

Using Cooperative Language While Mentoring ASPIRE Students

Opening:

Hi, I'm Celeste Janssen, the Program Director at Oregon Mentors. I am here today in partnership with the Oregon Student Access Commission, called OSAC for short. The topic for this podcast is tips for communicating better with teenagers.

Introduction:

The information we're covering comes from an excellent book, called How to Talk so your Kids will Listen and Listen so your Kids will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. Today we'll focus on how to gain cooperation from teenagers.

Body:

As an ASPIRE volunteer, there are many situations where you need to gain cooperation from the teens you work with. In situations where adults don't have cooperation from youth, they often become frustrated and resort to one of ten different ineffective responses. Let's consider a situation where a high school student you are working with has missed several scholarship deadlines. Listen to these ten responses from adults in this situation – some of them probably will sound familiar:

The first is to **blame and accuse**. A frustrated mentor using this tactic may say: "It was your fault you missed the deadline. I can't believe you'd forget."

The second response is to **name-call**. An example would be to say: "It just plain lazy to not fill out scholarship applications. They are giving away free money!"

Next, there are **threats** like "Do I have to call your mother?"

Fourth is issuing a **command** such as "I said do it by Friday."

The fifth response is to **lecture and moralize**. I'm sure that we can all hear the voice in our heads of an adult lecturing a youth on meeting deadlines and becoming responsible.

Sixth on is to use a **warning** such as "You'd better watch it. You've already missed several deadlines."

Martyrdom is seventh. A volunteer acting the martyr might talk about how much time they've spent volunteering and what a waste it would be to have nothing to show for it

The eighth response is setting up a **comparison**, such as "John is really busy with basketball and IB classwork, but he still managed to find time to apply.

Ninth is **sarcasm**. A sarcastic comment might be something like, “I can see you’re just racking up that scholarship money.”

The final response used by adults when there is no **cooperation** from youth is prophecy: “If you don’t meet this deadline, things don’t look good for you.” Or perhaps something like “Someday you’ll realize what you’ve done”

Some of those comments may have sounded all-too familiar, and perhaps may have even sounded mean or antagonistic. The reality is that all ten of these responses are unhelpful and can elicit negative feelings in a teenager. They usually don’t help you get a more cooperative partner. Instead, the authors of “How to Talk” suggest trying one of these five skills to help elicit cooperation:

First - **describe the situation**. “I see that you have missed three of the scholarship deadlines.” The trick here is NOT to follow up your description with one of the unhelpful responses that you just heard. Instead, just let your description stand for itself, and then allow the teen time to respond.

Second - give **real information** that the teen doesn’t already have. An example may be “The computer lab at school is open on Tuesday evenings.”

Third is reportedly a favorite with teenagers, and it is to **say it with a word**. This skill works when a you’ve already talked with the teenager and just need to offer a quick reminder. Instead of a lecture on an upcoming deadline, just say one trigger reminder word, such as “Friday.”

Fourth is to **talk about your feelings**. Make sure you are authentic here. You might say, “I feel like I’m not a very good ASPIRE volunteer because we’ve been working together for four months and we don’t have any scholarship applications in.”

Finally, the authors suggest you **write a note**. An example might be: “Desiree, I know you are busy with midterms, but getting into college with a good financial aid package is important to you. The Packard scholarship is due Friday. Best, Julie” Or even something like this: “Desiree, I’m due Friday! From the Packard scholarship.”

To review, the five helpful skills to build cooperation are to describe the situation, give real information, say it with a word, talk about your feelings, or write a note.

The authors explain that these new responses may not work the first time, but if you aren’t greeted with the response you’d like, try out something else new rather than resorting to those first ten unhelpful strategies that frustrated adults use.

Conclusion:

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk has many other great tips that you can use to improve communication and partnership, like holding off on giving advice immediately. If you can instead set up questions to help a teenager come to a conclusion on his or her own, you are creating a true learning experience. Also, if you have any opportunities to give teens a choice in when or how something is accomplished, this will provide important ownership.

Closing:

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