

How to involve different age groups

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www.enablingchange.com.au

The secret to engaging different age groups is to present activities that naturally engage their concerns and interests.

Youth, young mums, grandparents are very different and diverse groups and can have quite different and unpredictable interests, so you should start by getting to know your “target audience” personally.

1) Get to know the age group

Find some local people in the age group to talk to. Treat them as experts on how to reach other people like themselves. Ask about their concerns, needs and interests. Listen and have a conversation about what kind of activities interest them and the best way to communicate with them and involve them.

2) Identify concerns or interests that you can help answer

Youth, young mums, young dads, and grandparents have different concerns. To involve them, you’ll to find out what concerns them and provide activities that provide an answer. For instance, young mums may want to know how to look after a new baby, while young dads may want to know how to find skills or employment so they can support their family. Grandparents, meanwhile, may be looking for social activities that make a contribution to their community.

Remember that everyone loves to engage in physical activities, so think of activities that give them a chance to *do* something as well as talk. Even just cooking together is a great way to involve people and build relationships.

3) Make the activity safe and accessible

When listening, be careful to spot any barriers or fears that might stop people participating. Fears about personal safety, or of not having enough skills to deal with situations, or of being exposed to embarrassment, may block people from being involved in activities that interest them.

Lack of transport can also be a barrier to participation.

Sometimes *unfamiliarity* may be the problem. People may simply not know what to expect and so be turned off by unconscious doubts and fears.

Make a note of the fears and needs you hear about. Then be sure to address them (using positively language) when you plan and promote your activities.

4) Involve them in planning activities

Young people and grandparents are great sources of ideas, so involve them in decisions and planning. Carefully explain how group decisions are made. Show respect by recording their ideas in writing, and respond to young people just as if they were adults.

5) Communicate simply, from their point of view.

Once you've decided on an engaging activity, prepare a flyer to tell people about it. When communicating, imagine yourself in the audience's shoes and try to see the world through their eyes. Use simple language and focus on addressing the audience's personal wants and needs (not just the goals of your group).

Here's an example:

"Having a Baby? New Parent?
You're excited and there's a lot you want to know.

"New family lounge nite"

A friendly, enjoyable evening for pregnant teenagers and teen mothers and dads. Have a cuppa, meet other young parents and parents-to-be, and get answers to your questions. It's a free, it's confidential, and it's just for you.

Meets weekly. Call Wendy on 0411 675 675 for meeting times.
- Put on by the Blacktown Parents Group -

5) Go to where they are

Meet your audience, and post your flyer, at places where people of that age group naturally gather.

If targeting grandparents:

- approach them personally at seniors centres;
- post your flyer in senior centres, RSL and bowling clubs, and shopping centres.

If targeting young mums:

- approach them personally at child care centres, playgroups and story times at libraries;
- post your flyer in shopping centres, libraries, maternity wards, maternity centres, doctor's surgeries, community centers, counseling services and Centalink.

If targeting young dads:

- approach them personally at schools during drop-off and pick-up times;
- post your flyer in sports clubs, social venues and shopping centres and Centalink.

Using the media: It's a good idea to use local newspapers and radio stations, commercial and ABC, to help get your message across. See the *How to use the media* section for steps on getting your story into the media.

Useful resources

Sharing the Stage

A guide from the NSW Commission for Young people and Children - www.kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/sharingstage.cfm

Links for consulting young people about plans and activities

www.youth.nsw.gov.au/youth_workers/youth_participation

Peter Kenyon's 51 Things Adults can do With Young Men and Women

A great list of ideas for working with young people.

www.bankofideas.com.au/Downloads/Social_Capital_Handout_6.pdf