

Finding, Connecting, and Supporting Youth

How can CILs get started with youth?

- Take time to ask and listen to what youth would really like to do first. Have them involved in the decision making process, so they will know that they are respected and will be invested in the program.
- Have food!! Anytime you are working with young people offering food is a huge draw. Also, remember if you are meeting during a meal time make sure that the food available could be considered a meal and not just snacks. Be inclusive with dietary restrictions.
- Consider offering events on weekends and at night; youth are typically not available on weekdays.
- Meet youth where they currently are. Hold conversations and build relationships. **See FAQ on Engaging Youth through Social Media.**
- Hold an open house about the center services and resources for youth, parents, and teachers.
- Build relationships with community partners, including schools, chambers of commerce, VR, etc. **See Finding Allies and Partners FAQ and Brainstorm Bank.**
- Attend transition fairs, council meetings and student committees.

How can CILs connect with youth?

- Communication is key!
 - When talking with youth be real, be you; don't try to change how you act or dress to fit in. They will spot an imposter. They can connect with you if they can get to know the real you.
 - Try to connect with youth by knowing their names and pronouns. Avoid words like kiddo, kid, children, youngster, etc.
 - If you are not a youth avoid the "us" versus "them" statements. Speak from the "I" experience.
 - Avoid the statements "as we all know..." and "as I said..."
- Be honest and respect them as people...not just young people.
- Don't assume since you know a youth or have been around youth that you will know what they want. Everyone is different and youth are too. Make sure to frequently ask and listen to the youth that are there.
- Be flexible. Understand that youth may not be interested in what you want from them, but it is okay to turn the conversation into something beneficial that will give them some takeaways.
- Let youth establish some guidelines for the space they are in. This will create a sense of ownership, security, and validation.

How can CILs build youth services and provide support?

- Offer workshops on disability history, awareness, independent living (IL) and social skills, self-advocacy, work readiness, job exploration, managing money (by banks), safety (by police), transportation, transition, cooking, housing, leadership, healthy relationships, etc. Make it fun!

- Develop a social and advocacy group that meets during lunch or after school at high schools.
- If you partner with programs in the community, IL workshops can be held anywhere youth are. Partner with a restaurant, health department, hospital, or university to cover topics around nutrition and health.
- Hold a summer camp on gardening, emergency preparedness, bee keeping, IL skills, crafts, radio, etc.
- Facilitate regular nights as a fun way for youth to explore art galleries, listen to live music, poetry readings, attend author lectures, enjoy food at cafes, socialize, etc.
- Offer a community inclusion group with whatever activities youth want to do – bowling, skating, canoeing, movies, picnicking, swimming, star gazing, kite flying, cycling, shopping, etc.
- Participate in [youth leadership forums](#).
- Offer support groups for youth and parents, including peer mentoring.
- Pay for youth to attend NCIL, APRIL, and other relevant conferences.

Where can I find out more?

- For Peer Mentoring information to work on the goal of recruiting and finding youth, [APRIL](#) also has a multitude of youth resources for starting, growing, and sustaining youth programs.
- [ILRU](#) has extensive training on building youth programs, transition, etc.
- [NCIL provides a Disability Toolkit and Resource Guide](#).

To find places for CILs to connect with youth check out our brainstorm bank and social media fact sheet.



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