



# YOUTH POWER!

737 Madison Avenue  
Albany NY, 12208  
1-888-326-8644  
Fax: 518-434-6478  
[www.ftnys.org](http://www.ftnys.org)

## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT AND FOSTER YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

### Empowered Youth Speaking Up

“What can I do to encourage youth to speak up in their mental health services?”

#### 1. Empower

Encourage youth's independent thinking and teach them that they can shape their own future. Let them know that if they speak up they will be heard. Help them to make informed choices and support the choices they make. Give them the freedom to make their own mistakes by doing so you encourage growth and give them the chance to gain life experience.

#### 2. Listen

Just saying a youth's input is valuable is not enough you must back up your words with action. Do not disregard information or put off action indefinitely. Consider what they have to say to be valid and important. Do not rush to judgment. Assume the youth is being honest and ask questions. If you believe a youth is being unrealistic recognize the youth's ability and focus on their strengths. Perhaps there is a more realistic goal that still meets the youth's wants and needs. Listen to them and help them discover their options. Be respectful of the youth's choices and opinions.

#### 3. Involve

Involve the youth in all aspects of their service planning. Work as a team with the youth and their support system. Build choice and reach out to the community to find services that enhance the total well-being of the youth. Provide any training and support for youth to become real participants in developing individual service plans. Do not penalize youth for relapses, instead help them discover triggers and improve their service plan if necessary.

If the youth is on medication make sure they are aware of the name of the drug and its purpose. The youth is the expert on if the medication is working or not. Ask questions and address any concerns the youth may have. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a Black Box warning about antidepressant medications prescribed to children and youth. Be aware that certain medications may increase suicidal behavior. It is crucial to involve the youth and make sure they feel comfortable approaching you about suicidal thoughts and side effects to the medication.