Guidance on

Effective Relationships in Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs)

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Background

Youth justice practitioners in Ireland report that relationship building is key to the way they work with young people (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014; Fullerton et al., 2021). A 2018 youth justice practitioner survey found that *"building relationships with young people makes up an estimated 60% of their time, and therefore accounts for a significant proportion of public funds"* (Fullerton et al., 2021, p. 18). Therefore, relationships built for the purpose of diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour are important for Irish youth justice practice and policy makers. Relationships formed for the purposes of addressing offending behaviour have been explored in an evidence review connected to and preceding this guidance document (see Fullerton et al., 2021). The evidence review and subsequent research undertaken by the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project, highlights that youth justice practitioners in Ireland attribute significant value to relationship building with young people for crime prevention purposes. However, there is limited evidence on how relationships for crime prevention purposes work in practice. In the REPPP relationships research we have examined the potential transformative properties of purposeful and bounded relationships in Youth Diversion Projects (YDP). This guidance, co-designed with over fifty youth justice practitioners, provides evidence of how to practice effective relationships in YDP for crime prevention purposes.

Development of the guidance

The *Guidance on Effective Relationships in Youth Diversion Projects* was developed with youth justice practitioners from sixteen YDP throughout Ireland. Each project represented a case study site that inputted into an action research process[1] on what youth justice practitioners do to build the kinds of effective relationships that are most likely to help divert young people from crime. The resulting Action Research Project (ARP) was a three-year study funded by the Department of Justice in Ireland and led by the REPPP team at the School of Law, University of Limerick.[2] The overall project, evidence review and ARP, has aimed to examine the utility of quality relationships to meet the policy objective of reducing young people's criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Through a process of co-design with practitioners, we found that developing and sustaining an effective relationship with a young person to divert them from crime, can best be described as a journey. Practitioners can make progress, encounter unknowns and face setbacks along the way. This guidance is intended as a practice compass for each individual relationship journey, rather than a set of manualised instructions. This compass can point someone in the direction of best practice, but practitioners may need to find their own way at times. This idea reflects the individuality of youth justice relationships and supports the idea that no one relationship is the same. Thinking of the relationship as journey recognises that every relationship is distinctive and can be unpredictable. Relationships by their nature are organic and so flexibility is important. The guidance does not cover every eventuality, for example, it may not help restore a relationship with a young person that hasn't worked out. Nor is it a step-by-step list of what to do. Instead, it is a guide that practitioners can use to find their way, intentionally developed by their peers with suggestions for practice derived from information shared throughout the research process.

[1] Action research is a flexible research approach that aims to understand a system by changing some aspects of it and then examining and responding to those changes through an iterative process (Lienert, 2002a)

[2] The full Relationships Project report contains a detailed account of how the complete project was undertaken.

How to use this guidance

It is recommended to use this guidance as a practical tool, like a compass that points north, to aid in the development of effective relationships with young people, support practice and divert young people from crime. In addition, the practitioners who were involved in the ARP told us they used the guidance in the following ways:

a. To assess or improve relationship practice.

b. To reflect on progress with young people.

c. As a tool to aid discussion in team meetings, supervision, and peer networks.

d. To shape case management with young people and plan appropriate interventions.

You may find it useful to use the guidance in similar ways.

What's included

In the next section a *Relationship Model* is presented. This was co-designed with practitioners following the action research process. This is followed by suggested ways to practice each element of the model. Each element is accompanied by case examples provided by the sixteen case study sites. There are also some quotations from practitioners on how to practice each element, included in speech bubbles.

The Relationship Model

The relationship model illustrated in Figure 1 depicts what practitioners told us is needed for an effective one on one relationship between a youth justice practitioner and a young person in a Youth Diversion Project (YDP). We have attempted to visualise the YDP relationship journey by using the analogy of having a cuppa and a chat. Youth justice practitioners told us this is how they usually tend to build relationships with young people – in the everyday settings of their youth spaces, having informal conversations over a cup of tea or coffee.

The first part of the model is ***'create safety'***. It is depicted as a table in the image. Creating emotional and physical safety acts as **the foundation, or the base**, of all effective YDP relationships. Safety needs to be established before any of the other elements of the relationships. '*Creating safety'* is depicted as a table in the image because it functions as the steady, solid base that everything else is placed upon.

The **other essential elements** of the relationship model are presented at the centre, or 'core', of the graphic. These are ***'trust, time, support and being young person centred'*.** They are depicted as a scene with a young person and a youth justice practitioner having a one to one conversation on couches. *'Trust, time, support and being young person centred'* were described in our research as the other essential elements of a functioning positive relationship with the young person. Building trust, allowing time, providing support and being young person centred were expressed by practitioners as priority areas. They are core to all other aspects of the relationship journey and propel the relationship forward.

