



The Art of Connection and Relationship: Partnering with Youth for Their Success

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BEFORE WE GET GOING: LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Since time immemorial, the Dx^wdəwʔabš (Duwamish) have stewarded the land that we now call Seattle, Burien, Tukwila, Renton, Redmond, and surrounding communities. We honor and thank members of the Dx^wdəwʔabš (Duwamish) for hosting us on their ancestral, aboriginal lands.

(from: duwamishtribe.org/history)

Land Acknowledgement

Today, we acknowledge & hold that we are engaging in the activity of learning & growing on Duwamish Land. Occupied ancestral land that was not and has not been ceded by Indigenous caretakers and stewards of the land. We have and continue to benefit from the fruits of their labor. We honor the Ancestors and Elders of the land and verbally acknowledge that while colonization and genocide have taken a significant toll emotionally, physically, spiritually, mentally, and economically, the terrorism of neither colonization nor genocide have been completed.

We now take a moment to individually acknowledge and hold this.



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BEFORE WE GET GOING: ASKS FOR OUR TIME TOGETHER

- During our time together I ask that you be willing to try on ideas and thoughts with which you may initially be unsure or with which you may initially be uncomfortable. This will allow you to stretch and possibly grow. It is not always easy and may not feel good; this is okay. Think of the seed breaking open as it begins to spring forth the new plant—you are in a safe place to try on new things, your safety in discomfort will not be weaponized.
- Hold to ROPES
 - be willing to take risks and be respectful of yourself and others
 - be open to new ideas
 - participate and/or pass (the invitation is to consider when you are participating and passing and to explore, by turning to wonder what it means for you or what was coming up when you chose to pass)
 - escuchar (because listen starts with an 'l' 😊)—listen to yourself and those around you. Listen with your heart and without searching for flaw or seeking to respond AND experience—be in the moment, allow yourself to experience whatever feeling or emotions arise for you; take note and use wonder to explore and reflect on why those feelings or emotions arose
 - be safe and sensitive—help to create and maintain safe space for you and your fellow participants and be sensitive to yourself and others
- We will have several silent one-minute stand and be in your body breaks. This concept was introduced to me by the work of Nanci Luna Jimenez. I find value in the practice and hope that you do as well.

WHO IS LAKESHA?

I am:

- An advocate for healing, renewing, and transforming
- A mom, daughter, aunt, educator, facilitator, coach, change agent
- A baker, kind-of knitter, bibliophile, and writer

I believe:

- That we are living out the legacies of historical harms, violence, and trauma that impact all our lives and lived experiences
- In the power of story
- In the power of connection

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WHAT IS CONNECTION?

Connection is the process by which we become linked to self and others. Connecting touch points can happen once (a smile exchanged with a stranger) or be on-going with the same individual/entity. Points of connection can be experiences that are positive or healthy, they can also be or feel negative or unhealthy.

Connection can lead to long term, interactive relationship.

WHY IS CONNECTION IMPORTANT?

There are many reasons why connection is important, these are but a few reasons why developing healthy connection is important:

- **Connection is the foundational component of relationship building**
Connection, or points of connection, help to lay the foundation for any relationship.
- **Connection let's one know that they are seen/heard**
Authentic, healthy connection does not erase or silence. It helps to create the space that values and validates the voice and existence of those with whom we are connecting.
- **Connection can create space for deeper understanding, awareness, and appreciation for self and others**
Authentic connection can aid in the creation of space and time to get to know ourselves and others in more meaningful ways. This helps to create stronger and closer ties and bonds, which are needed for developing and maintaining relationship.
- **Connection can affirm/reaffirm value and worth**
When we engage in meaningful acts of connection, we aid helping the youth/young people with whom we work feel affirmed—we help them begin to see and/or tap into the innate power and greatness that lies within them.
- **Connection creates space for us to center and hold our humanity and that of others**
As we connect with self and others, and build relationship, we become better equip to center and hold our individual and collective humanity. When this happens, we begin to see and hold self and others in more genuine and caring ways.
- **Connection allows you to help redirect when behavior is challenging**
Without a buildup of connection points—relationship—we cannot engage in effectual redirection of displays of challenging behavior. It is important to highlight here, that BEHAVIOR IS NOT THE SCHOLAR. Behavior is language, it is always striving to tell us something. It is important to we work to understand the message in the behavior, and to address that rather than seeing and responding to the scholar as “behaviorally challenged”.
- **Connection is a way of interrupting systems of oppression and create pathways for healing and transformation**
Systems of oppression need disconnection to thrive. When we engage in authentic connection with self and others, we interrupt oppression. As we interrupt oppression, we create and contribute to personal and collective healing and transformation.

