

Letter 10: YRT2_Y3.F.23

Dear Professionals,

I am writing this letter to you today to inform you about how you can support myself and youth around me better; I will be identifying key things you can do to become better supporters of our well-being and specifically our mental health. I would just like to start off by letting you know that children and youth are different than adults and therefore require different care. One key thing I've identified and heard from peers around me is that it is super important for you to not be judgmental. Why this is the case is because as young adults we have not figured ourselves out yet, who we are, what are values are, etc. That's not to say that we are not thinking about these things or don't have some of it figured out, but our sense of being, where we are going, who is our support is not fully formed yet. We are also at a point in our lives where we compare ourselves to peers around us a lot because we don't have a firm foundation of ourselves yet. So, when we reach out to you for support, we put ourselves in a super vulnerable position where we expose things about ourselves that are rocky and just with simple eye gestures or certain guiding questions, we can sense that you don't approve of who we are and it's not fair because we are figuring that out. I suggest, instead of trying to figure out if we are up to your approval or not, to try and listen to our needs (through our silent gestures too) and take initiative to provide those needs. It's really difficult for us to explain a hard thing we've been through or something we're not proud of ourselves, we're embarrassed to talk about it. It will take us time for us to be comfortable enough to be talk about that thing and even trust you enough to do so. Most of the times, talking less and simply being there for us, listening to whatever we do want to talk about and saying encouraging words is way better than trying to get us to talk about difficult things we've been through. Another reason why talking to us doesn't help is because usually when you talk to us, you are speaking to us from values you've reached after a lot of experience. Now, you are trying to show us those values by just speaking to us about them, I'm sorry but that won't work. This is because most of the times it sounds like you're talking down to us like we don't know any better and talking down to us will just push us further away from us seeking support and trying to improve ourselves. We already think pretty lowly of ourselves and your judgement and talking down to us will confirm that, setting us into a cycle of negativity. We understand that you're trying to help us out but, in that moment when we're seeking out for support, you simply can't tell us to do that thing that's right or even try to get us to understand it. We won't get there by you, we need to learn it ourselves, through making mistakes and forming those same values you want us to reach. Mistakes are ok for us to make, please understand that we must make them to understand the perspective that everyone else sees of that thing is good for us, etc. It will take time, so please be patient with us. That is also another very important thing. A lot of the times we are told to do this, and we are told not to do that, expected to understand the right perspective right away. Usually, if we're coming to you for support, we've been through a lot, and experienced a lot of heavy hardships that have taken a toll on our mental health and ability to understand things the way others would, or an adult would. So, inevitably, it will take us a lot longer to process new perspectives and reach new conclusions. So, kindly, please be patient with us and allow us to get there through our own way. I'm going to repeat myself here because its

important, pushing things onto us will never work so be patient. Those are the important things I can think of right now for you, as a professional to consider when supporting children and youth in their mental health. The three main takeaways you should've taken from this is to not judge us (by the way you ask questions and gesture), simply listen and be there for us when we need instead of pushing things onto us, and lastly be patient with us as we make mistakes to reach values that are good for us, it will always take time to learn new perspectives. I also want to acknowledge that I did use words that implied that this is the perspective from all youth however, it is not. This is simply my perspective and those I've heard from other youth around me who believe these are the things that are most important for professionals to know when supporting children and youth's mental health. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and hear out youth from their own words. It's a nice feeling to be heard.

Sincerely,