Push me to go further.  
• Hold me accountable Insist I take responsibility for my actions.  
• Reflect on failures Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks. |
| 3. Provide Support | Help me complete tasks and achieve goals. | • Navigate Guide me through hard situations and systems.  
• Empower Build my confidence to take charge of my life.  
• Advocate Stand up for me when I need it.  
• Set boundaries Put in place limits that keep me on track. |
| 4. Share Power | Treat me with respect and give me a say. | • Respect me Take me seriously and treat me fairly.  
• Include me Involve me in decisions that affect me.  
• Collaborate Work with me to solve problems and reach goals  
• Let me lead Create opportunities for me to take action and lead. |
| 5. Expand Possibilities | Connect me with people that broaden my world. | • Inspire Inspire me to see possibilities for my future.  
• Broaden horizons Expose me to new ideas and experiences  
• Connect Introduce me to people who can help me grow. |

NOTE: Relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, with each person giving and receiving. So each person in a strong relationship both engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.
A Developmental Relationships Checklist

Checkmark each action that you think your programs and services intentionally and consistently promote with and for young people and families.

Express Care

Leaders and materials help family members . . .

___ trust each other.
___ really pay attention to each other when they are together.
___ make each other feel known and valued.
___ show each other that they enjoy being with each other.
___ praise each other for their efforts and achievements.

Challenge Growth

Leaders and materials help family members . . .

___ expect each other to live up to their potential.
___ push each other to go further.
___ insist that they each take responsibility for their own actions.
___ help each other learn from mistakes and setbacks.

Provide Support

Leaders and materials help family members . . .

___ guide each other through hard situations and systems.
___ help each other be strong, confident, and take charge of life.
___ stand up for each other when they need it.
___ set limits that keep each other on track and moving forward.

Share Power

Leaders and materials help family members . . .

___ take each other seriously and treat each other fairly.
___ involve each other in decisions that affect each person.
___ work together to solve problems and reach goals.
___ give each other chances to make decisions and take the lead.

Expand Possibilities

Leaders and materials help family members . . .

___ inspire each other to be hopeful for the future.
___ expose each other to new ideas, experiences, and places.
___ introduce each other to people who can help us grow.
# Reflecting on Relationships

When done well, how have you seen or experienced these five elements of developmental relationships being enhanced through your programs and services? Include specific examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>When do you see this element most at work?</th>
<th>Where do you see opportunities to strengthen this element?</th>
<th>How might you enhance this element of relationships?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Express Care</strong></td>
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Ideas for Building Developmental Relationships

The Developmental Relationships Framework focuses on aspects of relationships that can be enriched through intentional action. These ideas for how adults can build relationships with youth are based on insights from focus groups and interviews, as well as research on the elements of developmental relationships.

1. Pay attention. Focus on youth when they are talking about things that matter to them. Put away your cell phone.
2. Follow up with when you learn about what they are going through something, rather than waiting for them to bring it up again.
3. Make time for lightness. Share some humor, fun, and laughter amid the practical tasks.
4. Work to understand young people’s points of view, their background, and their story, even when some of it may be difficult to hear.
5. Ask follow-up questions so you both know you’re interested and tracking.
6. Find satisfaction in doing things for and with the young person, even if these things wouldn’t otherwise be important to you.

7. Highlight future goals. Talk with young people about the things they dream about.
8. Emphasize mistakes are a necessary part of learning. Praise them for hard work, whether they succeed or fail.
9. Help young people find their own solutions, rather than just telling them what to do.
10. Challenge young people to try things that are a little hard for them to do.
11. Expand thinking by asking hard questions, providing alternate explanations, and encouraging openness to different opinions.
12. Expect young people to do their best, even when doing something they don’t really like.

13. Offer information and practical help to solve a practical problem, or loan them something they may need.
14. Show young people how to ask for help when they need it.
15. Give more support when young people are struggling, and less when they are making progress. Step back as their skills build.
16. Help young people think through options and resources when they encounter obstacles.
17. When you teach a young person a skill, demonstrate it by breaking it into smaller steps.
18. When young people are not getting the help they need, find people who have resources or expertise to help with the issue.

19. Let young people make decisions about activities you do together and what you talk about. Don’t jump in too quickly to resolve awkward silences or ambiguity.
20. Include them in thinking about decisions, even when you have to make the final call.
21. Learn from young people. Let them know when you’ve learned something from them that you’re excited about.
22. When you can, offer choices (“So, what could you do differently to tackle this problem?”), rather than always giving instructions.
23. Encourage them to select and plan activities they are enthusiastic about that you can do together. Ask questions and coach them when needed, so they can be successful.
24. When you disagree, take time to understand each other’s point of view.

25. When young people seem curious about an activity, topic, or issue, ask questions such as “what strikes you about this?”
26. Introduce young people to a wide range of people, places, ideas, cultures, and vocations. Start with ones they’re curious about.
27. Broaden the web of relationships. Connect young people to people who share their interests or can expand their world.
28. Introduce young people to other cultures, ideas, and places that help them discover their place in the world.
29. Model being a curious learner by asking questions and sharing what you’re learning in your own life.
30. Encourage young people to try things they might be interested in. Maybe try it together.
**Relationship-Building Tools and Services**

*20 Ways to Build Developmental Relationships with Young People (mini poster)*

This new bilingual poster highlights the five elements of developmental relationships and the 20 actions that bring relationships to life. Share with educators, parents, youth workers, and others who connect with young people. Sold in packets of 15. English on one side, Spanish on the other. www.searchinstitute.org/shop/

*Relationships First: Creating Connections*  
*Help Young People Thrive*

This booklet introduces Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework, research on the power of relationships, and strategies for becoming more intentional in relationship building. Download for free from www.searchinstitute.org/relationships-first. Or text "RFIRST" to 66866 to receive an emailed copy.

*Getting Relationships Right: A Workshop for Leaders*

This workshop lays the foundation to begin implementing Search Institute’s Developmental Relationship framework in schools and youth-serving organizations. Participants leave ready to be more intentional and inclusive in building developmental relationships with and among young people. Visit www.searchinstitute.org/professional-development

*Strengthening Families by Strengthening Relationships*

**Keep Connected** offers a seven-session workshop series for parents and their middle schoolers. Families explore the five essential elements of parent-youth relationships through a mix of learning and sharing activities. For more information, visit: www.KeepConnected.info.

*REACH* is a set of research-based resources to strengthen student motivation:

- **R**elationships—Connections to learn and grow
- **E**ffort—The power of a growth mindset
- **A**spirations—Hopes for a positive future
- **C**ognition—Key self-regulation strategies
- **H**eart—Core values and sparks

Visit http://reach.search-institute.org

*Surveys*

www.searchinstitute.org/surveys  
Surveys examine developmental relationships, student motivation, program quality, and developmental assets. Each survey is offered online.

*Workshops*

www.searchinstitute.org/professional-development  
Build expertise and develop practical strategies to put Search Institute research into practice with a range of workshops.

*Other Resources*

www.searchinstitute.org/shop/  
Search Institute offers a variety of print resources for educators, youth workers, parents, and other leaders.
NOTES

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