

Principle 3: Build trust and connection





PREDICTABLE + RELIABLE

DO WHAT YOU
SAY YOU WILL



BUILD TRUST & CONNECTION



REGULAR
RELIABLE
CONTACT

SUPPORT IS
OFFERED
WITHOUT
SINGLING OUT
OR EXPOSING
YOUNG PEOPLE



SUSTAINED
FOLLOW-
THROUGH



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Why this matters

Trust does not happen straight away. It is built through small actions that are repeated over time.

Young people are more likely to stay involved when programmes feel safe, predictable, respectful, and supportive. This means being clear about what will happen, following up when someone is absent, and making sure support feels helpful rather than like surveillance.

Trust and connection are not just “nice extras”. They help young people feel able to take part, return after difficult moments, and develop at their own pace.

“...having some support in general as well would be pretty good for a first experience, it would help build trust”

leaders like us



What this can look like in practice



If you notice:

Try:

Young people seem unsure what will happen at sessions or what's expected of them

Send “what to expect” info before sessions and include all essential details relating to inclusion and accessibility

Arrivals or session starts feel awkward or high-pressure

Make the start of sessions predictable. Use a named greeter, a simple check-in, or a low-pressure welcome activity so young people do not have to work out how to join in.

A young person misses a session

Follow up quickly and warmly. Share a short recap if helpful, and make it clear they are welcome back.

Young people worry about what happens if they are late, absent, overwhelmed, or struggling

Explain the “what happens if...” pathways. Be clear about who they can speak to, how they can ask for support, and what will happen next

One practitioner is carrying all the relationship-building work

Share trust-building responsibilities across the group or team, so connection does not depend on one person.

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What you can do to build trust and connection

- Send clear “what to expect” information before the first session and after any breaks.
- Make arrivals and session openings feel predictable and welcoming.
- Agree preferred contact routes with young people and keep communication consistent.
- Be clear about expectations, boundaries, and what young people can do if they are late, absent, overwhelmed, or struggling.
- Follow up on absence quickly, warmly, and without shame.
- Use named contacts so young people know who they can go to for support.
- Keep support proportionate. It should feel helpful, not like surveillance.
- Ask young people what support would feel useful to them.
- Apply rules and boundaries fairly across the group.
- Share responsibility for building trust and connection across the team, rather than relying on one person.
- Help young people take part and develop at their own pace.



Signs it's working

Young people know what to expect before they arrive

Young people know who they can go to for support

Arrivals and session starts feel calmer and more welcoming

Young people ask for help before things become too difficult

Trust does not depend on one practitioner or one relationship

Young people describe the programme as safe, respectful, and reliable