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WAYS OF CONNECTING

There are many ways of connecting with others, some of them include:

- A smile
- A kind word
- Shared eye contact
- A heartfelt conversation
- Listening (without interruption, to offer advice/fix, or to give a shared experience)
- A gentle touch (appropriate—a high five, a fist bump—and with permission)
- Sharing a meal
- Playing a game
- A handwave or handshake
- Engaging in an activity with or without verbal communication (for example, coloring at the same table, building with Legos/blocks in the same space)

TIPS FOR CONNECTING

The following are eleven actions that can aid in growing and deepening connection. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, what would you add?

1. **Be Genuine.** Make sure that your action/interaction is coming from a place of realness
2. **Be Consistent.** Uphold rule/guidelines with consistency, this aids in building relationship and helps to create safe space.
3. **Be Open.** There are a variety of ways to engage, be open to new thoughts, ideas, experiences.
4. **Engage.** Join in the activity or conversation, if you are in classroom or group settings, participate in activities.
5. **Share the Voice Space.** When speaking, don't take up all the space, remember that the scholars have thoughts and feelings about what is happening, and their voice needs to be heard (even if what they want can't happen in the moment).
6. **Keep Coming Back.** Don't give up—it was a challenging moment, hour, day? Show up again fully and ready to have new and healthy points of connection.
7. **Listen.** Listen fully and with the hope of deepening understanding.
8. **Share.** Be sure to do this appropriately. Share about a time when you had a similar experience and how it helped you or how you were able to learn/grow from it. Consider language such as, "Sometimes I don't feel like _____, what helps me is _____"; "I get nervous/upset/scared when _____"
9. **Ask Questions.** When talking with scholars, ask open-ended questions to show you are hearing and/or to gain clarification.
10. **Remember.** When a scholar shares something with you, remember—ask them about it: "How was the birthday party you went to this weekend?"
11. **Center the Scholar.** Remember to think about the experience of the scholar and help to ensure that their needs are being fully considered.

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ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP?

Relationships are the multiple points of intentional connection that happen over a span of time between two or more individuals/groups. They are living entities which require us to actively engage; much like a garden, healthy relationships require continual nurturing and tending.

In this way, we are thinking deeper than using the term 'relationship' to show how two or more individuals/groups are joined (such as siblings, co-workers, et cetera) and thinking more along the lines of what is created when two or more individuals/groups work intentionally with one another to be in partnership with one another.

WHY IS RELATIONSHIP IMPORTANT?

Having healthy relationship with self and with the youth and young people with and for whom we work is critical.

Having and maintaining healthy relationships with the youth and young people with and for whom we work allows us to aid in their growth in ways we would otherwise not be able to do. It allows us to do all of the things shared below, in the brief section titles Partnering with Youth for Their Success.

Building and maintaining healthy relationship gives us the ability to connect on deeper levels with the youth. It allows us to become trusted adults who are able to support growth and to guide/mentor when and where needed. We are also able to contribute to the development and nurturing of positive and healthy self-identity.

PARTNERING WITH YOUTH FOR THEIR SUCCESS

Partnering with youth for their success requires a few things:

1. Ability and willingness to see.
2. Ability to willingness to listen.
3. Ability and willingness to hold that youth and young people have valuable insight about who they are and what they need/want.
4. Ability and willingness to hold accountability and responsibility,
5. Ability and willingness to have an asset-/strength-based frame of mind.
6. Ability and willingness to gently and safely challenge.

