



PARTICIPANT PACKET

How to Work with Adult Allies

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WORKING WITH ADULTS

As young organizers, you are bound to come up against resistance from adults who are not accustomed to giving young people's ideas equal respect. It can be very frustrating and unfair when someone:

- writes you off, not taking your project seriously
- acts threatened or hostile
- tries to discourage you from doing your project ("It's a nice idea, but it'll never work; why not volunteer for the church community group instead?")
- has a patronizing attitude ("Isn't that cute: little organizers!")

Remember: Adults are good

- They want young people to succeed.
- They love it when young people ask for their help—even when they seem too busy to help.
- Young people can learn a lot from them.
- They can give you access to resources such as office space, materials, and funding sources.
- They are excellent and important allies in terms of the professional skill, experience, and credibility they can bring to your efforts.
- They can provide great emotional support and encouragement.

Tips on Working with Adults

- Ask for their help.
- Expect adults to keep their meetings with you. Of course they get very busy, but they should be able to manage their schedules and meet commitments.
- Ask adults who already support you to talk to other adults and encourage their support.
- Ask adults about their own lives and successes. Build a two way relationship with them.
- Share things about your life with the adults you know. Personal conversations help build close relationships, and close relationships are key to success.



Understanding Adulthood

Adulthood is defined as the systematic mistreatment of young people and of young people's thinking. It is a large problem, not the fault of any one person.

Some examples of adulthood include:

- Discounting young people's experience, just because it is not "professional" experience.
 - Believing that young people are incapable of making responsible decisions or choices without adult guidance.
 - Assuming that young people only know or care about things like popular music, fashion, and parties, not about larger political or social issues.
 - Making condescending comments such as, "It's just a phase you're in" or "You're still a little wet behind the ears!" or "My goodness, you're certainly well-organized for a bunch of kids!"
- When you're confronted with adultist attitudes, try to keep your cool. Remember that adults *are* good people, even when they act this way.

Handling Adulthood

When you're confronted with adultist attitudes, try to keep your cool. Remember that adults are good people, even when they act this way.

- When confronted with adultist behavior or language, ask to be treated with respect, just as you respect adults.
- If you don't want to respond, don't, but know that you're still right. Don't internalize adults' negative views of you.
- Some well-meaning adults may try to discourage you from doing your project because they think it won't work and they want to protect you from disappointment. Appreciate their good intentions, but always trust your own judgement. Have faith in yourself and keep moving forward.



ADULTIST ROLE PLAY – SCENARIO 1

Shopping under a Watchful Eye (3 or 4 characters)

Scenario:

Marco is standing in the candy aisle of a corner convenience store. He's not sure whether he wants Jolly Ranchers or Reeses Cups. It's one of those days when it takes him forever to make up his mind. Susan, the storeowner, notices that he is lingering in the candy aisle and begins to eye him suspiciously. Marco knows that he is being watched, but he is determined to take his sweet time.

Marco Ortiz - hungry young person.

You came into this convenience store to spend your hard-earned money and just because you're young you are treated like a criminal. You aren't going to let the clerk rush you. You have as much a right to be there as anyone.

Marco might say, "Pardon me, but do you have Watermelon Jolly Ranchers. As you've noticed I've been looking for five minutes and can only find apple ones." "How come you only let 2 kids in here at once? There are more than two adults here!"

Susan Register - suspicious convenience store owner.

Your store has been robbed twice in the past year. Both times it was by teenagers, so you're not taking any chances. You can't afford to have these kids come in and steal all your merchandise.

Susan might say, "You need to hurry up and buy what you came for and move on. It can't be that hard to find a piece of candy." "I only allow two kids in here at a time." "I was just robbed... I know how you kids are." When Susan sees Mr. Chalk, she is very polite and says, "Take your time Mr. Chalk, let me know if there is anything I can get you."

Mr. Chalk - teacher.

You have had a craving for Cool Ranch Doritos all day. At first you don't notice that Marco Ortiz, one of your students, is in the store, but you do see the clerk watching someone suspiciously. You hate it when adults don't trust kids just because they are kids, and the way the clerk is watching Marco is starting to annoy you.

Mr. Chalk might say, "Hey Marco, good to see you. How are you? Getting a snack? Me too, what do you recommend?"

Need an extra character?

Give Marco a best friend - someone who is with him in the convenience store.



ADULTIST ROLE PLAY – SCENARIO 2

Broken Heart’s Club (3 or 4 characters)

Scenario:

Shawna comes home after a rotten day at school. She and Todd have been going out for five months now and he just called it off. Bill, her dad, notices that Shawna looks down, but when he finds out the problem he completely dismisses Shawna’s hurt over this breakup. He acts as if because she’s young her feelings aren’t real.

Shawna Bloodworth - heartbroken young person.

