

## California Mental Health Advocates for Children & Youth 2008 Youth Panel Recommendations

1. Don't take away visits with people that matter to youth as a consequence for misbehavior.
2. Don't use threats or isolation to make youth "compliant."
3. Challenge treatment centers that simply use the medical model who tell adolescents that they have a disease of addiction when they are abusing substances. Following this medical model youth are often prescribed 12 step meetings where they are trained to analyze their "character defects" or where others with more time in recovery are in a position of power that can be abused. When wanting to leave the program, participants are often told they are doomed to one of three ends: jails, institutions, or death if they do not admit their disease or prescribe to their way of life.
4. Continue to research and find innovative ways to talk to youth about their substance use or addictions. It may not be who they are forever.
5. Normalize behaviors and feelings that are in reaction to trauma. Don't label these behaviors with mental health diagnosis or simply biological.
6. Examine how a "therapeutic milieu" culture can border on cult like of abusive treatment. Especially when clients on lower levels are controlled by clients in higher levels in a chain of command, or where there is limited communication with the outside world or people, or the group has its own language or vocabulary and relies heavily on platitudes. Stop the abuse of children in the name of "treatment."
7. Spend time doing teambuilding with groups of youth and having fun together. This can be the best prevention to conflict among group dynamics and teaches youth social skills in helping to take care of one another.
8. Talk to youth about the side effects of medications and explain what they look like. In many cases youth can develop tics, twitches, tardive dyskinesia or a dystonic reaction to their medications without anyone noticing. Have youth keep an eye on each other and report different or unusual behaviors. They know each other best and interact with each other the most, rather than many professionals that often have limited contact with youth.
9. Talk to youth about who is important to them and the relationships they have.
10. Support youth around their housing and financial needs. When giving youth section 8 and other general assistance, they often need help utilizing and maintaining it.
11. Advocate for larger scale change - fight stigma, don't allow the system to treat people with mental health needs as criminals. When youth have court mandated services don't let them be brought in handcuffs and ankle shackles to the court rooms or transported in police vans.
12. Give youth an opportunity to tell their story in creative ways that work for them such as journaling, using media and technology, or art projects.
13. Encourage youth support networks to treat them with small acts of kindness. It's the smallest things that can make the largest difference.
14. Accept youth where they really are and respect the multiple ways that they cope to survive - strange behaviors, self-injurious behavior, substance abuse, etc.  
Meaning, do not ignore these potentially harmful behaviors, but educate on the risks, express your concerns and wishes for them to be well.
15. Have faith that your good work can be what youth need to succeed because although you may not have the opportunity to see how your compassion and love is helping to heal, it is that love and compassion that can help a youth to survive.