Principle 1: Build belonging and safety before leadership

leaders like us


Hello!
LEARN NAMES
BUILD
BELONGING
& SAFETY
before
leadership
A CULTURE OF
TRUST &
CONNECTION
APRI
EMOTIONAL
SAFETY
RAPPORT
PREDICTABILITY
BREAK
THE ICE
CONFIDENCE CAN
GROW WITH TIME
& SUPPORT

Principle 1: Focus on belonging before developing leadership

Why this matters



Young people are more likely to take part and grow as leaders when they feel safe, welcome, and connected. Belonging is not an extra activity at the start of a programme. It is part of how the whole programme is designed and delivered. This means making time for relationships, clear routines, trust, and low-pressure ways to take part.

"I think developing relationships are a must... smaller activities and group work can help" (young person)

What this can look like in practice







If you notice:	Try:
Young people seem unsure, hesitant, or say they are “not ready”	Spend time building relationships before moving into leadership tasks. Use simple activities that help young people connect with the programme and each other
The group feels high-pressure or performative	Use small groups, paired activities, or quieter roles so young people are not put on the spot
Some young people seem on the edge of the group	Change the delivery structure, not the young person. Give clear instructions, allow more time, offer quiet spaces, and provide different ways to take part
Young people look isolated, stay quiet, or struggle to connect	Offer buddy systems, bring-a-friend options, and activities that help people get to know each other

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What you can do to build belonging

- Set clear expectations at the start of each session.
- Use predictable routines, such as a visible agenda or regular check-in.
- Create low-pressure ways to take part, such as pairs, small groups, quiet roles, or gradual joining-in.
- Follow up absence warmly and consistently so young people know they matter.
- Build relationships between sessions, not only during activities.
- Reduce jargon and explain things simply.
- Check practical details, such as kit, modesty options, transport, translation, timings, and buddying.
- Respond to quietness by changing the conditions, not by demanding confidence.

Signs it’s working

Sessions start calmer and with less chaos, anxiety or uncertainty and young people find it easier to join in with content

You begin to notice greater levels of engagement, particularly from quieter young people

You experience stable participation and progressive engagement, particularly through the first few weeks of delivery

Young people refer to and uphold shared agreements and programme values

More young people begin to take on small responsibilities as a natural next step in their leadership development



Continue exploring the toolkit

Ready to move on? Continue to the next section: Principle 2~: Design with young people

You can also return to the Leaders Like Us at a Glance page to explore the modules and principles in any order.

Contact us

If you have questions about the Leaders Like Us toolkit, would like to discuss how to use the resources in your setting, or are interested in working with us, please get in touch.

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We welcome feedback on the toolkit, including how you have used or adapted the resources and what you have learned.



We are family
BORNINBRADFORD