After five months you’ve really grown to care about Todd. Not only is he your sweetie, he is your best friend, and it’s really sad to imagine life without him. Your dad notices something is wrong and he completely blows you off when he hears about your breakup with Todd.

Shawna might say, “Sheesh Dad, why do you think it’s just puppy love? Just because I don’t have my driver’s license doesn’t mean that I don’t have real feelings.” “ You don’t know what love is – you and Mom gave up.” “ Todd was my best friend don’t you understand? We talk to each other everyday- unlike you and mom!”

Bill Bloodworth - Shawna’s oblivious dad.

It seems just crazy to you how kids think they have the weight of the world on their shoulders. What you would give to have their little worries.

Bill might say, “Oh buck up now. You still haven’t gone through a real break up. The alimony I’m paying your mother - Now that’s something to cry about!” “Who’s Todd? Wasn’t it Omar last week?” or “Problems... I know problems- I got your mother, bills, jobs, my life is one big problem!”

Teri Sweet - Shawna’s dad’s girlfriend.

You’ve noticed that whenever Shawna is around her partner Todd, she just swoons. They are crazy about each other. You don’t want to get in the middle of anything, but her dad Bill is being awfully insensitive.

Teri might say, “Shawna I didn’t want to say anything in front of your father because there seemed to be some tension, but here’s my phone number - just in case you want to talk about things.” “ I know your dad doesn’t understand- he doesn’t know much about this kind of stuff.”

Need an extra character?

Add a scene at the beginning during which Shawna and Todd breakup.



ADULTIST ROLE PLAY – SCENARIO 3

The Most Adultist Board on Earth (5 to 7 characters)

Scenario:

The most adultist board on earth is planning a fundraising dinner. Liz Climber, the Executive Director, is facilitating the planning. All of the adults are deeply engaged in the planning and discussion, but no one will let Pedro, the young person on the board, get a word in edgewise. They only ask his advice on trivial things, if they ask for it all.

Cheri Heart - Mom of five.

You are fulfilling your civic duty by being on a local non-profit board. You think the young people on the board are adorable and sometimes say the sweetest things. You smile at the young people constantly. Cheri might say, “You kids, you’re so clever these days! I couldn’t have read that budget at your age. I see you finished your cookie. Can I get you another?” “Aren’t you sooooo cute?” “Oh that is such a cute idea!”

Dick Green - President of a local bank.

You frequently boast of your large personal donations to the organization. You think the young people on the board are better seen and not heard. Dick might say, “That’s a real good idea for your middle school debate club, but it won’t cut the mustard here. This is the real world, son. Think like a man.”

Liz Climber - Executive Director of the non-profit.

You are extremely proud of the fact that the board now has young people on it - perhaps a little too proud. Liz might say, “Before I introduce the rest of our board, let me point out our newest members. We have a 16-year-old on the board. His name is Pedro and he is Mexican American. I am so proud of the diversity we have- now let’s see what a young person thinks, what do you think Pedro?”

Milford English - Retired school teacher.

You listened to screaming kids for thirty-two years, and you never thought you would have to deal with them in these board meetings! You’ve been opposed to bringing young people on the board since the beginning. Milford might say, “Sit up straight! Feet on the floor! Don’t make me write your name up!” “Young people don’t belong here. You should be home doing your homework.”

Pedro Fernandez - Youth board member.

You have been on this board for two months. In spite of all the adultist attitudes you encounter, you try to keep your head up and offer good ideas. Pedro might say, “No I don’t mind helping sweep up after the meeting, but I can also think of a few ways to save money on this project.” “I’ve got some ideas about a fundraiser.”

Need extra characters:

Add more board members - try these:

• **Doc Grimman - Family Physician:** Since 1948 you’ve seen the tonsils of almost everyone in town. You don’t know what’s going on with kids today, with wild colored hair and piercings all over. “Now Pedro, don’t bring all you crazy friends in here.” “I may have to call your parents if you don’t behave.” “I’ve known you since I had to dig that fish hook from your behind- welcome aboard!”

• **Sharon Conwell - Another youth board member:** You joined the board two months ago, the same time as Pedro. You’re so tired of being treated badly. If you hear one more condescending tone, you might just explode! “I can’t stand this!” Let Pedro speak! “I am furious- you adults are all alike!”



ADULTIST ROLE PLAY – SCENARIO 4

The classroom scene (4 characters)

Scenario:

Latasha and Amy are two friends busy doing their math homework together after school in class. Maria another classmate is in the back of the room quietly working – she loves math and usually does well. Latasha figures out an easier solution to the math equation than the teacher, Mr. Smith proposes. This makes Mr. Smith mad. Suddenly Maria, overhears the discussion and tells Mr. Smith that she discovered the same solution.

Latasha – trying hard to improve her math scores.

