

TIPS for Working Directly with Youth

DO:

1. Use the phrase “help me to understand.” It is okay to admit you do not understand the child or youth.
2. Reassure the youth that you are there to help, not harm.
3. Speak slowly, simply and briefly, while announcing your actions before initiating them.
4. Be direct and honest.
5. Ask the youth for their cooperation, and allow them time to respond.
6. Understand that you may not have a rational discussion, but recognize that the youth may be overwhelmed by sensations, thoughts, surroundings, frightening beliefs, internal sounds or voices. So try to keep conversation concrete.
7. Be aware that your police uniform and equipment may frighten the youth. Multiple officers may increase the youth’s level of agitation.
8. Understand and acknowledge that the child’s or youth’ fears or delusions are real to them.
9. Do recognize that body language of the youth can provide important hints about their mental status.
10. ALWAYS Contact your CMHL with referrals and questions!



DON'T:

1. Don't tower over the child; instead get on their level.
2. Don't make *continuous* eye contact.
3. Don't move suddenly, shout or give rapid orders.
4. Don't use behaviors or language that may be interpreted as threatening or intimidating.
5. If possible, don't touch the youth.
6. Do not crowd his/her “comfort zone.”
7. Don't force discussion or assume that an unresponsive youth cannot hear you. They may not understand or may be unable to respond.
8. Don't argue with delusional statements, or mislead the youth to think that you feel or think the same way.
9. Don't use inflammatory language, such as “wacko” or “psycho” in the youth's presence or in the nearby vicinity.
10. Don't use language when talking with parents that suggest they should hit, beat, or physically punish the child or youth.