

HOW TO STAND WITH YOUNG LEADERS

A guide on practicing Youth Allyship

A FOCUS ON RIGHTS

Youth participation is important in shaping society both in the present and in the future. It is necessary for adults to believe, support, and practice platforming young people and youth engagement. The dreams and ambitions of young people are capable of enacting substantive, creative, and far-reaching change that impact and benefit the collective community.

We must involve young people not simply to help build existing and future communities, but also because of the present, as young people are not simply dependents awaiting adulthood, but fully-fledged and recognizable human beings that adults can learn from and grow with. To achieve this, it is important that youth participation and their voices are platformed and respected.

Human rights are fundamental to the well-being and ability of people to live fulfilled lives in which their human dignity is respected. When practicing youth allyship, it is necessary to consider and understand the unique rights of youth in order to create the spaces they need to thrive. Below is a list of articles from the CRC that active youth allies can reference in their work to support youth communities:



PROTECT THEIR PEACE: How do we ensure the safety of youth?



ARTICLE 3

Centering the best interests of children as a primary consideration in the interactions and initiatives adults have with younger communities.

ARTICLE 16

Protecting their privacy—ensuring we do not subject them to arbitrary or unlawful interference to their privacy, family, home or correspondence.



ARTICLE 19

Ensuring that they are protected from all forms of violence and abuse: physical, mental, emotional, sexual, exploitative, and neglect.

→ ALLOW THEM TO GROW: How do we ensure that youth needs are fulfilled?



ARTICLE 28

Helping them access affordable and equitable educational opportunities in academic and vocational institutions.

ARTICLE 29

Supporting the development of children's full potential by nurturing their personal, cognitive, physical, social and artistic capabilities.



→ AMPLIFY THEIR VOICE: How do we support youth advocacy?



ARTICLE 12

Respecting and according due weight to the views of younger communities and actors, especially in relation to matters that affect them.

ARTICLE 15

Supporting their right to peaceful assembly in forming and joining organized groups.



ARTICLE 13

Upholding their right to share their thoughts freely and be able to seek and receive information.

— DEFINITION OF AN ALLY —

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

- Lila Watson, Australian Indigenous Activist for Women's and Aboriginal Issues.

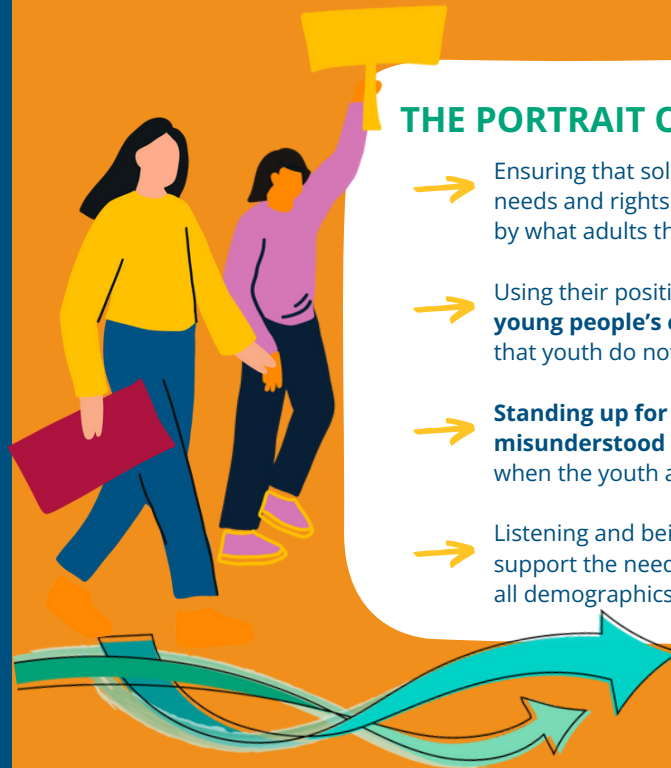
As youth grow to define themselves, grow into and shape their realities, and become acknowledged as leaders in and out of their spaces, they need an **active ally**. Active allyship lies in a genuine care for the struggles, experiences, and needs of marginalized communities—a fundamental desire to do and be better by supporting their fight against systemic harm.