You've been studying really hard to improve your math scores. You frequently stay after class to try to figure out how to learn math equations. You think they are pretty boring but you're willing to try. You've recently stayed after school five days in a row and feel like you are making BIG progress.

Latasha might say, "Mr. Smith, look I found a new solution to the math problem you gave us!"

Amy – Latasha's friend and after school study partner.

You and Latasha study together all the time. You frequently take breaks to talk about who you have a crush on or who you think is cute. You don't necessarily like math – today you are working on your French homework. You and Latasha cheer each other on even though you don't want to do your homework. You get mad when Mr. Smith argues with her. Amy might say, "Keep going Latasha – it may be hard but you can do it."

Mr. Smith – high school math teacher

You've been teaching for so long – you're a bit burned out on teaching. It must be 30 years now and you're not sure about these new teaching techniques. You try to be patient. You think students these days have been getting a bit too uppity. When you were young – no student would dare speak back to a teacher. Mr. Smith might say, "I've been teaching for 30 years. Why do you think you have a new solution? I went to college, I have a degree in math. I wrote a paper on math. How dare you challenge me."

Maria – valedictorian

You love math – it's like a puzzle. You frequently find new solutions than the ones suggested in the math book. Maria might say, "Uh, Mr. Smith – I hate to break it to you, but I found the same solution that Latasha did."



ADULTIST ROLE PLAY – SCENARIO 5

The department store (5 characters)

Scenario:

Jennifer and Robert are two friends who meet each other every Saturday at the mall – it’s a tradition. They both know the latest fashions and love hanging out together. They talk about life, home and school. Jennifer has a question about a dress she wants to buy but when she goes to ask the cashier, George, she helps the adult with a credit card first. George and Jennifer argue and the manager overhears. The manager tells the cashier that Jennifer is right and that every customer is valuable.

Jennifer – shopper.

You found the perfect outfit but you have a few questions. You love the store. You are shocked when the new cashier helps the adult when you have been patiently waiting. Jennifer might say, "Wait, wait, excuse me – I was here first. I have a quick question."

Robert – Jennifer’s friend and shopping partner.

You and Jennifer go everywhere together. You go into this particular store every weekend. You can’t believe that your friend Jennifer is getting mistreated given that you are regular customers. Robert might say, "Jennifer, don’t let him help that man before you, say something."

George – new cashier

Why oh why did I go into retail? George just got this new job and he’s trying to make a good impression. He is supposed to sell things right? Doesn’t that mean helping the people who are going to buy things before anything else? George might say, "I need to help this customer first. They are buying something."

Michelle – Store manager

You want to keep all your customers happy. You’re store is doing great and that’s partially due to your good customer service. Michelle might say, "Sorry, George, but in this case these young women are right. They were here first."

Henry – Adult Shopper

You are on a business trip and the airline lost your luggage – again. You are in a strange city and you need to quickly buy a pair of dress pants for this evening’s banquet. You go to 50 events a year, you know what you need, you have your credit card out and your cell phone is ringing. You need to buy your pants fast. Henry would say, "I’ve got a business function in 30 minutes, can you ring this up now?"



ADULTIST ROLE PLAY – SCENARIO 6

The Case of Police Harassment (6 characters)

Scenario:

Three young people have been excused from school because of a family emergency. They're caught and questioned by security while waiting to be picked up at the local mall, where they've gone to get medication for their sick grandpa.

Ricardo – high school senior

You are the voice of reason and you don't want to get into trouble. The oldest of five siblings, you were brought up to be responsible and not talk back to adults of authority. You are worried about your cousin and your brother, and want to protect them. Gloria is always saying things you have to cover up for. Ricardo might say things like, "Sorry, officer, she didn't mean it like that." "Larry, stop encouraging her!" "Gloria, keep your voice down!"

Larry – seventh grader, Ricardo's brother

You are amazed by this whole situation. You haven't ever seen kids talk back to grownups, but you haven't ever seen your cousin this mad before. You are a big cheerleader for Gloria as she tries to stand up for the three of you. You think the security guards are being mean, and that your brother Ricardo is being too nice to them. Larry might say things like, "Yeah, what she said!" You might be the one to stick your tongue out at them when they're not looking.

Gloria – high school freshman, Ricardo and Larry's cousin

You're usually reasonable, but you also know how to stand up for yourself. You can't believe the security officers would treat you like this. You've got a sick grandfather at home who needs your help, and try as you might to reason, the security guards don't believe you. You're always getting harassed by people in authority (teachers, police), and although you always try to remain calm, the more they question you, the angrier you get. Gloria might say things like, "But we already told you we're waiting for our aunt to pick us up?" "Why do you need to see our school ID – don't you believe us?"

