



REMEMBER

- “At risk” is a category not a destiny. We need to help young people recognize that their decisions have more weight than their situations when it comes to a truly good life.
- Many youth feel powerless when they are living in difficult situations and behave in unhealthy ways to find some sense of power. Help them see the power they have to impact others positively by creating opportunities for them to make a difference in the world around them... and in your world as well.
- Some youth in difficult situations are angry with God because they feel he’s been unfair with them. They have tried prayer and are upset that God didn’t fix things. This has shaped their view of God and we need to be willing to listen and recognize how this feels for them. Then we need to introduce them to the heart of the God who has never left them for a moment, and is with them IN their situation (Deut. 31:6,8; Ps. 27:10; Ps. 139).



RECOGNIZE

- Vulnerable means being in need of special care, support or protection (because of things like life difficulties or risk).
- Many teenagers live in situations at home or at school that threaten to push and pull the worst out of them. As youth workers, we are often not able to remove kids from these environments—so our focus needs to be on equipping them to walk through the tough stuff.
- Life situations have a lot to do with creating risk in the life of a youth, especially these:
 - ▶ *Chronic poverty, living with a single parent, inconsistent parenting, being in care of the government*
 - ▶ *Unsupported learning difficulties, social isolation, mental health issues, low self-esteem*
 - ▶ *Drug use in home or individual drug use*
 - ▶ *Being from an indigenous background, sexual minority or recent immigrant*
 - ▶ *Past or present abuse*



RESPOND

Healthy adults walking alongside youth as they navigate through difficulties lessen the impact of risk.

- **NOTICE:** Don’t pretend everything is okay. Be specific about what you have seen/heard/observed that causes you concern.
- **ASK** good questions that are:
 - ▶ *Open-ended* - “How do you manage the difficult things in your life?”
 - ▶ *Inviting* - “Tell me about how _____ is affecting you. I really want to understand what it’s like to live in your shoes.”
 - ▶ *Timely* - Watch for the right place and right time for these conversations. Emotional safety means guarding them from embarrassment.
- **LISTEN:** Push back the urge to correct their perceptions or tell them how to fix things. Make space for them to express their feelings and frustrations. Check back as they are talking to be sure you are understanding their meaning not just their words.
- **PRACTICE EMPATHY:** How must it feel to live with the beliefs they hold about themselves and their situation? Try to put that into words for them if they aren’t able and ask if your words are close to what they are feeling/thinking.
- **BUILD RESILIENCY:** Equip them with tools to not be pulled under: communication skills, problem solving, sense of identity/significance, coping skills, a sense of purpose/sense they can make a difference, and spiritual connectedness.
- **WALK** with them towards help: connect them to the services available
- **PRAY:** Pray with them. Invite them to pray for their friends in tough places.



VULNERABLE YOUTH

lifeteams
resources



RESOURCES

YOU! 70% of kids who are “at risk” succeed against the odds when they have one significant person investing in their life.

ontariomentoringcoalition.ca - Check out the toolkit for “Mentoring Youth Facing Barriers.”

www.fosteringresilience.com - Information for teens, parents, and professionals on the essential building blocks of resilience.