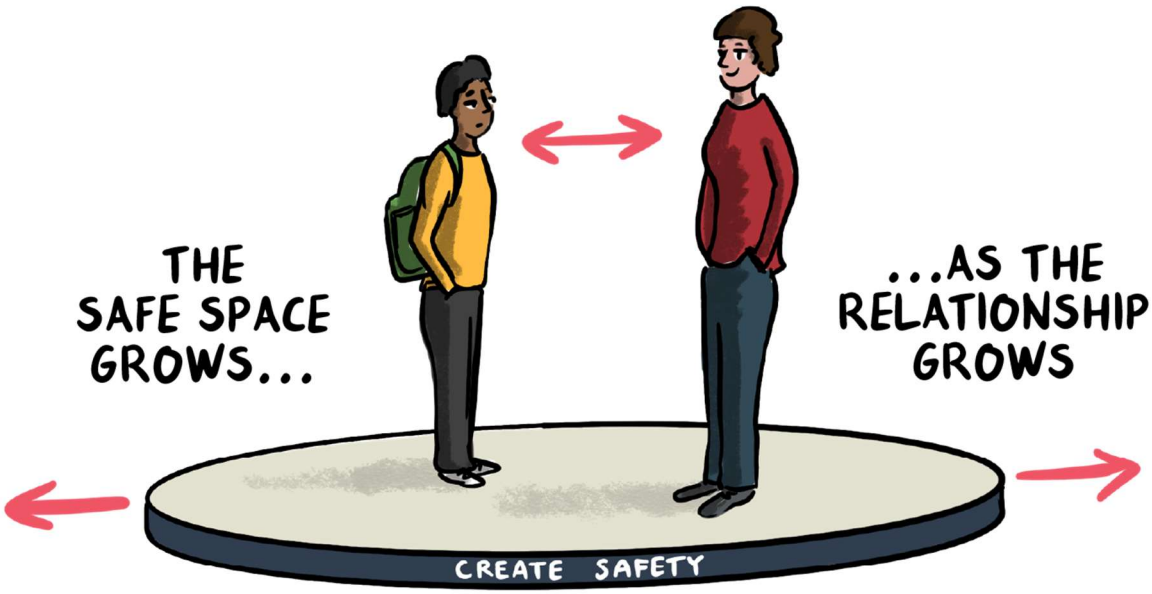
Finally, there are seven grouped **skills, attributes, and practices** that can help build each unique relationship with a young person. These are depicted as mugs in the relationship model, because they can be picked up and put down again, depending on the individual relationship. They are practice areas that can be **applied at various points** in the relationship, when needed. These elements encourage practitioners to **'*be fully committed, communicate with empathy, make connections and advocate, be flexible and adapt, practice use of self and reflection, be honest and challenge constructively* and *guide, inspire hope and build agency'*.**

Applying all these elements together was considered the most effective way to build relationships to address the policy objective of diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour.

Explanations of how practitioners described their practice under each of these elements are detailed in the narrative following the relationship model in Figure 1. These explanations are accompanied by case study examples provided by practitioners from the sixteen sites.



Figure 1. The Relationship Model



Base of the Relationship

Create safety

Youth justice practitioners highlighted that it was important to provide a safe and secure foundation to build the relationship on. Here are ways suggested to create safety for young people within a YDP:

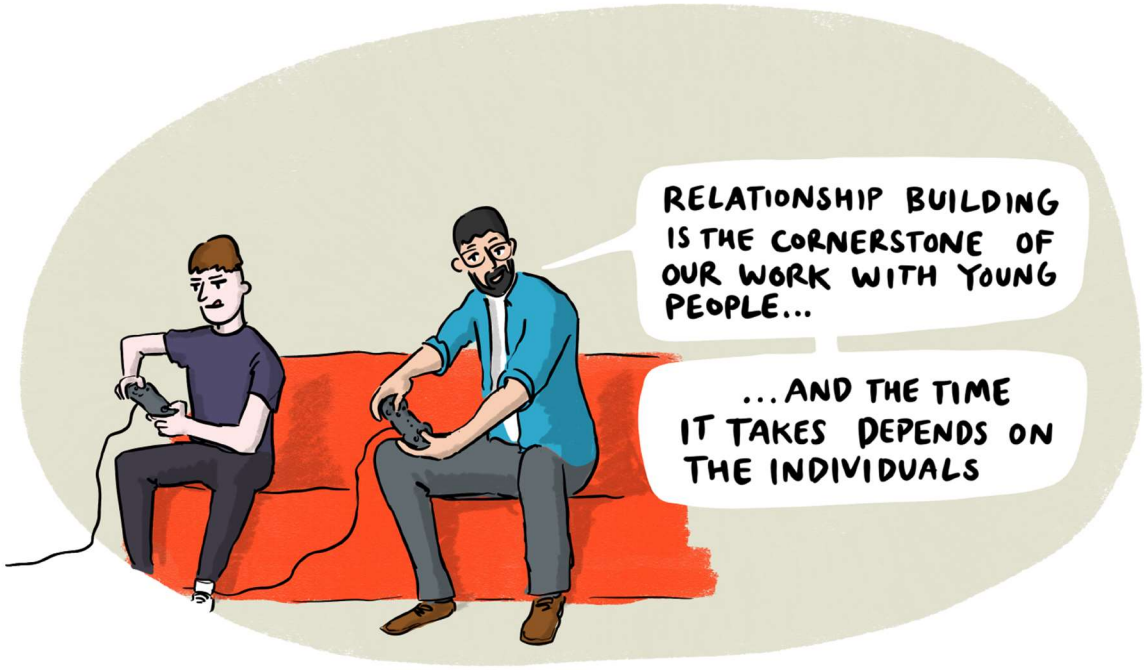
- Create a safe and comfortable space where the young person feels secure. Try to provide a clean, warm, welcoming, and safe physical space where young people can feel at-ease. Take into consideration the basic needs of the young person, for example, by providing food when needed. Recognise the value of the young person having a space where they feel a sense of ownership, for example, youth spaces with their artwork and photos on display.
- Create an emotional safe space for the young person. Practitioners should try to take the approach that this is 'the young person's time' and ensure they are made aware of that.
- Explore the young person's level of comfort before introducing them to different situations. Get to know them by learning what makes them 'tick' and what 'presses their buttons'.
- Introduce the young person to everyone that works in the YDP. This relationship building helps transitions within the project if a young person's key worker is absent or unavailable.
- Maintain an informal approach in contrast to a more formal authoritarian one. Work with the young person to understand their preferences and views rather than, for example, telling them how to behave or where to sit. This informal approach at the early stages of the relationship can be important for building rapport.
- Try to be aware of where the young person feels most comfortable and safe. When offsite, avoid spaces where they feel exposed, at risk or judged.

