

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 6

Topic:

Facilitate connection.

(HPR *way of being* strategy #2)

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WEEK 6

- What is meaningful connection, and how does it support youth well-being?
- What are facilitators of connection in the HPR *way of being*?
- How can I strengthen my ability to meaningfully connect with youth and others?
- **TRUSTED ADULT ACTIVITY:** FACILITATORS OF CONNECTION SELF-ASSESSMENT
- **YOUTH ACTIVITY:** WHAT MAKES ME FEEL CONNECTED?



WHAT IS MEANINGFUL CONNECTION, AND HOW DOES IT SUPPORT YOUTH WELL-BEING?

Meaningful connection is the experience of being seen, valued, understood, and supported in a relationship that builds **trust** and emotional safety. In health-promoting relationships, connection (and environment) **lay the foundation** for cultivating the five core protective beliefs in youth: “I am seen and loved,” “I matter,” “I can influence my life,” “I can overcome hard things,” and “I have support.”

But...not all connection is equal.

Casual, transactional, or superficial interactions (e.g., quick instructions or purely task-focused exchanges) do not produce the same benefits. Meaningful connection characterized by quality, depth, consistency, and the presence of facilitators such as full presence, empathy, and authenticity is what drives the documented health outcomes.¹

Strong evidence from research, including meta-analyses by Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad, shows that meaningful social connections significantly affect health and longevity. Individuals with robust, high-quality social connection have approximately a 50% increased likelihood of survival compared to those with weaker connections with an effect size comparable to quitting smoking! Social disconnection raises risks of premature mortality (26–32%), cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, depression, and anxiety across all ages, genders, and backgrounds.¹⁻²

“We need to prioritize our social relationships like our life depends on it, because it does.”

- Julianna Holt-Lunstad

For youth ages 11–18, meaningful connection with trusted adults is a powerful protective factor against mental health challenges (e.g., depression, anxiety), behavioral health risks (e.g., substance use), violence-related outcomes, and suicide, while supporting resilience, academic success, and long-term flourishing.

1. Holt-Lunstad J. Social connection as a critical factor for mental and physical health: evidence, trends, challenges, and future implications. *World Psychiatry*. 2024;23(3):312-332. doi:10.1002/wps.21224

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Connecting the Dots: Connecting multiple forms of violence. Accessed June 13, 2026. <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/connecting-the-dots/connect/>

WHAT ARE FACILITATORS OF CONNECTION IN THE HPR WAY OF BEING?

The second HPR *way of being* strategy includes 16 Facilitators of Connection, core personal qualities that foster meaningful connection with others. Many also serve as relationship values for both adults and youth and build directly upon the first strategy of creating the environment. The table on the following pages provides a simple definition, focused reflection question, and one immediate action for each facilitator. The 7 facilitators highlighted in **yellow** were identified by youth and trusted adults as particularly important and serve as excellent starting points. As always, remember the HPR way of thinking when considering which facilitators to engage.



In this moment, what facilitators of connection are most important?

Facilitator	Definition	Reflection	Quick Start
Authenticity	Showing up as your real self by aligning your words & actions with what you truly believe and value.	How might I show up more genuinely with youth so they experience the real me and build deeper trust?	Pick one value that matters to you and demonstrate it in a conversation with a youth this week.
Care	Looking out for a youth's well-being through consistent, respectful actions that support and protect them.	How can my actions more clearly show youth that I truly care about their well-being, beyond just my words?	Remember and follow up on one specific thing a youth shared last time — show it mattered.
Empathy	Actively understanding and sharing in a youth's feelings and perspective so they feel truly seen.	How can I better see situations through the youth's eyes before responding, so they feel deeply understood?	Ask one open-ended question ("What was that like for you?") and reflect back the emotions or meaning you heard with compassion and without fixing it.
Full Presence	Being completely focused and engaged in the moment with a youth — body, mind, and attention fully there.	If nothing was pulling at my attention—no tasks, worries, or distractions—how might I show up differently with this youth, and what impact could that have?	Put away all distractions for one full conversation this week and notice the difference.