Frankie Badge and Joey Nightstick – two security guards

Joey has been a security guard in this mall for years and has dealt with all kinds of trouble-makers. He's sick of kids causing trouble but is pretty lazy and would rather not even deal with it. Frank is a new guard and wants to make an example out of every young person he comes across.

They might say things like, "What's that cigarette butt by your foot – were you smoking?" "Why aren't you in school right now?" "Where's your ID card?" "You can't all be related – you don't even look like each other!" "You have drugs in that backpack?"

Isabel – their aunt

You're worried about your father. You've sent your nieces and nephews on an important task. You're in a hurry to get the medication to your father, and are completely shocked that the children are being harassed by the mall's security guards. You're even more shocked when they start harassing you too. Isabel might say things like, "My father is sick at home, why are you harassing these children?" "You should be ashamed of yourselves!"



TIPS FOR YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS FROM YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS

These tips are especially good for young people who are on boards or other bodies with adults. They were developed by young people who have served in these positions and know the pressures involved.

1. **You belong on the board!**

You might feel inexperienced at first, or you may think that the adults don't want to hear what you have to say. Remember that your opinions are key to the work the board is doing. As a young person, you have a right and responsibility to be on the board. Young people are part of their communities and organizations need to hear from them.

2. **Find allies.**

Find people on the staff and the board who seem to take young people seriously. Sit next to them at meetings, have lunch with them, or talk to them during breaks. When you forget that your role in the group is important, they can help remind you.

3. **Ask questions.**

If you don't understand something, make sure to ask someone. Your questions are important. You need to understand what's going on, and it won't help anyone if you sit quietly without understanding certain discussions. There will be times when you feel shy or not interested in what's going on. No matter how you're feeling, it's important to ask questions so you can stay involved.

4. **Build a support base for yourself.**

Find three young friends who are interested in what you're doing on the board. Talk to them openly about what frustrates you, excites you or bores you about your work. Choose good listeners who can help you think things through and get some of the feelings out.

5. **Get the word out.**

You have a responsibility to get the word out about the importance of youth leadership to as many young people as possible. It's not just about serving on your board. It's about giving other young people information they can use to take charge. If you're on a foundation board, or any kind of board where you can influence grant policies, encourage the board not to fund organizations that don't have young people in their government structures.

6. **Know that you're not alone.**

There are many young people out there on boards, advisory boards and students councils, working to make a difference in how things are done. You may sometimes feel that the work of your board isn't important. Connecting with other youth board members can help remind you that there is a youth voice movement going on and you're part of it. Contact Youth on Board to find out about active youth in your area or just ask around.

7. **If you're feelings bored, it's up to you to make board work interesting.**

Learn the language of the board or of the organizations (e.g., acronyms and jargon). Ask the questions you need to ask. Say at least two things at every board meeting, so that you always stay engaged in what's going on. If you feel that meetings need to



HOW TO WORK WITH ADULT ALLIES

be jazzed up, suggest some activities like brainstorming or small group activities. Chances are, other people will also be more engaged if meetings are more interactive.

8. If you don't like how something is going, chance it.

You are a member of the group. If you don't think the agenda is interactive enough or you don't like your committee assignment, speak up and work with people to make changes. This is not always easy. You may have to talk it through with people a few times to win them over.

9. Don't get discouraged.

If it feels like people aren't listening or adults are disrespectful, keep trying. Change usually takes time. Try to notice when adults do listen and try to understand your thoughts. If you feel like someone is talking down to you, don't be quiet about it. Bring it up. The group needs to deal with the issue.

10. Go to all meetings.

Find out the dates, and write them all down in your calendar. Be prepared for meetings. Read the materials, and learn about how things work.

11. Join a committee and take on leadership.

Get involved in the work that happens outside of meetings, and make your presence known. Especially on boards of directors, most work does not happen in full meetings. Committees are places where the relationships are built and where you can make an even bigger difference.

12. Relax and be yourself.

If you are someone who tells a lot of jokes, then tell jokes. You are a member of the governing body, and you should show who you really are. Think of other people in the group as your peers.

13. Don't believe negative messages.

There are lots of negative messages about young people - "Kids should be seen and not heard." "This hurts me more than it hurts you." "You'll understand when you are older." Many young people hear these messages at home, at school, and on TV. Don't believe them. Simply because you're young does not mean that your ideas are any less important. Even if you think you don't have anything to say, look a little deeper. You know a lot, and you have huge contributions to make.

14. Remember that you *should* have a say.

In fact, your opinion is more than important. It is essential. Even if everyone else doesn't realize that, you have to remember it. Regardless of the negative messages you hear, you and other young people have the power to change your communities and your world. To do so you must remember it is your right to have a say.

15. Do it again and again.

Not everyone is going to hear your message the first time. Whether you are lobbying your school board to include young people or organizing a neighborhood festival, remember to speak your mind over and over. Don't get discouraged. Believe in your ideas, and be persistent.