- Inform the young person of the purpose of the YDP, what to expect and any practical aspects such as opening hours. YDPs have policies and procedures to ensure the safety of all young people. Try to display these and discuss them with the young person.
- Involve the young person in identifying appropriate boundaries and expectations, e.g. mutual respect. Endeavour to include the young person in any decision-making regarding expectations, especially in terms of their engagement.
- Ensure the young person and their families understand the confidential nature of the project. Practitioners should not discuss a young person or their family in front of others. At the same time, practitioners should inform young people early on that although they can keep certain things confidential, there are limits to this and they must follow through on child welfare and safeguarding concerns.
- Build a respectful ethos that is inclusive of culture, ethnicity, and individuality. Treat all young people with equity, celebrate diversity and design programmes or activities with this in mind. Practitioners should make it clear that the project is a place for all. In groups promote a supportive inclusive approach, where all can express their opinions and share their stories and experiences.
- Be sensitive to personal situations and individual circumstances, for example, struggles a young person or family might be having, and offer support.

Case Example

I worked with a young male for approximately a year. This young person engaged quite well, meeting on a weekly basis. At times, engagement would be reduced due to his drug use and mental health difficulties. This young person felt very isolated and lost in trying to find a way back into family life. Due to drug use and physical and verbal abuse within the family home, the relationship with family suffered greatly.

Given the difficulties faced by this young person, I would try to be as flexible as possible in arranging a time and place to meet each week. The young person seemed relaxed and comfortable in the meetings. We got to a safe place where he said he felt listened to and heard while discussing really difficult aspects of his life. Throughout the meetings, I would regularly feedback what was talked about and try to get the young person to come up with possible solutions. At times when the young person found it difficult to come up with solutions, I would make suggestions, but the young person was always aware that the decision to commit to anything always rested with him.



Core Elements of the Relationship

Time, Trust, Support and Being Young Person Centred

Youth justice practitioners highlighted that time, trust, support and being young person centred were core, essential elements of building an effective relationship with a young person.

Here are ways suggested to practice these four core elements:

- Recognise that relationships take time and cannot be forced or rushed. Practitioners should allow relationships to form naturally over time. Some will take longer than others. Be patient and committed to investing time in building the relationship.

- Model trustworthiness. Build trust by saying what you mean and following up on promises. Keep the young person informed of all actions related to them and admit when you make mistakes. Be aware that each young person sets their own pace regarding when and how they trust the practitioner.

- Build on longevity of relationships in the community to establish trust. Draw on the family and community's history with the project and other connected projects. Build rapport 'on the doorstep' by calling to houses. Although not always possible, it helps if practitioners are visible, known locally or have long standing relationships in the community.

- Support the young person on their personal journey. The youth justice relationship can involve a process of the young person learning to self-regulate, through feedback, guidance, and motivation from the youth justice practitioner. Support them in areas they are interested in and topics that will help them, e.g. advice on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

- Focus on the young person and the relationship itself, and less so on the reason for the referral at the early stages of relationship building. Try to do as much as possible to find out about the young person, this includes learning what makes them 'tick' and what 'presses their buttons'. Strive to get to know the young person for yourself. Don't allow others' accounts to influence you.

- Maintain a broad focus, not limited to the offending behaviour. Even if you disagree with a young person's behaviour or attitude, always accept the young person for who they are. Look for the good and recognise that all young people have their unique identities.
- Be respectful of the young person's environment. A youth justice practitioner should reinforce a respectful and supportive stance for the young person and people in the young person's community. The approach should not be contrived, but genuine - 'walking with' the young person.
- Mark special occasions or significant dates, for example, record the young person's birthday at the beginning of the year in the diary and acknowledge their special day. It may also be important to remember an important anniversary or loss.

Case Example

A young person was referred to the project through the Community Gardaí. He was finding it difficult to cope in school and was spending a lot of time hanging around the estate. He was very volatile and finding it really difficult to manage his behaviour. When he would attend the project he would invariably end up getting frustrated and shortly after arriving, he would say something or act out and then storm out of the building. I would follow up afterwards by calling up to the house to see how he was doing, and we would chat for a few minutes at the door. I didn't push the issue of what had happened as our relationship was still very new. I kept it about checking that he was ok.

Through these conversations and his regular attendance at the project we gradually got to know each other. In the first few months his behaviour remained an issue and often resulted in an early exit. I had a lot of concerns about how it would potentially land him in a lot of trouble out in the community.

As our relationship grew he was able to be more open about his triggers. We both agreed that he would start to come to the project a bit early to have a chat and settle in. This gave him the space to talk about things that might have gone wrong at school or at home before we started into a session or activity. We also developed a routine where he began coming back to the project for a chat if something went wrong during a session so we could work through whatever was going on.

As the relationship developed I had a much better understanding of the young person, and he began to trust in me to discuss various aspects of his life. The time and space that we allowed to bring the relationship to a point where we were comfortable talking about what was going on really helped to develop a positive route for the young person. From there, and with agreement from him, I was able to engage with his family and school to build additional supports around him. This story is from twenty years ago, but I still remember the young person so vividly.


TIME
TRUST
SUPPORT
& BEING
YOUNG
PERSON
CENTRED

Skills, attributes, and practices

Youth justice practitioners identified seven skills, attributes, and practices that can help build each unique relationship with a young person. They are described below. They can be applied at various points in the relationship, as needed.



