

# APPROACHES TO EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES



Expand Possibilities may seem like something you mostly do by going to new places or talking about new ideas. Yet it begins with a relationship in which you know and see the other person in ways that other people might not—including the person themselves. Your insights on who they are and your own experiences, ideas, connections, and imagination may be able to open up new possibilities that they hadn't considered. When that happens, they'll always remember you for it.

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## Places You Would Never Go

Adults who get to know young people and their interests, and connect them with opportunities can have a big impact. For example, one young person described an adult in her life who expanded possibilities for her by encouraging her to join a dance team. This young person noted, "She always has something new to offer, but it's usually an opportunity. As in somewhere for you to go, some place for you to audition. . . . she takes you to places that you never would have thought you would have explored or have been interested in." Through this relationship, the young person was inspired to "try new things in life."

*Source: A national Search Institute study of non-parent, non-teacher youth-adult relationships that lead to thriving.*

- 1. Use culturally responsive content:** Make sure content you use is reflective of the young people in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, culture, religion, sexuality, ability, etc. For example, if you are making a collage using magazine pictures, make sure the youth can see themselves in the images.
- 2. Introduce options:** Ensure that young people are aware of multiple possibilities before they make important decisions. For example, when discussing life after high school with young people, be sure they know about and consider a wide variety of options, including 2- and 4-year colleges, careers, internships, apprenticeships, and trade schools. Make connections between young people's strengths, dreams, and interests and these future opportunities.
- 3. Broaden perspectives:** Recommend things to watch, listen to, or read to gain exposure to new ideas, prompt consideration of different perspectives, and expand a young person's thinking about a topic.
- 4. Help them go deeper:** Ask about and listen for things that young people are curious about or like to do. When you discover such a subject or interest, encourage the young person to learn more about it. When possible, provide them with resources to engage in and build on that interest, such as clubs, classes, events, books, websites, field trips, guest speakers, or other opportunities.
- 5. Promote diversity:** Facilitate conversations and connections among young people that cross lines of difference.
- 6. Take field trips:** Bring young people to places they've never been to before. This can include in-person trips to destinations near or far, or virtual field trips. Take time to reflect together on what they learned through this new experience.

**7. Make introductions:** Introduce young people to other people or organizations who have expertise in something they want to learn or get better at. Encourage these new connections to share their stories with youth and for youth to ask questions about their experiences. Some youth may be nervous to meet new people, especially if they are older or have a role/position that could be intimidating. Rather than making an introduction and leaving the young person to connect independently, meet with the new person and the young person together so everyone feels comfortable.

**8. Say what you see in them:** When you see a talent in a young person that they might not see themselves, let them know, “I think you might be really good at this.”

**9. Share stories of how different people find their path in life:** Whether it be examples from the lives of famous people or historical figures, interviewing other adults in your community, or sharing your own story, help young people see that there are many ways that an individual’s life experiences and decisions shape the journey they take in becoming adults and figuring out what they want to do in life.

**10. Help young people think forward, act now:** Provide young people with experiences and share insights that help them understand that the things they do in the present will influence the options that they have in the future.

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### “She Gave Me a Book”

Adults who help youth think concretely about their future goals and connect them with new ideas open up opportunities that they may have not otherwise learned about. One young person explained, “You know how they ask us, ‘What do you wanna be when you grow up?’ I would be stuck. And then they would tell me about jobs that I didn’t even know existed, and some of those jobs are really cool.” Another young person gave an example of how, through their relationship, an adult staff member encouraged further learning about the issue of segregation: “When we were talking about police brutality, she asked us, ‘What do you think the root causes are?’ So, I said, ‘geographical segregation,’ and then after that, two days later, she gave me a book.”

*Source: A national Search Institute study of youth-serving organizations.*



### **Blend Elements: Expand Possibilities & Provide Support**

Introduce young people to others who can support them. Sometimes these people might be new to them; other times you may identify a person that a young person already knows but highlight how that person could be supportive in a new way.

For example, staff in a large congregation shared that instead of fully supporting all the youth themselves, they connected youth with other adults who could support them. One staff member shared that the congregation connects elders with young people so they can build relationships and the elders can share their experience with the young people.