Principle 5: Make flexibility and access part of your programme design

leaders like us


OFFER REALISTIC OPTIONS OVER WHERE, WHEN & HOW YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE
MAKE FLEXIBILITY & ACCESS PART OF YOUR PROGRAMME DESIGN
LEADERSHIP IS BUILT OVER TIME
CHOICES ABOUT
LEVEL OF VISIBILITY
SENSORY DEMANDS
COMMUNICATION
PACE OF LEARNING

Principle 5: Make flexibility and access part of your programme design

Why this matters

Young people are more likely to take part and stay involved when they know what to expect and have realistic choices about how they join in.
Flexibility and accessibility should be built into the programme from the start. Young people should not have to ask for “special” changes, disclose personal information, or wait until something goes wrong before support is offered.
This means making information clear, offering different ways to participate, and creating predictable routines that still allow young people to move at their own pace.

“I need to know what’s coming so I can prepare myself, but I also might need adaptations to make it work for me”
(Young person)



What this can look like in practice







If you notice:	Try:
Young people suggest they have anxiety before coming to sessions	Send clear “what to expect information” in advance. Include who will be there, where to go, what to bring, what it will cost, and what the session will involve
Young people fell unsure how they can take part	Offer a small number of clear participation options, such as observing to learn, joining in slowly and gradually, working with a partner, taking breaks when needed, or helping out with smaller tasks
Young people seem overwhelmed by instructions and information	Keep communication short, clear and jargon-free. Use simple steps, examples, reminders and visual prompts where helpful
Adjustmets are only made once a problem happens	Plan common adjustments in advance and make them available to everyone as part of the programme design

Principle 5: Offer flexibility and accessibility by default

What you can do to build flexibility and accessibility in from the start

- Send clear “what to expect” information before sessions, especially before the first session or after a break.
- Include practical details such as time, place, cost, travel, access routes, kit, food, and who to contact.
- Offer a small number of meaningful choices, rather than too many options.
- Build in different ways to take part, such as observing first, working in pairs, taking breaks, helping behind the scenes, or choosing a lower-pressure role.
- Keep routines consistent so young people know what to expect.
- Use clear communication, short instructions, examples, reminders, and visual prompts where helpful.
- Make accessibility available to everyone, not something that feels exceptional.
- Record useful adjustments so staff can be consistent.
- Use communication routes that work for the young people you are supporting.



Signs it’s working

- Young people know what to expect and are able to plan for each session
- Young people use different ways to take part without feeling shame
- Different routes to participation feel normal
- Fewer young people drop out because of avoidable uncertainty, sensory overload, or practical barriers
- Communication is short and easy to understand
- Staff use planned options and recorded adjustments, rather than improvising under pressure



Continue exploring the toolkit

Ready to move on? Continue to the next section:
Principle 6: Make it as easy as possible for young people to take part

You can also return to the Leaders Like Us toolkit 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.