#1 - Be fully committed

Youth justice practitioners highlighted that being fully committed shows the young person that they are dependable, they care about them, are there for them and will not give up on them.

"Being persistent and consistent creates stronger relationships over time."

Here are ways suggested to practice this:

- Create routine and structure. Persistent and consistent approaches by the practitioners help to establish structure and routine so a young person knows what to expect.
- Try to meet with a young person consistently but also be ready to respond to what the young person needs. Ensure the young person knows they can contact or call in to meet a worker at other times (within reason) when they need to.
- Send out routine reminders, for example, texts the day before a session or written reminders. These are important after certain periods such as the summer or Christmas breaks. The young person should be reminded of any goals and plans for the following week at the end of a session.
- Be conscious and consistent in use of language. Try and have a positive focus when wording requests, especially when addressing absences from the project or other challenges, for example 'we missed you this week, what's going on?'

- Be consistent during positive and challenging times. Remain available, even when a young person is not engaging. If a young person can't make it, practitioners can let them know they still have a place and can link back in for support when they are ready and able to engage.
- Follow up when a young person does not show up or has not engaged. Where engagement is proving difficult, practitioners should persist with calls to the home to parents or other identified caregivers.
- Remain persistent and patient with the young person. Be aware that a high risk, vulnerable young person may have had agencies and professionals fall in and out of their life and be prepared for the young person to test them before they fully engage in the relationship.
- Know when to pull back and give space. Continue to engage and maintain contact with parents and guardians during this time and try creating informal opportunities to maintain engagement with the young person. Be proactive in recognising when to take the pressure off and ask other services to support if appropriate.
- Go the extra mile when needed and within reason. Be willing (when appropriate) to meet a young person when they are in a crisis or at unusual hours or circumstances, for example, with a solicitor, or at Garda Stations and hospitals.

Case Example

A young person who was out of education for two years began training in the local training workshop. We assisted the young people in securing a place, met with the manager and linked each day with the young person at the beginning of the process to ensure that they were supported and helped to settle in a bit easier. Of note, I went with the young person on the morning of the first day and this was acknowledged by them and very much appreciated. This demonstrated going the extra mile for that young person.





#2 - Communicate with empathy

Youth justice practitioners highlighted that communicating with empathy was important for helping a young person feel heard, cared for and valued.

"That must be scary… I'm worried about the risks you are taking"

Here are ways suggested to practice this:

- Reiterate and remind the young person that part of the practitioner's role is to provide support and guidance. Be encouraging and complimentary, remind the young person of their strengths, and that their stories and experiences are important.
- Use a selection of tools to support communication. This can be done individually and in groups, using skills and approaches learned in training, for example motivational interviewing and restorative practice. These among other techniques are helpful to guide a young person through unfamiliar processes and help them deal with challenges in their lives.
- Recognise and acknowledge when something might be going on for the young person, by being attentive to cues such as body language.
- Create spaces to listen attentively. It is important to hear what the young person is saying and witness their stories.
- Listen to the young person's views. Facilitate them to take opportunities to feedback and voice their opinions. Explain why their opinions are valued. Short- and long-term goals should be developed collaboratively with the young person.

Practitioners should actively listen to the young person, being mindful to:

- Hear what the young person is saying and focus solely on the young person during the conversation. Try not to become distracted by taking notes. Reflect the conversation back to the young person, by paraphrasing and summarising.
- Intentionally use silence at the right time. Silence allows the young person to gather their thoughts and discuss what is on their mind.
- Reassure the young person that you hear them, empathise with what they are going through, and that they are not alone.
- Show the young person that there is no judgement, acknowledge their truth and clarify any misconceptions.
- Try to capture and remember the little snippets of information that a young person shares. Consciously check back on what the young person told you in the previous session, asking about things they previously mentioned or reminding them of something positive that they said.
- Consciously stop jumping in to offer advice, listen, and make suggestions only when needed.

