

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

TOP TIPS: ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Whether they come as part of an educational group, with their family or as independent visitors, young people are an important audience to inspire and engage. We need to engage them in meaningful ways that make them feel welcome and confident to participate in our experiences. We consider young people as those spanning the ages 11–24 years.

Here we share some of our top tips for engaging young people...

1

RELEVANCE IS KEY

Link to things that matter to young people, both personally and locally, such as their school, friends, family and interests. Music, sport, food, fashion, technology and current issues are good hooks and reveal that science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) is in the things they care about. Show people who are 'like them' in meaningful roles: young, dynamic, diverse, relatable. This can positively impact their attitudes and feelings towards STEM.

2

VALUE WHAT THEY COME WITH

Young people have life experiences, perspectives and knowledge that you may not have, so don't discredit their experience or ignore their input. Ask them what they know and listen to what they say. If they share something with you, respect it and use it as a jumping-off point for your conversations or as a link to help them make connections and give meaning to your content and ideas.



3

CAREFULLY CONSIDER YOUR ACTIVITIES

Activities should be active, fun and suitable for the space you are in. Motivate young people by incorporating things that they are interested in, providing them with some choice and control, and enabling them to be sociable by working with friends and talking to each other. Empower them by providing a sense of completion and achievement, and asking for honest feedback.

4

BE YOUR GENUINE SELF

Don't try to speak like them and don't treat them like little children. Consider how you would act towards a friend or colleague and use the same approach with young people. They want to be treated with respect and authenticity. Every one of us is an individual. Don't be afraid to apologise if you get something wrong – being honest about a mistake can help young people see that they can trust you.



5

GIVE THEM TIME TO WARM UP

In their friendship groups young people might be loud and energetic because they feel comfortable with each other. They may not feel that way when they meet you or find themselves in new situations. Don't expect them to immediately want to talk to you. Welcome them, introduce everyone in the room and break the ice with fun activities. Allow them time to look around and get comfortable in their surroundings and with you.

6

BUILD THEIR CONFIDENCE

Positively reinforce young people's contributions and encourage reflection. Don't single them out or put them on the spot unless they are already comfortable with you. Ask questions that seek young people's opinions or experiences so that you can validate responses without anyone being 'wrong'. Provide activities that spark group discussion so they can share ideas with each other before sharing them with you. Let them make their own choices.

7

HIGHLIGHT AND DEVELOP SKILLS

Young people are frequently considering their future. They may be curious, excited and/or anxious about it. Offer activities where they have the chance to recognise, practise and reflect on important transferable skills such as problem-solving and teamwork. Being able to see those skills in themselves and the people they know, while exploring their value across different careers, can be very powerful.



8

BE FLEXIBLE

Be prepared to engage young people in groups as well as a single individual. You may need to tweak the structure of an activity, or explore a new angle if discussions lead that way. Harness their interests to maximise the connections you make. They may complete an activity more quickly or more slowly than you planned, so ensure you are prepared for either eventuality. Don't expect long stretches of focused work.

9

EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE

Make it easy for young people to know how they can find out more if they are curious. Suggest what to try next, where else they could go or who they could speak to. Highlight opportunities to get more involved: for example, jobs, volunteering or study programmes. If they come with an adult group leader or family member, provide support for them too so they can assist the young person's continued engagement.



10

LEARN FROM THEM

Young people are hugely creative and passionate about tackling the opportunities and challenges of the world. As much as you can inspire them, if you take time to listen to them they can inspire you with their ideas. They are often full of subversive, outside-the-box ideas and unfiltered opinions. Reflect on your conversations with them and let their curiosity and sometimes revolutionary attitudes open doors for you too.

EXPLORE MORE

To find out more about Science Museum Group Learning, including resources to use in informal learning experiences, at home and in the classroom; training opportunities; and insights and research around STEM engagement, visit: learning.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk

For further information, contact us at: SMGAcademy@sciencemuseum.ac.uk

Please write 'Top Tips: Engaging Young People' in your email subject line.