

12 Habits of Successful Guardians ad Litem Who Serve Youth Clients

Top Twelve Things to Keep in Mind When Working With Youth

This list was generated at a SaySo Board meeting. It has been further developed by the Polar Star Youth Speak Out Panel and their adult supporter, Ruth Kravitz, Training Administrator, NC Guardian ad Litem Program.

1. **Meet regularly** - Even when we seem like we don't want to spend time with you or even if we say we don't want to, we still benefit from contact and the knowledge that you are there for us—that you care enough to show up every month. Please ask us where we'd prefer to meet with you (school is usually not the best place).

2. **Discuss ways to get in touch with you** - Write your numbers down and give them to us more than once. Like most teens, we can be disorganized and we might lose your numbers several times.

3. **Explain your role more than once** - Chances are we never heard of guardian ad litem before. You just look like one more social worker to us so you better make sure we understand the difference. We like to hear that *you work for us*.

4. **Ask about our concerns** - We are young adults with valid opinions about our own lives and futures. Be sure to check in with us about our lives and ask us specifically if we are worried about anything. We might have problems but feel powerless to solve them. You can help.

5. **Speak to your client on their level** - Please don't talk down to us and please don't assume we can follow a sophisticated string of ideas. Find out who we are and then communicate appropriately. Oh, and don't mistake a lack of proper grammar for a lack of brains.

6. Keep it real - We want to know the truth. Be kind, but be real.
7. Keep confidentiality - Don't tell our business (except when your job requires that you do). Discuss confidentiality with us. Be clear about the kinds of things you will have to report and who you report them to.
8. Tell client what your recommendations are *before* court- What we really want is to read your court report but the next best thing is to know what's in it. Tell us *exactly* what you are recommending to the court on our behalf. Don't surprise us in court.
9. Be objective and consistent - Keep a level head. Don't run hot and cold on us. (Our job is to "loose our head" while your job is to help us maintain it.)
10. Be aware of triangulation - Like many teens, we may try to pit adults against each other. Check things out with the other professionals in the case before you believe everything we tell you. Don't let us shift the focus of the case to a feud between service-providers. We need you to stay focused on our issues, even if we are "*triangulators*."
11. Know your limits. You are not a therapist - Please leave the head-shrinking to the professionals. Don't try to get us to tell our secrets. Don't make us "process" our experience. Don't lecture us with advice about how we should live. Just be there as a support if we want to talk and otherwise stay focused on the practicalities.
12. Say goodbye when you leave the case - Ideally you will find the time to meet with us to say good-bye and to explain what will happen next in our GAL case. If you can't meet in person, a phone call will have to do but please, please, please don't just disappear!

Thank you!

Youth Speak Out Panel Members: Anthony and Rodney Alston, Shaquita Boone, Thomas Davis, Jeremy Herring, Melinda Medina and Sandy Turnage