Case Example

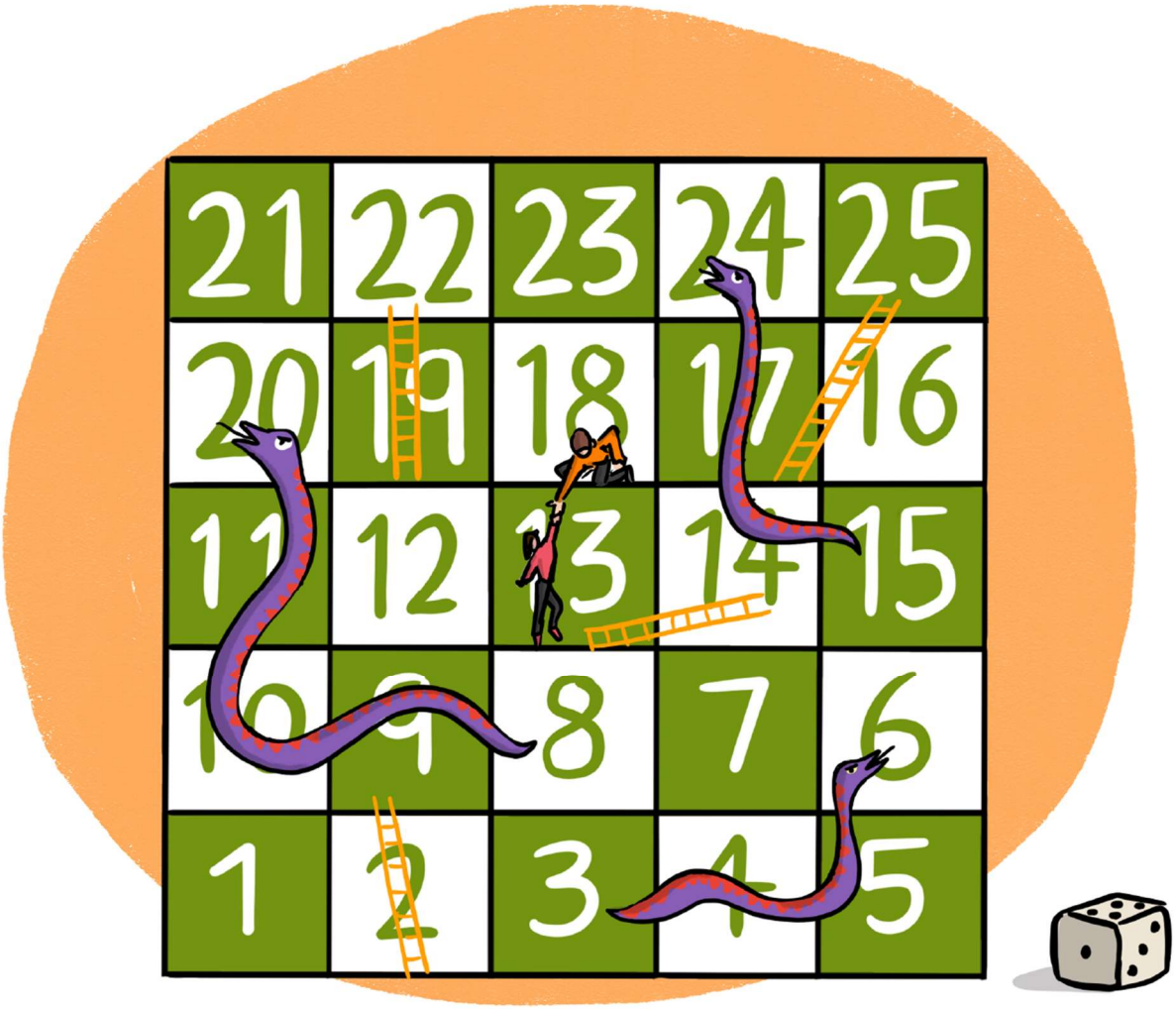
I worked with a young person aged sixteen for a twelve-month period. We arranged to meet on a weekly basis, at 4.30pm after school. The first thing we did was go to the kitchen, cook noodles, have a cup of tea and a bar of chocolate. As a worker, I felt the importance of creating a safe space to help him feel listened to and respected.



The young person had been involved in several offences including theft, minor assault, burglary, and possession of a weapon. He would have been very easily influenced. He would just go along with others to feel connected and have friends, regardless of the negative activities they got involved in. He had few positive influences in his life.

The young person engaged really well in the project overall. He always enjoyed coming in after school to have something to eat. We talked about how school was going, how his sporting activities were going, keeping fit and positive mental health. We slowly built a relationship based on trust, understanding and respect. Starting the 'Life of Choices Programme' gave me the chance to explore crime and offending behaviour with him. We focused on decision-making, impulsivity control, victim empathy, motivation to change and peer influences. He also took part in restorative practice, hand-writing a letter of apology to a victim for his wrong-doing. As time went on, his level of risk reduced significantly. He didn't reoffend again on completion of the programme.

The young person pulled away from a number of negative influences in his life and is now doing really well. Six months after he left the project, he phoned me after receiving his Leaving Certificate results to let me know how well he did. I could see he had a huge sense of pride, having completed his exams and doing so well. Having built such a strong working relationship while he engaged in the project, it was lovely for me to hear from him and see his success.



#3 - Make connections and advocate

Youth justice practitioners highlighted the importance of making connections for the young person. This meant spending time advocating for and linking with the young person's family to connect them with other relevant services. Here are ways suggested to practice this:

"A wraparound effect to support the young person in all aspects of their life is important."

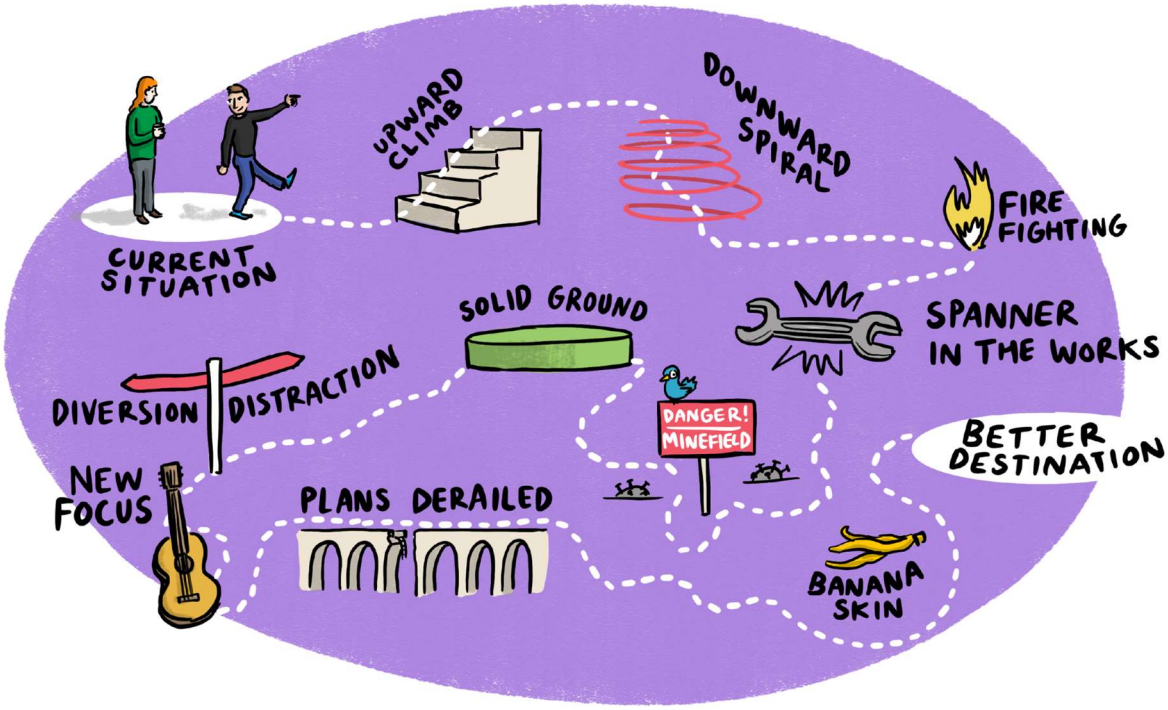
- Regularly link with parents, guardians, and families to include them and act as a source of support and contact. Promote a positive relationship between the young person and their family (e.g. by arranging outings to spend stress free time together and have fun).
- Identify and signpost the young person and their family to other appropriate services when needed. This ensures the parents or carers are aware and equipped with the right information to engage. Aim to demystify services for families by supporting them in a step-by-step process and encouraging them. When needed, arrange transport and accompany the young person for support at appointments and meetings.
- Explore all options with the young person and family. Some may not be ready to engage with another service. Provide support to help them prepare or engage.

