

**Building Connections with Group Home and Runaway Teens:
3 Major Challenges & My Personal Tips for Success**
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CHALLENGE #1: SAFETY

How can I make my student feel safe with me?

- Upon arriving at your site, take time to **say hello** to everyone, including staff and other residents. Acknowledging everyone in the space makes people feel comfortable with you.
- Pay close attention to your body **language and tone of voice**. If you enter calmly and quietly, residents and staff will most likely respond to you the same way.
- If possible, find a **quiet workspace**. Try to work with the environment, but never enter a student's bedroom or take your student offsite without permission.
- Keep your **physical distance**. This includes touching your student's belongings or sitting too close.
- Make sure your student **understands why you are there**. Your student needs to understand that you are there to help, not to get him or her into trouble.
- Be consistent**. Work extra hard to come every week at the same time so your student knows that you are reliable and predictable.
- Give it time!** It can take weeks for your student to feel comfortable around you. Let your student accept you on his or her own terms.

CHALLENGE #2: CONNECTING

How do I show my student that I care?

- Spend time with your student** every week. Just by showing up, you show your student that you value their time.
- When teenagers talk, **listen**. This shows that you care about their thoughts and opinions.
- Ask questions**, but keep it light ("How was your weekend?"). Show natural, genuine interest and avoid stepping into their past.
- Manage your own expectations**. It can take weeks for a student to open up to you, especially if they have a negative view of their academic selves.

How do I connect with a teenager?

- Be yourself**. If you are sincere, your student will be able to tell. If you are comfortable with yourself, your student will be comfortable with you.
- Be creative**. By active listening, you will be able to pick up on what your student enjoys. Hold onto that information and find creative ways to bond over that.
- Be patient**. Again, let your student take you in on his or her own terms. It may take weeks, but it will happen eventually.

How do I deal with disappointments?

- Do not blame yourself**. If your student gets arrested or goes AWOL, do not take it personally. Our students are mature people who make their own decisions for their own reasons.
 - Allow yourself to **be sad**. Feeling a sense of loss is a sign that you cared. However, there are other students at the group home/transitional shelter who need you, too.
 - Reach out** to other group home/transitional shelter tutors. No one understands your position quite like another School on Wheels tutor.
 - Remember that **our students are loyal**. No matter where they are, if they feel like you truly cared, you will most likely see them again.
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CHALLENGE #3: ADVOCATING

How do I help my student reach out for support?

- Establish a good **relationship with the group home/shelter staff**. If you communicate with them often, they will listen when you speak on behalf of your student.
 - Keep your **School on Wheels RC** updated. They are always there to help, and often, they have connections with local school districts and special populations liaisons.
 - Contact your student's **social worker/case manager**. Facility directors will give you their contact information. Social workers have an obligation to help their clients make positive connections with adults, and they can put your information in your student's file so he or she can reach you wherever they go.
 - Get permission to go with your student to **meet with teachers**. Be persistent. You will get resistance from the school staff, so you need special permission from your student's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or social worker to do this. If you cannot get permission to meet in person with your student's teachers, email works well, too.
 - Bring in **resources** for your student: California Youth Connection information, college brochures, scholarship information, whatever it may be.
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INFORMATIVE WEBSITES

My Friend's Place: <http://myfriendsplace.org/index.html>

School on Wheels Resources & Tutoring Tips: <http://www.schoolonwheels.org/tutor-center/tutoring-resources-materials>

California Runaway & Homeless Youth: <http://carhymonth.wordpress.com/homeless-youth-info/>

California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/resources.asp>

SEARCH Institute: <http://www.search-institute.org/>