An active youth ally is somebody recognized by youth as going beyond simply understanding their concerns and being willing to help. It is about being willing to walk the long road ahead with youth and caring that they make it to the end having reached their fullest potential.



THE PORTRAIT OF ACTIVE ALLYSHIP

- Ensuring that solutions are driven by the actual needs and rights of young people rather than by what adults think youth need or deserve.
- Using their positionality as an adult, to **bring young people's concerns to light** in spaces that youth do not occupy.
- **Standing up for young people when they are misunderstood** or shamed by adults, even when the youth are not present.
- Listening and being willing to learn and support the needs and concerns of youth from all demographics.



THE PORTRAIT OF PASSIVE ALLYSHIP

- Engaging in Performative Allyship – **only mentioning youth issues when it is "trendy" or for personal gain** (to promote one's own virtuous moral compass). However, once the discussion is over, they stop advocating for youth issues.
- Providing **selective support**—only supporting "some" youth while ignoring the concerns of other youth.
- Reverting to **harmful language/stereotypes/attitudes about youth** when they are inconvenienced by youth behavior.
- Ignoring or not centering young people and trying to advocate for what they think young people need and center what they think are appropriate "solutions" to young people's problems.
- **Overshadowing youth voices** in their spaces by taking up too much space and leaving young people incapable of fully and comfortably expressing themselves.



— THINGS TO AVOID AS AN ACTIVE ALLY —

Below are examples of comments that can be demeaning, disrespectful, and harmful to youth.

“Young people these days are so sensitive”

This statement invalidates the lived realities of young people as they try to navigate their complex experiences and how these realities affect their wellbeing and perception of the world.

“What do I have to learn from young people?”

The belief that one cannot learn from young people denies their role as valuable sources of knowledge.

“It is for your own good”

This statement blurs the lines between protecting children and policing, controlling and preventing them from making their own decisions, especially when it is used to *end* a conversation and does not teach or explain to youth why they *cannot* do something.

“You are too young to understand”

This statement and attitude questions the intelligence of young people and their ability to understand what is going on around them. It also lacks care and respect for young people and attests to an unwillingness to educate them.

“That is childish, you will outgrow it”

This type of reply prevents young people from authentically living and experiencing the various phases of their lives. It encourages them to “grow up” at the expense of their youth. Putting down youth interests also fails to consider how young people can use their interests as a means of change.

Being unaccommodating to youth in public spaces: **When youth are shamed or criticized for acting their age, it makes them feel unwanted and denies their rights as members of society to occupy shared spaces.** This is especially harmful as active participation in public spaces is important to their development; excluding youth from these spaces puts youth needs in second place and excludes them simply for their age.



— HOW TO INTERACT WITH YOUTH COMMUNITIES-BUILDING “TRUST” —

How do I build trust?

T

Talking to young people with the same level of **respect, grace, and attention** that is used when speaking to adult peers. This requires getting rid of **Adultism** – being prejudiced against young people simply because of their young age.

R

Realizing that as an adult in youth spaces, there is a power dynamic that exists due to your presence in the space. Look for ways to minimize this distance.