- Connect, collaborate, and co-operate with a range of services such as schools, Gardaí, further and third level education, employers, courts, drug and alcohol and mental health services. If suitable, link with Juvenile Liaison Officers on house calls, attend court proceedings and engage with probation services on behalf of the young person. Be mindful of over dependency and ensure autonomy is respected and supported.
- Advocate on behalf of the young person at meetings and act as the young person's 'voice' if needed. Hear what the young person wants and present that at inter-agency meetings, e.g. case conferences, hearings, and school. Make a point of emphasising positives about the young person in interactions with services.
- Empower the young person to advocate for themselves and use their voice when they are ready. Support the young person to have their voice heard at meetings, asking them their views, and helping them practice in advance.
- Actively help prepare the young person for when their time with the project is finished, e.g. by introducing them to adult supports, services, and programmes.
- Highlight for others the unique role taken by the project and how it differs from other services, e.g. by taking a deliberately informal approach.

Case Example

We had a sixteen-year-old participant who had received two cautions for anti-social behaviour. This young person missed a lot of time from their training programme and was putting their place at risk. Education was not a priority. The young person expressed an interest in farming. We contacted the training coordinator to see if they could get a placement on a farm to be included as work experience. The coordinator was happy to facilitate. We got in contact with a social farming service and went to meet the farmer. The young person engaged well, feedback was positive and overall attendance was consistent. The collaborative approach really helped the young person remain in education.





#4 - Be flexible and adapt

Youth justice practitioners highlighted the importance of being flexible, changing or adapting to facilitate programmes and strategies based on the strengths, needs and interests of the young person.

> "This is reflected in the individually tailored response to each young person."

Here are ways suggested to practice this:

- Flexibility in approach. This involves meeting the young person 'where they are at, in the here and now' and focusing energy on their current needs. It also means exploring elements or areas of the young person's life that they want to work on and not allowing for the sole judgement of the worker to decide on areas they feel need to be addressed first.
- Consciously respond to what the young person needs in a particular moment, space, and time. Prioritise the young person's well-being, particularly during periods of stress or concern. Recognise the cues and respond, check-in with them, ask how they are and respond accordingly.
- Work together with the young person on personal development plans and give them more ownership of their own plans where feasible.
- Engage in reflective cycles of reviewing programme content with the young person and be willing to change direction when needed.

- Be flexible at specific times of year. This includes being innovative and open-minded especially during certain times, for example, changing ways of working at times of the year such as Christmas or summer, adapting to change when needed.

Case Example

We supported a previous participant looking for help regarding access to third level education. The young person, now aged twenty three, reflected that the project had been the one constant support, outside of family, he had since he was thirteen. He said that it was always somewhere he turned to for support in different areas of his life, and mentioned addiction, education, and referrals to other appropriate services. He said that other services and staff in certain roles came to an end and even though he was disengaged from the project when he was seventeen, he continued to link in with the service.





#5 - Practice 'use of self' and reflection

Youth justice practitioners highlighted the importance of using their own personality and life experiences in a safe way to connect with a young person. Reflecting and self-awareness was viewed as important for the practitioner. Their unique role was seen as providing a platform for transformation for the young person. Here are ways suggested to practice this:

"You can't relate to a young person if you don't first know yourself and reflect on your own life and personality."

- Be yourself and use your personality and attributes to support the relationship. Reflect on the information you give the young person. Consider whether it would be helpful and appropriate to share some of your own similar life experiences and struggles, where relevant. When done safely, this can be an effective way to build connection and discuss issues. Using aspects of your own identity and life story might also challenge the stereotype that only some types of people have certain experiences or problems.
- Identify and share common interests, where relevant and appropriate. Actively find common ground with the young person, for example, a love for animals or certain hobbies. This can spark a connection that can be built upon.