FACILITATORS OF CONNECTION (CONT.)

Facilitator	Definition	Reflection	Quick Start
Honesty	Being truthful and sincere, even when it's uncomfortable, while keeping trust and respect intact.	How can I practice honest communication with youth in ways that strengthen trust and respect?	Share one small, appropriate honest comment or admission this week.
Humility	Having an accurate view of yourself — open to learning, admitting mistakes, and putting the youth's needs first.	How might I model humility so youth see it's okay to learn, grow, and admit mistakes?	Identify a way you could have shown up differently with a youth. Apologize to the youth for what you did or missed.
Kindness	Treating youth with genuine warmth, generosity, and consideration, especially under stress.	How can I show kindness consistently, even on tough days, so youth feel valued and supported?	Before an interaction, reset your stress and offer one intentional kind word or small helpful action.
Love	Deeply wanting the best for a youth; investing in their growth, happiness, and well-being over time.	How can I invest more intentionally in this youth's long-term well-being so they feel genuinely cared for?	Make a short list of what you appreciate about one youth and act on one item (extra time, encouragement, support).
Non-judgment	Suspending quick judgments so youth feel safe to share without fear of criticism.	How can I approach youth with more openness and curiosity instead of quick judgments so they feel safe to share?	When you catch yourself judging, pause and ask: "What compassionate explanation might there be?"
Nurturance	Actively supporting and encouraging a youth's growth, especially through challenges and mistakes.	How can I better support youth as they grow through challenges and mistakes?	Offer validation and emotional support the next time a youth faces a setback.

FACILITATORS OF CONNECTION (CONT.)

Facilitator	Definition	Reflection	Quick Start
Patience	Staying calm and steady when things feel frustrating or slow, giving youth space to process.	If I wasn't rushing to get to the outcome, how would I think, speak, or act differently in this moment with the youth?	Notice rising impatience within you, name it to yourself, then choose a calmer response.
Respect	Treating youth with dignity, valuing their feelings, opinions, and rights even when you disagree.	How can I show respect in different ways so youth clearly feel their perspective and contributions are valued by me?	Actively listen and acknowledge their opinion, even (especially) when you see it differently.
Self-Awareness	Clearly noticing your own thoughts, emotions, triggers, and patterns in real time.	How can greater self-awareness help me respond more effectively as a trusted adult with youth?	After an interaction, quickly reflect on what you felt, what triggered it, and how you responded.
Self-Acceptance	Fully accepting yourself (strengths, flaws, and all) without harsh self-criticism.	How can I practice greater self-acceptance so I can model a healthy self-view for youth?	Reframe one negative self-thought and spend time noticing and focusing on a strength.
Self-Alignment	Acting in ways that match your values, beliefs, and what you say matters most.	How can I better align my actions with my values when interacting with youth?	Pause once a day and ask: "Is how I'm showing up right now aligned with my values?"
Vulnerability	Choosing to be open and real about your own struggles or mistakes (when appropriate) to build deeper trust.	How can I appropriately model vulnerability so youth see it's okay to be real and build stronger connections?	Practice one small, safe act of vulnerability this week (e.g., "I've struggled with that too").

HOW CAN I STRENGTHEN MY ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH YOUTH AND OTHERS?

Strengthening your ability to connect with others begins with strengthening your ability to connect with self. As with so many concepts presented in the HPR paradigm, **connection is fundamentally an inside-out process**. Self-connection was first defined in 2022 as the subjective experience of being aware of oneself, accepting oneself based on that awareness, and aligning one's behavior with that awareness. Greater self-connection predicts greater well-being, authenticity in relationships, and the capacity to form deeper connection with others.³

Practical Steps

1 Build Self-Connection: Begin by increasing self-awareness of your thoughts, emotions, and patterns during interactions with youth. Practice self-acceptance by approaching your imperfections with compassion rather than judgment. Then work toward self-alignment, ensuring your actions with youth match your values and intentions. This internal foundation makes your expression of the facilitators of connection far more authentic and sustainable.



