



Youth Leadership Initiative Affirmations

Time: Variable, depending on group size; 10 minutes for instructions + 1 minute per participant (minimum of 8 participants)

Goals:

- To have an opportunity to provide one another positive emotional support.
- To experience uplifting someone else through verbal affirmation.

Activity:

- a. This activity is particularly powerful if young people and adult staff participate together. If there is an odd number of people, the facilitator can sit out. Split the participants into two equal groups. One group should stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle, facing inward. The second group should form a circle outside the first group, also facing inward, so that one person is standing directly behind one other person.
- b. Tell everyone to think back to their childhood.
Ask: What is one phrase that was said to you often or that you wish was said to you that always made you feel good? It should be no longer than a sentence and should not contain your name.
- c. Provide examples:
 - You can and you will change the world
 - Nothing can hold you back
 - You are beautiful exactly how you are
- d. *Say:* Now that everyone has a phrase in their head, we are going to share these phrases with one another. In addition to offering this verbal encouragement, we also know there is often a lot of power in touch, so we will also be sharing our support by placing our hands on the shoulders of the person in front of us. However, we always want touch to be consensual. If you would like the people standing behind you to put their hands on your shoulders, flip your nametag around so it's on your back, as a visual cue (*note: stickers, buttons, etc. could also be used as visual cues*).
- e. *Say:* In order to share our verbal affirmations, the people in the outer circle are going to place their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them and lean forward and whisper the phrase they heard or wanted to hear as a child in the person's *right* ear. Other than whispering this phrase, this will be a completely silent activity. When you are done whispering, stand up straight. Once I see everyone is done, I will say "switch" and you will move one person to the right. You will whisper the same affirming phrase to the next person in the circle. Before placing your hands on the shoulders of the person in front of you, please take note whether their nametag indicates they have consented to this.

- f. We will repeat the process until every person in the outer circle has repeated the same message to every person in the inner circle. Once we make it all the way around the circle, we will switch circles and repeat the exercise so everyone has the opportunity to both give and receive support.
- g. Have a small group of staff members demonstrate the activity. In the demonstration, have some people with their nametags to the back and some people without so that the staff can demonstrate respecting consent and boundaries.
- h. This activity is often very emotional, particularly if the group has already formed strong bonds. As time permits, you can provide the opportunity for participants to have one on one or small group conversations after the activity. You can also have a larger group debrief where participants share how the activity made them feel and any specific phrases that were particularly meaningful to them.