- Reflect on practice individually and together with the team with the view to becoming more self-aware. Space for this reflection should be built into your work.
- Be self-aware. Know your own traumas, triggers, and projections and how these might impact relationships at times.
- Play a specific role in the young person's life that's different to that of authority figures and other adults they know. Meet the young person 'where they are at' and build a constructive working relationship that is unique, different, and positive for them. Be aware of how the relationship serves a particular function.
- Help build a young person's confidence and self-esteem by passing on skills you have, e.g. creative skills like woodwork or art.

Case Example 1

A staff member was the victim of knife crime which changed their direction in life. Years later this staff member started working with a seventeen-year-old who had committed knife crime and was subsequently referred to the project. The practitioner felt it important to share this experience with the young person and talk about how it affected them. The practitioner felt the young person was genuinely concerned for them. This shared experience brought about a discussion about victims of crime and the impact on the person, families, and the community. The practitioner felt using this experience helped the young person in terms of their empathy and their future.

Case Example 2

When I first met him, he was living in residential care. He had a very complex background. Even after he had been attending the project for quite a while, he was still very closed and reluctant to open up to me. The use of conventional programmes did not work with this young person.

I discovered that he had a great interest in boxing, and coincidentally so did I. As time went on, I found that after taking part in a training session, he would be far more open to talking to me about himself and life's problems. We had many long conversations while recovering from strenuous training sessions. I decided to always focus the interventions with him on a training session followed by motivational interviewing. Over time the relationship between us grew to the extent that the young person travelled thirty kilometres just to bring me a Christmas present.

Unfortunately, his historic cases of criminality and continuing substance misuse built up against him, and he was sentenced to six months detention. Apart from his parents (with whom he had reconnected as they had restored more order in their lives) and his residential home, the only other person on his call list was me. I contacted him at least twice a week during his stay. I received an invitation to visit, becoming his only visitor during his time there. He became a model detainee and worked hard to get his life back on track.

On the day of his release, he had a scheduled court appearance. I met him and gave him a present on behalf of the project. It was a pair of boxing gloves and other training gear. He was delighted with



these and vowed to join the local boxing club when he settled back in. Before he got in the car to start his journey home, he said goodbye to me with a very genuine display of emotion.

He is now living back at home with his parents. He is attending a youth education programme and is studying for his exams. He is also making good use of the boxing gloves and training gear, and most importantly, he is engaging with the substance misuse counsellor. He remains drug free and has not come to the attention of the Gardai since his release.



#6 - Be honest and challenge constructively

Youth justice practitioners highlighted the importance of constructively challenging a young person. They emphasised that being honest, genuine, and supportive comes with constructive challenging. Practitioners acknowledged that challenging a young person can be tricky. Consistent engagement, routine and structure can be helpful, and it takes time before you can really challenge on a deep level and encourage a young person to take responsibility for their actions.

"Constructively challenging a young person to be their best self is an important practice."

Here are ways suggested to practice this:

- Be transparent with the young person and their family. Within reason up to date information about progress or lack of, can be important for the relationship with the young person and their family.
- Give an honest account when something happens, while being cognisant and aware of individual triggers. This involves recognising the right time to challenge, away from others and in a safe manner. Giving honest feedback can lead to growth and moving forward.
- Help the young person to understand the boundaries and limits of the YDP.
- Focus on building the young person's capacity by firstly supporting them and then challenging them to take responsibility for their actions when needed. When challenging negative behaviours, endeavour to highlight positive behaviours displayed by the young person in the past.

- Take responsibility and accept when you have done something is wrong. Be willing to admit mistakes and apologise for it.
- Use a consistent approach when challenging behaviour. Workers should take into consideration what may work for the individual young person at that moment in time and the stage the relationship is at. Practitioners should support each other when challenging young people.
- Use creative approaches to challenging negative behaviour, such as humour where appropriate.
- Listen to all perspectives and hear what all parties need and want during conflict situations. Then present back alternative perspectives and translate these into tangible and appropriate actions that both parties can do.
- Use evidence-based tools for managing disagreement and conflict, e.g. restorative practice.

Case Example

A young person in our project spoke about his negative views on young females. This was challenged by the youth workers, but at the same time we gave the young person a platform to express a different opinion. The young person wasn't told they were wrong, rather encouraged to see it from a different point of view, and to look at gender stereotypes. I remained calm and consistent but challenged honestly. The goal wasn't to win the argument, rather to challenge the young person to think about their views, where they came from and to consider others.





#7 - Guide, inspire hope and build agency

Youth justice practitioners highlighted the importance of positive reinforcement with young people, continually pointing out progression. Practitioners can offer praise to promote positive behaviour and boost self-esteem and confidence. The relationship is a vehicle for the young person's development, and practitioners can give a clear message that change is possible.

"Encourage transformation and facilitate the young person to find the way."

Here are ways suggested to practice this:

