

WHAT are youth-friendly services?

Young people may avoid accessing the services they need for various reasons including concerns about confidentiality, fear of judgment, and inconvenient hours and location. It is important that youth-serving organizations take seriously the unique needs and concerns of young people and implement changes to make their organization more youth-friendly.

The World Health Organization describes youth-friendly services as those that are **equitable, accessible, acceptable, appropriate, and effective**. Take a look at the following strategies and resources to learn ways your organization's policies, practices, and environment can become more youth-friendly.

STRATEGIES for providing youth-friendly services

Make your services accessible to youth

- Offer your services at times when youth are available. This may include after-school, evening, and/or weekend hours. Survey your youth patients or consult with a youth advisory council on their preferences.
- Provide youth access to services on short notice by offering drop-in, same-day, or next-day visits.
- Establish policies and procedures to ensure young people can access services for free or at low cost (e.g., a sliding fee scale), especially for services that teens may want to keep confidential.
- Provide services in a location that young people can easily get to. If your location is not ideal, try offering transportation assistance (e.g., bus tokens, cab fare, shuttle service). You can also install bike racks near your facility.
- Bring your services to young people. This can include partnering with youth-serving organizations (e.g., schools, community centers) to offer your services onsite.
- Provide services and materials in the languages spoken most in your community.

Create an environment that is welcoming to young people

- Maintain a clean and welcoming environment. Some ways to make your space [youth-friendly](#)ⁱ include having magazines for teens, cell phone charging stations, and artwork by local teens.
- Provide visual and auditory privacy if you offer services that might be sensitive (e.g., counseling). Room dividers and white noise machines are quick fixes for an environment with limited privacy.
- Develop and post a non-discrimination policy so youth of all identities know they are welcome.
- Review intake forms, handouts, [posters](#),ⁱⁱ and other materials to ensure they are inclusive (e.g., images reflect the diversity of your community, language is [LGBTQ+ inclusive](#)ⁱⁱⁱ) and [easy to understand](#).^{iv}
- [Train](#)^v staff to provide friendly, respectful, and non-judgmental services to youth.

Identify young people's needs and connect them to additional resources

- Schedule longer visits with young people to ensure adequate time to address all of their needs.
- Establish an effective [referral system](#)^{vi} to connect young people to other youth-friendly services in the community.

Provide confidential services (where applicable)

If you offer services that are legally protected for adolescents (e.g., pregnancy testing):

- Develop and post a [confidentiality policy](#)^{vii} that is aligned with state laws.
- Provide clear information to adolescents, parents/caregivers, and staff about which services young people can access confidentially. Strategies to share information about your confidential services may include:
 - Provide [handouts](#)^{viii} to adolescent clients and their caregivers describing the protections and limitations of confidentiality and minor consent.
 - [Train](#)^{ix} all staff on the protections, rights, and limitations of confidential services.
 - Train all service providers to discuss these protections, rights, and limitations in all of their interactions with adolescent clients.
 - Develop procedures to preserve the confidentiality of youth (e.g., billing, documentation).
 - If parents or guardians are present, meet with young people one-on-one for a portion of every visit.

Implement a youth-friendly marketing and communications plan

- Increase awareness of your services and how to access them by marketing your services to young people, caregivers, and other adults who work with youth. Engaging youth in the development of a marketing plan can help to ensure its relevancy. Marketing strategies may include the following:
 - Utilize outreach workers and teens to promote your services at youth-serving organizations and events.
 - Communicate regularly with referring organizations (e.g., schools, health centers, youth-serving organizations) and/or trusted adults who work with youth (e.g., school counselors and coaches) to ensure they are aware of your services and know how to refer youth to them.
 - Develop print materials to distribute throughout your community, especially to referring organizations.
 - Maintain an up-to-date website and social media presence.

Solicit youth feedback on your services

- Engage young people in providing feedback on your services. Youth engagement strategies may include:
 - Collect and review adolescent client/patient satisfaction surveys at least annually.
 - Invite a group of adolescent clients to participate in a focus group to learn about their experiences accessing your services and their ideas about how services can be improved.
 - Invite a local youth council to tour your organization and provide feedback.

Additional **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- [Spark trainings](#),^x pre-packaged mini-trainings for staff meetings, on topics including adolescent brain development, being youth-friendly, cultural responsiveness.
- Tools to assess youth-friendliness: [Youth-Friendly Services Assessment Tool](#);^{xi} [Quality Assessment Guidebook](#).^{xii}
- Factsheet on youth-friendly health care: [Characteristics of Youth-Friendly Health Care Services](#).^{xiii}
- Youth engagement resources: [Creating and Sustaining a Thriving Youth Advisory Council](#),^{xiv} [Youth-Adult Partnerships](#);^{xv} [Strategies for Youth to Change the World](#).^{xvi}

ⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAu5ad827I8>

ⁱⁱ https://www.michiganmedicine.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/tactac-poster_virtualcare_nocrops.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/Collecting-Sexual-Orientation-and-Gender-Identity-Data-in-EHRs-2016.pdf>

^{iv} https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/simply_put.pdf

^v <https://www.michiganmedicine.org/community/community-health-services/adolescent-health/resources-type/spark-trainings>

^{vi} http://www.ncsddc.org/sites/default/files/docs/referral_system_implementation_kit_020615_.pdf

^{vii} <https://www.michiganmedicine.org/community/community-health-services/adolescent-health/resources-type/spark-trainings/confidentiality-laws>

^{viii} <https://www.michiganmedicine.org/community/community-health-services/adolescent-health/resources-type/spark-trainings/confidentiality-laws>

^{ix} <https://www.michiganmedicine.org/community/community-health-services/adolescent-health/resources-type/spark-trainings>

^x <https://www.michiganmedicine.org/community/community-health-services/adolescent-health/resources-type/spark-trainings>

^{xi} <http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/resources/youth-friendly-services-assessment>

^{xii} http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44240/1/9789241598859_eng.pdf

^{xiii} https://www.healthyteennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/TipSheet_CharacteristicsYouth-FriendlyClinicalServices.pdf

^{xiv} https://www.michiganmedicine.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/yac_manual-2019_10.pdf

^{xv} <https://advocatesforyouth.org/resources/fact-sheets/building-effective-youth-adult-partnerships/>

^{xvi} <https://freechild.org/strategies/>