2 Complete the Facilitators of Connection Self-Assessment (on the next page): Rate yourself on each facilitator (Strong / Needs Work) in your interactions with youth.



3 Deliberate Practice of Specific Facilitators: The ability to connect with others through patience, respect, and other facilitators is not a “soft” skill. As a matter of fact, intentional and consistent practice is essential to learning the breadth and depth of each facilitator across contexts and strengthening your ability to connect. Choose two facilitators from the table and practice them consistently in real moments this week.



4 Regular Reflection and Adjustment: Use the table on the previous pages for daily focus. Reflect on your interactions and adjust based on what you notice or what is shared with you.



3. Klussman K, Curtin N, Langer J, Nichols AL. The importance of awareness, acceptance, and alignment with the self: a framework for understanding self-connection. *Eur J Psychol.* 2022;18(1):120-131. doi:10.5964/ejop.3665

TRUSTED ADULT ACTIVITY:

FACILITATORS OF CONNECTION SELF-ASSESSMENT

Estimated
Time:
15 mins

Purpose: To help trusted adults honestly evaluate your current strengths and growth areas in the 16 facilitators of connection. By increasing your self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-alignment (self-connection), you will be better equipped to build deeper, more meaningful relationships with youth.

Instructions: Rate how often you demonstrate each facilitator in the context of your relationships with youth ages 11–18. Be honest and compassionate with yourself.

1: Almost Never

2: Rarely

3: Sometimes

4: Often

5: Almost Always

Facilitator	Rating	Recent Example	Action Step for This Week
Authenticity			
Care			
Empathy			
Full Presence			
Honesty			
Humility			
Kindness			
Love			
Nonjudgment			
Nurturance			
Patience			
Respect			
Self-Awareness			
Self-Acceptance			
Self-Alignment			
Vulnerability			

YOUTH ACTIVITY: WHAT MAKES ME FEEL CONNECTED?



Estimated Time: 20 mins

Purpose of Activity: This activity helps you explore what connection qualities make your relationships feel positive, safe, and supportive. Understanding these qualities (called “Facilitators of Connection”) helps you recognize good connections in your life and even ask for what you need from trusted adults if you are not receiving it.

Instructions for Youth: Think about the adults or friends in your life that are important to you. Rate how often you experience each of the following qualities. Take your time. Be honest – there are no right or wrong answers.

1: Almost Never **2:** Rarely **3:** Sometimes **4:** Often **5:** Almost Always

Quality	Rating	Quality	Rating
Authenticity: They act like their real selves around me.		Nonjudgment: They don't judge or shame me when I make mistakes.	
Care: They genuinely care about how I'm doing and what happens to me.		Nurturance: They encourage and help me grow through hard times.	
Empathy: They try to hard to understand how I feel.		Patience: They stay calm and give me time to figure things out.	
Full Presence: They give me their full attention and are not distracted.		Respect: They treat me with dignity and value my thoughts and feelings.	
Honesty: They tell me the truth, even when it's hard or uncomfortable.		Self-Awareness: They notice their feelings/reactions & grow from them.	
Humility: They admit when they're wrong or don't know something.		Self-Acceptance: They are okay with their own imperfections.	
Kindness: They are warm, generous, and kind to me.		Self-Alignment: They actually do what they say is important to them.	
Love: They truly want the best for me and show it through their actions.		Vulnerability: They share their own struggles or mistakes (if appropriate).	

Reflection Questions:

- Which qualities do you experience from others the most? How does it impact you?
- Which ones do you wish you experienced more often? Why?
- How would you advise trusted adults to help you feel more connected?
- What is one quality you can bring into your own relationships this week?