



AGES 11–23

**Supporting staff to:**

# ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY

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Engage Authentically is a young person’s experience with an adult who takes the time to get to know them by listening and understanding who they are — their cultural and lived experiences, their interests, and their passions.

Engaging authentically involves placing young people’s personal stories at the center of the program’s work and ensuring that they feel valued, heard, and cared for by adults. This is a Foundational Experience for young people, or one that lays the groundwork for all of the others in Hello Insight’s logic model.



# WHY

## IS ENGAGING AUTHENTICALLY IMPORTANT?

Empirical research shows that the number of hours young people spend in a program, or the number of activities they engage in, does not make a difference (Flores, K. 2018; Pekel, K. 2016; Pekel, K., et al 2015). Rather, it's positive, meaningful relationships with adults that really drive social and emotional learning.

In 2015 the Search Institute conducted a provocative study that found that positive youth-adult relationships were ten times more predictive than demographics in influencing mastery of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills (Pekel, K., et. al., 2015). In 2016, they conducted a second study that showed that, when young people had a greater number of positive relationships with adults, they reported higher academic motivation, stronger social and emotional skills, and a more responsible attitude. They were also less likely to engage in risky behaviors (Pekel, K., 2016).

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2015) has also found that the single most common finding in their research was that children who end up doing well after childhood trauma “had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.”

### DISCOVERIES FROM HELLO INSIGHT

Young people are dynamic and full of promise, with many different pathways to success. Every year Hello Insight mines our growing dataset of more than 125,000 young people, participating in more than 1,500 programs nation-wide, so that we can continue to learn what works for each and every young person.

- \* Hello Insight has found that Authentic Engagement is a Foundational Experience for all young people, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity. In fact, young people who participate in programs that purposefully build strong youth-adult relationships demonstrate growth in SEL that is more than double the growth seen in other programs (Sabo Flores, K. 2018).

# HOW HAVE OTHER PROGRAMS INCORPORATED ENGAGING AUTHENTICALLY?

PYD, including engaging authentically, is not a curriculum, it is a way of working with young people that has been proven to promote SEL. You can incorporate engaging authentically in a wide variety of interventions and programs. Here is how some Hello Insight members have integrated this practice into their programs.

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

**Staff at DREAM build relationships during program activities, and they get to know young people in less formal “in-between moments,” such as before the program starts or during transitions between activities.**



Staff intentionally use this informal time to learn more about each young person’s day. Staff are trained to actively listen to young people and to let them know that they care about them and what is going on in their lives.

*“The relationships that we build with our youth, as program coordinators, are key. We are available to them all of the time... we are there for them beyond program hours.”*

**Staff at Philadelphia Student Union want young people to know that they can say whatever is on our minds, they won’t be judged.**



Adults are considered allies and take time to understand young people’s experiences and interests — these stories are the building block for developing critical consciousness and supporting young people to develop campaigns, actions, and research that is based on their own lives.

# HOW

## CAN OUR PROGRAM BEST SUPPORT STAFF TO ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY?

Use this reflection guide with your staff to explore “bright spots” – practices that you already do, highlight potential “accelerators” – practices that you could easily incorporate into your work, and “challenges” – things that might make this practice difficult.

<b>PRACTICES</b> Ways to engage young people	<b>BRIGHT SPOTS</b> Examples of what the program already does	<b>ACCELERATORS</b> Ways you could easily incorporate this practice	<b>CHALLENGES</b> What might make this practices difficult to do
<b>Carve out time in your day to learn about and listen to young people.</b>			
<b>Take the time to really understand young people and their lives outside the program.</b>			
<b>When young people share thoughts and opinions, let them know how much you value their ideas.</b>			
<b>Help young people feel safe and supported by consistently and purposefully applying their recommendations.</b>			



This guide is part of a set meant to help youth-serving programs incorporate PYD. Visit [www.ins.gt/pyd-exp](http://www.ins.gt/pyd-exp) to learn more.

■ View a full list of citations at [www.ins.gt/citations](http://www.ins.gt/citations)



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