

Engage with Intention

HPR in Action!

A 12-week campaign to help trusted adults build intentional, health-promoting relationships (HPR) with youth ages 11-18

Week 5

Topic:

Create the environment.

(HPR way of being strategy #1)

- Follow ADAPT on [FACEBOOK](#) and [LINKEDIN](#).
- SUBSCRIBE to ADAPT on [YOUTUBE](#) and [EMAIL](#).
- WEB: www.hidta.org/adapt
- EMAIL: adapt@wb.hidta.org

WEEK 5: Create the environment.

- What does it mean to “create the environment” in health-promoting relationships, and why does it matter so much?
- How do our values shape the environments we create?
- What practical steps can I take to intentionally shape positive environments for youth?
- **TRUSTED ADULT ACTIVITY:** ENVIRONMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT
- **YOUTH ACTIVITY:** CO-CREATING OUR ENVIRONMENT EXERCISE



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT” IN HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS?

The HPR *way of being* consists of four key strategies beginning with “**Create the environment.**” as the foundation. This strategy represents intentionally shaping the physical, emotional, and cultural spaces around youth so they feel valued, respected, safe, encouraged, and empowered to grow. Teaming with youth to co-create the environment is critical and a great opportunity for them to advocate for themselves and peers. This is an active, ongoing process that includes paying attention to 3 specific types of environments:



Physical Environment: The tangible spaces where interactions happen such as arranging seating in a circle or side-by-side to encourage connection rather than rows; minimizing distractions such as phones; displaying youth artwork or shared values or goals visibly; creating comfortable, welcoming spots like a hangout space; or having food available.



Emotional Environment: The tone and feeling you create such as bringing warmth, calm presence, and consistency; starting interactions with genuine interest or appreciation; and responding to setbacks with patience and encouragement rather than frustration. Your own emotional regulation and full presence help set this climate.



Cultural Environment: The shared values, norms and standards that define the kind of culture you intentionally build together. It includes co-creating simple group agreements like “We value respect, kindness, and empathy”, “We listen to understand,” or “Mistakes are opportunities to learn,” and consistently role modeling this way of being while celebrating effort and maintaining fair boundaries.

WHY DOES IT MATTER SO MUCH?

The environment around us communicates what is valued and what is possible. Supportive environments reduce stress, activate positive social engagement, and make it easier for youth to develop protective beliefs and skills. **It is evident in the physical, emotional, and cultural aspects of the environment that youth matter.** Environments that foster connection, safety, and supportive norms are key protective factors that promote resilience, better mental health, and reduced risk behaviors such as substance use. Positive school and relational climates, in particular, are associated with lower levels of emotional distress, conduct problems, and improved well-being in youth over time. Chaotic, dismissive, or overly rigid environments, on the other hand, can undermine even the most caring words and actions. By thoughtfully shaping these three environmental dimensions, trusted adults strengthen every other HPR *way of being* strategy and help youth thrive.

HOW DO OUR VALUES SHAPE THE ENVIRONMENT WE CREATE?

Our values (such as respect, empathy, honesty, and growth) serve as a compass. If you value respect and voice, you might ask youth how they prefer to sit during a group discussion (physical), respond with curiosity instead of interrupting (emotional), and co-create norms like “Everyone gets a chance to share their thoughts” (cultural). If you value growth and resilience, you intentionally role model learning from mistakes openly and establish standards that treat setbacks as normal and valuable. When values shape the environment, youth experience consistency between what we say and how we show up and interact with them. This congruence builds trust and helps them internalize those same values.



What values are evident in these environments?



WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS CAN I TAKE TO INTENTIONALLY SHAPE POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR YOUTH?

Shape the physical environment with purpose.

- Co-create space with youth.
- Display youth-centered visuals (photos, shared goals)
- Integrate decor that reflects community identity & calm.
- Make the space predictable. Offer food.

Establish a positive emotional tone.

- Show genuine interest in youth and acknowledge them warmly: "I'm glad you're here!"
- Express belief in youth's efforts and capabilities.
- Celebrate small wins publicly to build shared sense of pride.

Role model & reinforce values in everyday actions.

- Role model empathy and self-regulation under stress.
- Frame mistakes as opportunities for growth.
- Model emotional honesty, apology, & self-compassion.
- Reflect group values in interactions.



Foster a culture of voice, choice, & contribution.

- Invite youth into decision-making about projects/goals.
- Offer choices that matter to the youth.
- Recognize acts of leadership, creativity, & kindness.
- Celebrate youth influence.

Create norms & standards that promote growth & positive choices.

- Use language that communicates "This is hard, AND I know you can do it."
- Establish standards that emphasize effort and curiosity.
- Normalize setbacks as part of growth.

Embed support into everyday interactions.

- Be present and observant.
- Notice small changes.
- Create rituals of connection.
- Encourage youth to recognize one another's efforts.
- Follow-up after difficult moments.

ENVIRONMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Estimated
Time:
10 mins

(TRUSTED ADULT)

Purpose: Increase awareness of the type of environment you currently create and identify one or two small improvements.

Think about a regular setting where you interact with youth (home, classroom, practice, mentoring, etc.). **Rate the following on a scale of 1–5 from never true to always true):**

1–Never

2–Rarely

3–Sometimes

4–Frequently

5–Always

- 1 ——— **The physical space supports connection and focus and tells youth that they matter and belong here.**
- 2 ——— **The emotional tone feels warm, encouraging, safe, and positive.**
- 3 ——— **Youth consistently feel they have real voice and choice.**
- 4 ——— **Norms and standards reinforce respect, a growth mindset, learning from mistakes, and mutual support.**
- 5 ——— **I consistently model the values and presence I want to see in youth.**

Reflection Questions:

1. What are you doing well?
2. What one or two changes could make a big impact?

**SMALL
DAILY
PRACTICE**

What 2 concrete actions will you take this week to enhance the environments you are creating for youth?

YOUTH ACTIVITY: CO-CREATING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Estimated Time: 15-20 mins



Purpose of Activity: To empower youth to contribute to the environments they're in, building agency, belonging, and ownership while modeling collaboration.

1. Discuss

- What makes a space (home, team, classroom, group) feel good/safe/supportive vs. stressful or unwelcoming?
- Please share examples.

2. Brainstorm together.

- What would an ideal environment look like here? (Physical setup, emotional tone, norms and standards, routines.)

3. Co-create norms and standards.

- As a group (or 1:1), agree on 3–5 simple, positive norms and standards (e.g., “We listen to understand,” “We celebrate effort,” “We support each other”).
- Write them down where they can be seen by all.

4. Try it and reflect.

- Implement for a short period.
- Check in: “How is this working? What should we adjust?”

Facilitation Tips:

1. **Listen to learn!** Stay curious and nonjudgmental.
2. Affirm youth ideas. (“Hmm. I hadn’t thought about it that way. Thank you for sharing that with me.”)
3. Tie back to values and protective beliefs. (“This is something we all value and will help everyone feel like they matter.”)
4. Allow the conversation to organically evolve and adapt in any way that makes sense at the time based on the responses of the youth.