When we partner with youth for their success, we aid in their development. We create and hold space for them to take risks, to challenge themselves, to reflect on choices and things happening in and around their lives. Partnering with youth for their success gives them agency and says that they are trusted to make mistakes and to learn and grow from them. It means allowing them to explore and to define, for themselves, what success means and looks like.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The following are some questions you may wish to reflect upon. The hope is that by reflecting on some of these questions/areas you will increase your ability to have authentic points of connection with self and the scholars with whom you work.

1. I am most open to connecting with myself when _____.
2. A challenge I have experienced in staying connected with and to myself is _____.
3. I feel most disinterested in connecting with myself when _____, this is because _____.
4. Something intentional I can do to stay connected to myself is _____.
5. I feel most connected to others when _____. Some reasons this might be are _____.
6. Something I can do to deepen points of connection with those in my life is _____.
7. A challenge I have in connecting with others is _____. Some reasons this might be are _____.
8. Connection with myself is valuable to me because _____.
9. Connection with others is valuable to me because _____.
10. A time when a point of connection helped me feel seen/heard was _____. This was meaningful because _____.

IN SUMMARY

Connection and relationship are critical in partnering with youth and young people for their success. In order to connect with youth and young people to build healthy and lasting relationships, we must first genuinely connect with ourselves. Establishing these relationships takes time, dedication, and perseverance.

When we partner with youth and young people for their success, we center them, their voice, and their experience. This allows us to help them in their development in many ways: academically, socially, and emotionally. We are able to redirect challenging behavior and aid them in taking healthy risks. We become one of the many healthy and positive touch points that youth and young people need daily to grow and develop in healthy fashion.

THANK YOU

Thank you for sharing time with me today. I hope that you found information in the workshop helpful. Please know that what was shared in the workshop and what is shared here is truly only a small glimpse into this subject area.

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ACTIVITIES

- **CONNECTION ACTIVITY.** If you really knew me. Five rounds at 45 seconds each.
- **LISTENING ACTIVITY.** Constructivist listening activity to help us explore a time when a point of connection helped us to feel seen/heard, and the value in that experience.

LET'S REFLECT

Try it On. What is one thing that you will commit to trying for the next five or so sessions with your scholar(s)?

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NOTES & DOODLES

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LAKESHA'S BRIEF BIO AND HOW TO CONTACT



LaKesha grew up in Seattle's Central District. She is the mother of an awesome daughter and daughter of an amazing Mom. LaKesha's background and experience in working with children, youth, and families spans nearly 20 years and includes currently serving as the Middle School Success Coordinator at Washington Middle School for Seattle University via the Center for Community Engagement. She has worked as a Program Manager, Education Coordinator at a childcare facility, a preschool teacher, milieu counselor in a group home, an education advocate, and as a literacy intervention specialist. She has worked with PTAs and volunteered at a school designed to work with children and families who were experiencing homelessness. Her work has primarily been with children, youth, and families that are members of under-represented or 'marginalized'/minoritized groups. She believes in meeting children and families where they are, capitalizing on their strengths, and helping to develop tools to address challenges. In addition, LaKesha has experience working toward the healing of historical harms and traumas. LaKesha enjoys facilitating workshops and trainings that support deeper understanding and appreciation of diversity, inclusion, and identity. LaKesha believes that healing is an integral part of dismantling systems of oppression. She strongly believes that helping children, youth, and adults embrace themselves while developing a sincere appreciation of and for others is a vital part of our being. LaKesha enjoys reading, writing, genealogy research, baking, traveling, and being by the water (in addition to many other things).

Let's Connect

You can connect me any of the following ways:

- E-Mail: LaKesha.Kimbrough@outlook.com
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lrkimbrough/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/lakeshakimbrough-facilitator-coach-connector/?viewAsMember=true>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lakesha-kimbrough-06681459/>
- Instagram: [kimbroughlr](#)

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