

# Youth Voice Tip Sheet

Communication Between Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist & Youth

## ***10 Tips to Improve the Conversation***

January 2012

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
CHILD & ADOLESCENT  
PSYCHIATRY

W W W . A A C A P . O R G

This Tip Sheet was developed to provide guidance for how child and adolescent psychiatrists can more effectively communicate and partner with young people.

### **1. Learn how to talk to us, and get to know us:**

- Learn our names, and talk to us with interest and respect.
- Show us genuine concern, so we know that what we say really matters to you.
- Learn about our lives, and have a conversation with us as people.
- Look at us and not just our file, when you talk to us.
- Use words we understand, not jargon.
- Ask us questions, to help us become active during our meetings.
- Remember that we notice your tone and your reactions to us, not just what you say.

### **2. Be youth-friendly, and learn about youth culture and other aspects of our culture:**

- Put things in your office like games and magazines to help us feel comfortable.
- Ask us about our interests, and show us you know something about what we like to do.
- Ask us how we would like to communicate with you.
- Learn about Facebook and other social media, and consider creating your own website.
- Learn about our religion, ethnicity, race, gender, and other parts of our culture.

### **3. Listen to us, because we typically don't feel heard:**

- Understand that it takes time for us to trust, and we may not say too much at first.
- Be patient with us, and try to understand where we are coming from.
- Remember that we know what's going on in our lives better than anybody else, and we know ourselves best.
- Take what we say seriously, even if you don't agree.
- If you don't understand something we say, ask us to explain.
- Recognize that we won't always say what you want to hear.
- Don't be judgmental, because this will shut us down.
- Try not to make us feel rushed – spend time with us.

### **4. Provide us information:**

- We have a right to information, and we believe that information is power.
- We can't make informed decisions if we don't understand what is going on with us.
- Explain our diagnosis, and how our condition can be treated.
- If you believe that medication will help us, explain this to us in plain language.
- Use drawings and pictures to show us how medication works.
- Give us written material that we can read, in the office and at home.
- Tell us about other treatments to consider – in place of, and in addition to, medication.

**5. Understand that we are likely to be afraid, and we may get frustrated and angry:**

- We have problems. Take the time to find out the best way to help us, because we are not all the same.
- We don't like having a mental health problem, and we don't like having to be a patient.
- We don't want to feel different from everyone else, and we don't want to be rejected because we are different.
- While we believe that you can help us, we'd rather not have to see you at all.
- We're afraid of what you will think of us.
- We're afraid you will believe our family and not us, when our stories are different.
- We worry about being sent straight to the hospital when we see you, or being placed in a residential facility away from our friends and family.
- If hospitalization is necessary, communicate clearly that it is not a punishment, it is not our fault, and you will not abandon us.

**6. Understand our concerns about medication:**

- Even if we need medication, we'd prefer not to have to take it.
- We're concerned about being over-medicated, and we're afraid of possible side effects.
- Taking medication is very personal, and we don't want the whole world to know our business.
- We need reassurance that taking medication doesn't mean that we're crazy.
- We also need to know that we are in charge of our bodies, not the medication.

**7. Give us choices, and offer alternatives:**

- We'll be more open to treatment if you let us know that there is more than one way to move ahead.
- Explain the various alternatives, with medications and with other treatments, and help us understand the pros and cons of each.
- You can tell us if you think a treatment is really important, but understand that we may or may not be ready and we have a right to refuse.
- Explain our legal rights to us, throughout treatment.
- Give us information about other respected providers, in case we want a second opinion.

**8. Offer us hope:**

- We need your encouragement and support.
- We need you to reassure us that things can get better.
- Tell us about others you've treated who have gotten better.
- Understand how important our friends are to us, and help us stay involved with them.
- Encourage us to seek out community supports.
- Encourage us to stay involved in our treatment and not give up hope.

## **9. Learn to deal effectively with our parents/caregivers and with us:**

- Don't forget that you are our doctor, not our parent.
- Talk to our parents/caregivers, but maintain our confidentiality and let us know what you will be talking with them about.
- Be clear about the limits of our confidentiality, such as limitations due to concerns about our safety.
- Don't always believe the adult over us. It may just be that we have different opinions or perspectives.
- Try to bring us and our parents/caregivers closer together, when there is disagreement or conflict.
- Give our parents/caregivers information, and offer them hope.
- Inform them of resources in the community.

## **10. Treat us the way you would want your own child to be treated:**

- Don't blame us for our problems.
- Remember that we are more than our diagnosis, and we are more than just a patient.
- Teach us coping skills.
- Help us manage our own lives, without lecturing or telling us what to do.
- Work with our therapist, the school, and others involved in our lives.
- We need you to be part of our team.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)  
[www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org)  
[www.thebalancedmind.org](http://www.thebalancedmind.org)  
[www.bringchange2mind.org](http://www.bringchange2mind.org)  
[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org) [www.friendshipscount.org](http://www.friendshipscount.org)  
[www.MIKID.org](http://www.MIKID.org)  
[www.NAMI.org](http://www.NAMI.org)  
[www.ppal.net](http://www.ppal.net)  
[www.youthmovenational.org](http://www.youthmovenational.org)

*This **Your Voice Tip Sheet** was developed by the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry with partial support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. AACAP gratefully acknowledges the youth and youth organizations that provided assistance in drafting, reviewing and editing this Tip Sheet to ensure that Youth Voice was appropriately communicated.*