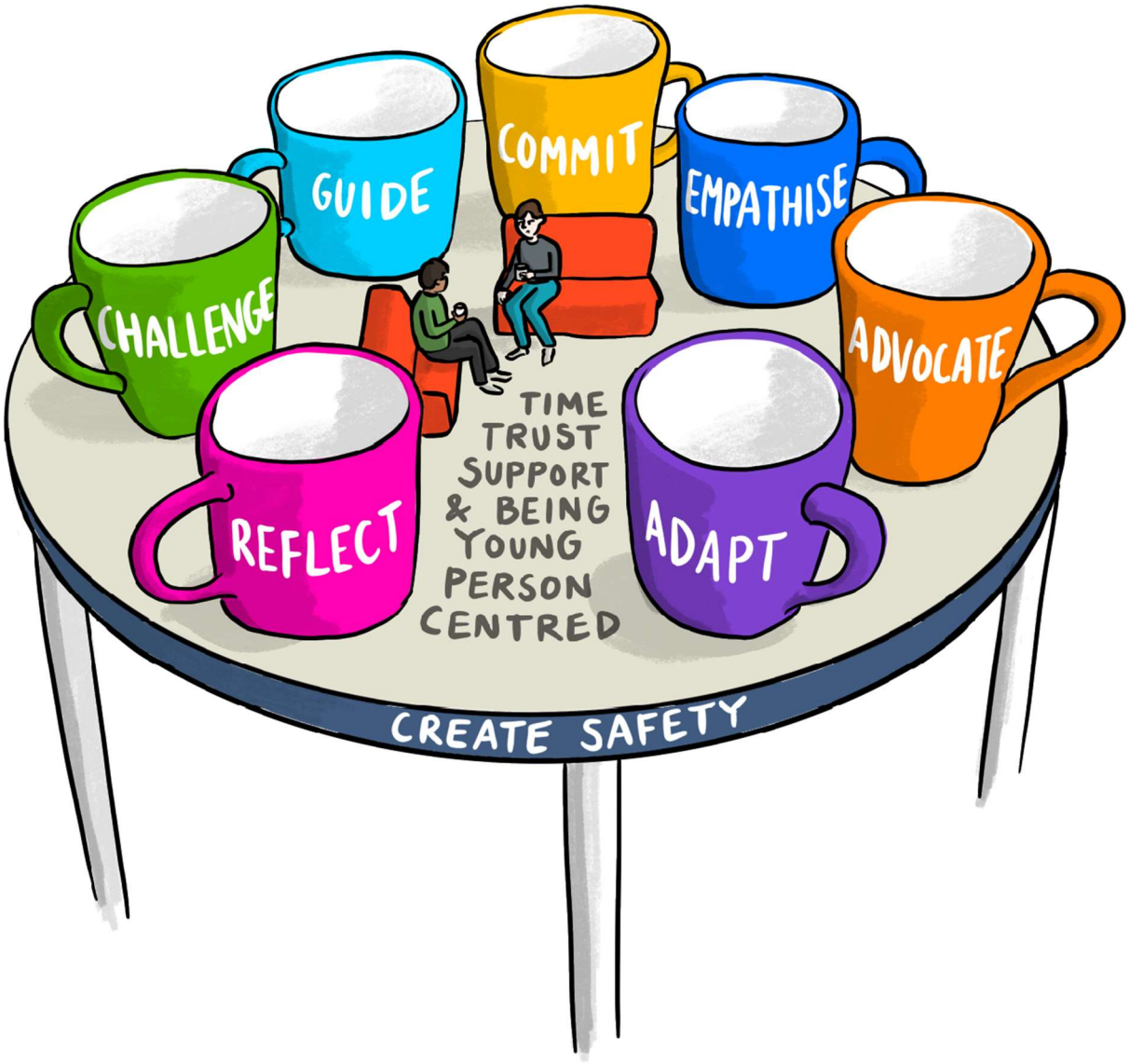
- Provide a sense of possibility and optimism for the young person. Discuss issues through a lens of acceptance and empowerment. Building the young person's voice, agency and independence are important aspects of relationship work. Youth justice practitioners believed in second and more chances.
- Take opportunities to communicate positive news stories and affirmations to parents or guardians using suitable methods to send positive reinforcement messages home. Make a conscious effort to 'catch young people doing well', intentionally acknowledging it or highlighting it to them.
- Ask parents, guardians, and other services to identify the young person's strengths and point these out. Recognise the young person's achievements, for example, on finishing a programme.

- Support the young person to see and identify their own strengths and potential. This is an opportunity for both practitioner and young person to explore strengths to build upon.
- Actively look for opportunities to give the young person responsibility by assigning them appropriate roles, duties, activities, and tasks they might not normally be asked to do.
- Help set realistic goals with the young person, reviewing them regularly and being a constant source of support for the young person to complete the given task or goal.
- Provide opportunities to learn new skills, develop aspirations and encourage further education and training.
- Connect the young person with clubs, groups, projects, activities, or experiences that can support them to engage in pro-social behaviours and with the wider community. Work with them to support participation in community initiatives and projects.
- Engage in fun-based activities that broaden horizons while building relationships with others and creating good memories. Try bringing the young person to events outside of the project which benefit their interests, for example, trips to competitions or special interest. Try a mix of engagement strategies such as fun activities that are strengths or interest led. Talk to the young person informally about topics of interest, for example, music, art, sport, and find out what helps the young person to relax during a session such as a cup of tea, or icebreakers. Activities can be planned based on things the young person is good at and likes.
- Get involved in activities with the young person. Doing activities with young people can help build relationships. Endeavour to attend positive events with the young person where possible also, for example, a match they are playing in.
- Engage the young person in evidence-based programmes and practices that encourage greater reflection, better decision-making, and aid change, e.g. motivational interviewing.
- Facilitate the young person to get involved in decision making structures, where available, to inform planning, programmes, and youth participation.

Case Example

One project organised a young women's group made up of past, present and younger YDP participants. The group was entirely youth led, with a different participant leading the group each week. They were required to choose the theme, purchase what was required for the group, and facilitate. The group was particularly aimed at one individual who was a primary referral. Working with the family support worker the project seized the opportunity to reinforce the young person's progress by giving them a leadership role. This was a huge success for the young person and group with full attendance throughout. It also gave the opportunity to praise the young people, and in the long-term this continued to be used as a reference point for future group activities.





Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) is a research collaboration between the School of Law in University of Limerick and the Department of Justice. It is aimed at improving the evidence base in relation to youth crime and youth justice reform in Ireland. REPPP's research activities are informed by, and in support of, the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027.

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