

# *Honoring a Youth's Story: Tips for Respectful Sharing*

*The members of Go Out and Learn Life (GOALL), the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) state youth advisory board, believe in the power of telling their personal stories to educate others about child welfare issues. In light of the potentially sensitive nature of the material that will be discussed in GOALL's presentation, we ask you to please consider the following guidelines. It is hoped that these considerations will promote a dialogue that is educational, inspiring, and worthwhile for everyone involved.*

## **1. Be positive, supportive, and encouraging.**

- In sharing their stories, youth are sharing a part of who they are. Even though they may have accepted certain aspects of their experiences, they are still engaged in an ongoing healing process. Please be sensitive to youth's emotional ties to their personal experiences.
- While they are speaking, youth are aware of your facial expressions and other physical and audible reactions to their stories. If you show too much emotion, you may make a youth uncomfortable. Please be mindful of how you respond to a youth's story.
- Youth present to inspire and to educate others. It takes great courage for them to speak about what they have been through. Your sympathy for what they have experienced is appreciated, but your pity can be demeaning. Celebrate youth's successes, instead of focusing only on the challenges they have faced.
- Being judgmental can be hurtful. Youth are making themselves vulnerable when they share their life stories. Please be respectful of the choice youth have made to speak openly and honestly with others about their personal experiences.

## **2. Honor a youth's perspective.**

- Different people will likely have different views of the same situation. Please respect a youth's view of a situation even if it does not agree with your view or a view with which you are more familiar.
- After you have heard a youth's story, please treat him or her with the same level of respect you would show if you did not know his or her story. If there is information that is shared that you disagree with or frown upon, do not look down on the youth. Respect a youth's journey, regardless of your perception of the youth.

## **3. Respect confidentiality.**

- If you ask a youth a question during the Q&A, please give the youth the option not to respond. If a youth left out certain details, he or she might have done so because they make him or her uncomfortable. Please consider this possibility when asking a youth to divulge more information. Sometimes youth feel obligated to respond to an audience member's question, even if answering may cause them discomfort.
- Please only share the youth's story outside of the presentation if you have the youth's permission to do so. Even though a youth has agreed to share his or her story with this particular audience, he or she may not be comfortable with this information being shared with others.
- If the youth has given you permission to share his or her story, leave out specific details, like names. The youth may be willing to speak about certain events, but other individuals who were involved may not be as willing. Respect the confidentiality of everyone involved.
- Let there be a positive and respectful purpose for sharing a youth's story outside of the presentation, so it may continue to inspire others.