U

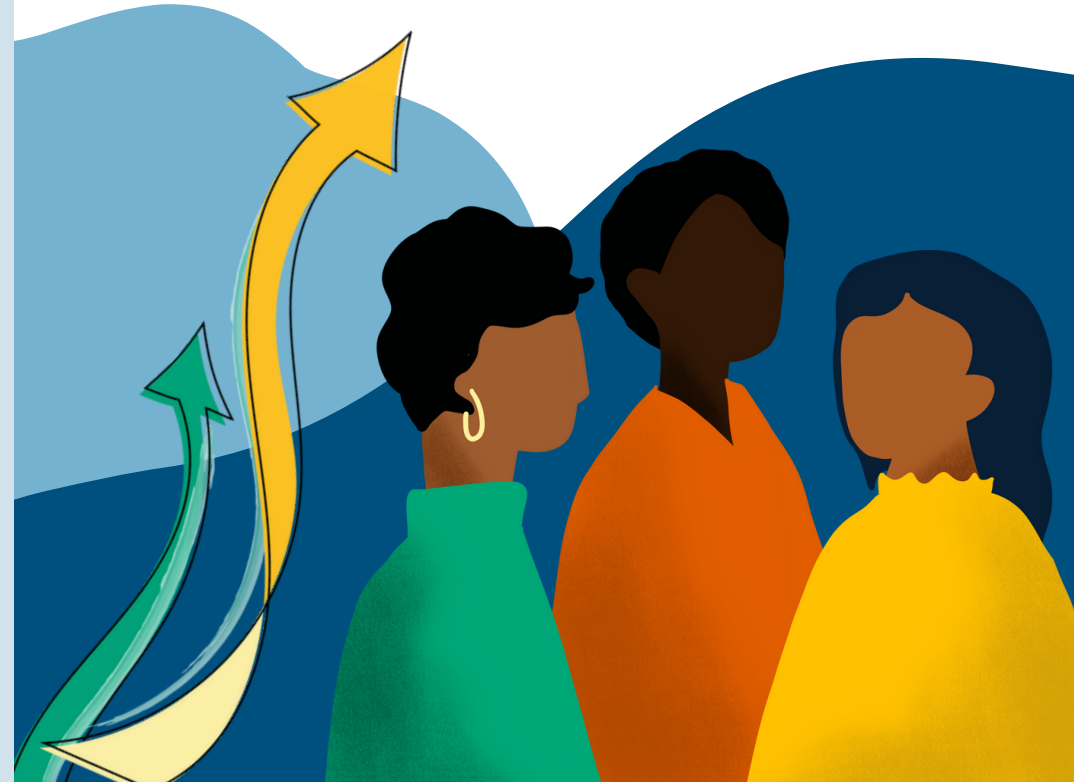
Understanding that **labels stick and being conscious of the words** used to describe young people, as the stigma of tagging a youth with a negative label influences their self-perception and may lead to them emulating negative traits to “fit” that label.

S

Seeing youth as unique individuals that exist outside of boxes and stereotypes of what a “young person” should be. Building positive and authentic relationships with youth by taking the time to **get to know them as unique individuals**.

T

Taking an **EMPATHETIC rather than a SYMPATHETIC approach** to youth concerns. Rather than pitying them, try to connect with them as a former young person and access your own experiences.



NEXT STEPS: HOW CAN YOU BEGIN BEING AN ACTIVE ALLY TO YOUTH LOCALLY?

Learning about allyship should not be limited to this guide. You will find below additional resources to enrich your journey as an active youth ally!

RESOURCES:

1. Say La Vie by Youth for Youth Québec: A podcast by a youth led organization focused on the needs of English speaking Youth in Quebec that highlights the challenges, successes and experiences of Young People. [Youth for Youth Québec \(y4yquebec.org\)](http://y4yquebec.org)
2. Understanding the State of Youth in Canada: The Canadian Government's Youth-led report, examines the various sectors and issues in which youth have concerns and require supportive and active allies. [State of Youth - Canada.ca](http://StateofYouth-Canada.ca)
3. PAR-et-POUR- a guide for the francophone community by la Federation de La Jeunesse Canadienne-Francaise on what youth participation looks like, how can it be supported and what it means to engage with young people within communities: [PAR-et-POUR-Doc-Explicatif.pdf \(fjcf.ca\)](http://PAR-et-POUR-Doc-Explicatif.pdf)
4. Apathy is Boring's "Youth Friendly" program [Youth Friendly](http://YouthFriendly), contains/lists resources, services, and opportunities to hear from youth on what they need from their allies. Youth Friendly's mission is to educate and train partner organizations on creating spaces where youth can have a tangible impact on the conditions they live in. Here are the 7 principles behind what it means to be "Youth Friendly" - [7 YF Principles — Youth Friendly](http://7YFPrinciples-YouthFriendly).
5. Children First Canada is a national charity that acts as a catalyst to ensure every child in Canada thrives – now and for generations to come – by protecting their rights and equipping them as the leaders of today and tomorrow. CFC works alongside children and youth, providing them with a platform to be seen and heard, and mobilizes individuals within our community, businesses, and government to protect the rights of children through research, public engagement and advancing public policy. Here are some resources to start with: [Raising Canada](http://RaisingCanada) | [Young Canadians' Parliament](http://YoungCanadiansParliament) | [National Child Day](http://NationalChildDay) | [The Canadian Children's Charter](http://TheCanadianChildrensCharter).

