

▶ Sitter Tip Sheet

The purpose of this tip sheet is to provide a general overview of tips and techniques that will be helpful when sitting with youth awaiting placement. It is important to remember that every youth and situation is different.

Preparing for Sitting:

- Be knowledgeable of where you are going any rules/restrictions for youth in that location.
- Ensure that you have your cell phone with you, charged and always keep it near you and ready for use.
- Ensure you have numbers of on-call supervisors and who to contact in the event of any emergency or questions arise.
- Review any materials provided to you about each child/youth you will be sitting with that gives you an overview of their background, history, needs, and behaviors.
- Upon arrival, visually check building. Be aware of who all is in building/sitting area and where all exits and bathrooms are located.
- Always, be alert and aware of surroundings.

During Sitting Session:

- Engage the child/youth. Ask about their likes and interests. Show curiosity in what they are sharing. Help them to see you as a person and not just an authority figure.
- Set rules and expectations for each child when the child/youth arrive at the office or community location. Review the rules and expectations if you are relieving someone else. Use language that is clear, direct, easy to understand and considerate/respectful.
- Use soft but direct eye contact. Use a tone that is compassionate, kind, and calm. Even when the child becomes upset or their voice begins to rise, you demonstrate control by keeping a calm tone that is at a normal volume or range.
- Avoid power struggles, shouting matches, or making derogatory comments about the child or their family members. Avoid asking the child/youth about overly personal details such as reason the child came into custody or where their parents are. If they bring these things up, you want to listen without judgement or asking additional probing questions. You can make affirming statements such as "I appreciate you sharing that with me" or "it sounds like you are dealing with a lot right now, I am here to listen."
- Set firm boundaries and ensure you are following the rules that have been set each time. Consistency is key. However, do not expect perfect behavior. You want to be tolerant of differences in music, language, self-expression.
- Do not let a child/youth go anywhere in the office/community site alone.

- Always follow them whether it is to get a snack or go to the bathroom.
- Always let them lead so they are not walking behind you. Instruct them to go in front of you if needed.
- If it is a bathroom with multiple stalls, go inside the bathroom with them and wait outside the stall.
- If it is the opposite sex **or** a single bathroom, wait outside the closed door.
- If it is a younger child, you may need to assist them. Explain to them what you are doing and ask permission to assist. so they feel comfortable with assistance. Leave the bathroom door open if possible when you are in this situation by yourself.

De-escalating/Defusing Techniques:

- Be direct, but do not engage in argumentative behavior.
- Avoid bringing up youth, family, behavioral history, or any other “triggering” information.
- Maintain eye contact and personal space
- Avoid sudden movements that may be considered as threatening by a traumatized child/youth.
- When a person starts to get loud, speak more softly. They will need to quiet themselves to hear you, and it is calming.
- Try to stay calm and listen attentively to keep a situation from escalating further. Use reflective statements to demonstrate that you are listening to what is upsetting them.
- Redirect an outburst by engaging them in a discussion about something of interest to them. Ask an open-ended question to distract their attention and help them to focus on something else long enough to calm down.
- Count to 10 with them or encourage them to take 3 deep breaths. Slowly and deeply breath in and out 3 times. Do it with them to model this behavior.
- If behavior begins to escalate or becomes offensive, you want to address it quickly. For example, the youth may talk loudly and use slang words, but if they use offensive language such as the “F” word or call you names, you calmly let them know that language is not acceptable, and you would appreciate them making better choices. Help them to identify what would be a more appropriate choice. Another approach is “I’m showing you respect; I would appreciate you showing me respect too. When you call me names, I do not feel respected. How can we work on this together so we both feel respected?”
- Signal for help when needed (have a pre-determined code with your co-workers to alert them without a great deal of distraction and to avoid further escalating the situation)