STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

A Guide to Adult Allyship in Youth-led Movements

The Climate Strikes continue to be an opportunity to bring together the energy, passion, and media spotlight that youth climate activists have with the infrastructure, foundation, and resources so many adults have been building up over the last many decades. Authentic intergenerational collaboration is essential to making this the strongest and most powerful movement possible. However, in order for relationships between adult and youth activists to be successful, they require work on both ends. This guide focuses specifically on how adults can work with youth in a productive, engaging way, which benefits adults, young people, and the movement itself.

This is not meant to scare you away from engaging with the strikes. We need adult allies to make this as successful as possible. This is a tool to help navigate working with young people which can feel daunting if you don't know how to show up in the right away.

Allow young people a seat at the table

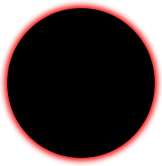
Young people are impacted uniquely by issues, and it's important to give them a space to be heard. Youth are also very motivated, passionate, and energetic, and think of innovative, creative ideas. Including young people in every part of the work and letting them speak for themselves will benefit everyone.

Take young people and their ideas seriously

The biggest thing you can do to alienate and push away young people is to not take them seriously. Most young people are dedicated and hardworking, and truly believe in the work they're doing. To be brushed off as "just a kid" is extremely frustrating and discouraging. Ideas thought of by young people tend to be big and bold. Instead of telling them that their idea is not possible or will never happen, work with them to find a way to make it happen, or a way to adjust it so it can happen.

Provide help when and where it's needed

Like all people, youth don't like it when someone insists that they need help or are doing something wrong. You can always offer your help, but if they don't want it, accept that and then move on. Though a mistake might be made because of this, it can be a learning moment for them. Plus, if you're too insistent on helping them, it could jeopardize your relationship with them, as well as their trust, which is arguably more important in the long run.





Be understanding when mistakes are made

At the end of the day, youth do have less experience than adults, and therefore may make decisions without knowing the potential consequences. When mistakes do happen, do your best to be understanding. Know that mistakes usually come from a lack of experience, and they'll learn from it. This doesn't mean act like nothing happened, but don't rub it in their face either, as they probably know they messed up.

Advise, not order

Just like how young people tend to be energetic and good at generating ideas, they also can tend to be stubborn and believe they know everything (when they don't). Because of this, if you order them to do something, regardless of whether it's the best option, they'll likely resist. It is often more effective to advise young people, rather than straight up tell them what to do. You'll come off as less strong, and they'll be more likely to trust you. Remember that people don't know what they don't know, and so you should assume best intentions when working with young people even if it feels like something is being done for the wrong reason. Asking questions instead of giving answers is always a good way to do this!

Don't tokenize or isolate

Make sure that when you're working with young people, you have good intentions. Don't use young people just to promote your platform or organization, and don't include youth in your work but then not give them any decision making power or chance to share their ideas.

You should also avoid having only one young person on your team or in a meeting. For most young people, being in a situation where everyone else is an adult but them is intimidating. That one young person will be less likely to actually speak their mind and say what they really feel. Don't rely on the same young person for all your young people needs either. They shouldn't have to compensate for the fact that you aren't involving more youth.

Step back

Though it may be hard, your role as an adult is sometimes to simply step back. Respect that it is a youth-led movement and recognize the power in that. Know that the youth-led movement is grateful for the support of adult allies, and that your help is valuable. If you need to, think of it as a long term investment - if you give young people the chance to lead and make change now, they'll become experts in all the skills that go along with that by the time they reach adulthood.