

# Is Youth Work For Me?

This assessment tool is based upon the 10 competencies for front-line youth workers adopted by members of the National Collaboration for Youth (<http://nydic.org/nydic/documents/Competencies.pdf>). This tool is provided to help you imagine yourself engaged in the work that youth development professionals practice every day in the U.S.

As you read through, check all the boxes where, as a result of who you are, you can actually see yourself engaged in these types of activities in a future job. The more checks...the greater possibility of a match between who you are and the career of a youth worker.

An important note: While there are many supporting roles and jobs in the field that have little contact with young people, this assessment is for front-line youth work and assumes direct, regular contact with young people. Therefore, before taking this assessment, be sure to think seriously about your answer to the fundamental question: Do I enjoy working with young people? You don't have to have an interest working with all ages and types of young people, but you must have a "yes" answer in some way, shape or form if you expect to devote your work life to young people.

## The competent and effective youth worker...

### Understands and applies basic child and adolescent development principles.

#### **Do you see yourself....**

- Providing opportunities for young people in positive growth and development?
- Designing programs and activities that help young people build skills and abilities?
- Nurturing a sense of optimism and hope in the future as well as the young people's beliefs about their role in it?
- Keeping up to date on youth culture and trends?
- Recognizing transitions and the role of rites of passage in the lives of young people?

## The competent and effective youth worker...

### Communicates and develops positive relationships with youth

#### **Do you see yourself....**

- Establishing rapport easily with young people.?
- Keeping aware of what is going on in youths' lives, neighborhoods and schools?
- Helping young people feel welcome and part of the group?
- Helping youth make informed and responsible decisions?
- Fostering a sense of connectedness by encouraging and nurturing positive relationships among young people?

*The competent and effective youth worker...*

**Adapts, facilitates and evaluates age-appropriate activities with and for the group.**

**Do you see yourself....**

- Demonstrating skill in choosing appropriate activities and in adapting, during the session, when the activity must be changed?
- Supporting mistakes as opportunities for learning and reinforces appropriate risk-taking?
- Asking questions to provide deeper opportunities for learning?
- Involving youth in expressing ideas, making suggestions for improvement and encourages youth to determine the direction of the activity and their own learning?
- Encouraging youth to set goals and reflect on process of completing activities?

*The competent and effective youth worker...*

**Respects and honors cultural and human diversity.**

**Do you see yourself....**

- Affirming and respecting each youth's culture, religion, home language and family values in all verbal and non-verbal exchanges?
- Making appropriate challenges to stereotyping and discriminatory statements or practices?
- Accepting youth representing all dimensions of diversity (gender, race, culture, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, family configuration, religion)?
- Creating programming that reflects the language, music, stories, games, and crafts from various cultural traditions?
- Speaking to all youth in a caring and non-judgmental way, using language that is respectful and bias-free?

*The competent and effective youth worker...*

**Involves and empowers youth.**

**Do you see yourself....**

- Planning programs with youth so that they are meaningfully engaged from beginning to end?
- Ensuring that the youth voice directs activities more than the youth worker?
- Giving youth opportunities to choose what they will do and with whom?
- Fostering a sense of connectedness by creating positive relationships with and among young people?
- Encouraging youth to reflect on their level of involvement and make suggestions on how to increase that level?

*The competent and effective youth worker...*

**Identifies potential risk factors (in a program environment) and takes measure to reduce those risks.**

***Do you see yourself....***

- Reinforcing positive and safe behaviors among youth participating?
- Providing program opportunities that match the physical, motor and emotional development of participants?
- Intervening when potentially unsafe situations arise that put others at undue risk?
- Planning progressive activities, assuring that participants have the lead up skills for safe involvement and skill development?
- Observing activity constantly and being prepared with preventative interventions, alternate approaches and added support?

***The competent and effective youth worker...***

**Cares for, involves and works with families and communities.**

***Do you see yourself....***

- Communicating to families about individual youth strengths, successes and achievements and responding in a respectful and timely manner to family questions?
- Looking for opportunities for involving families in activities (i.e., intergenerational activities)?
- Bringing volunteers into programs who are reflective and knowledgeable of the community?
- Knowing key organizations in the community to refer youth to for special needs (e.g., depression, substance abuse) or knows who to go to for help?
- Advocating on behalf of the unique needs of youth, families and communities?

***The competent and effective youth worker...***

**Works as a part of a team and shows professionalism.**

***Do you see yourself....***

- Having a sense of purpose for your work tied to a broad vision of youth development?
- Striving for self-improvement through professional development opportunities?
- Fulfilling responsibilities for assignments as expected – on time and with attention to high-quality?
- Taking personal responsibility for both successes and failures?
- Articulates a personal vision of youth development that aligns with the organization's vision, mission and goals?

***The competent and effective youth worker...***

**Demonstrates the attributes and qualities of a positive role model.**

***Do you see yourself....***

- Being truthful with youth; answering their questions. If unable to answer the question, explaining why?
- Doing what you say you will do. Following through, exhibiting trust?

- Demonstrating a healthy lifestyle (e.g., Selecting and enthusiastically engaging in physical activities (both moderate and rigorous) within programming and in the presence of youth, and; selecting, eating and enjoying fruits, vegetables, healthy grains and low-fat dairy products in the presence of children; selecting and drinking water and juices over soda or sugar-drinks)?
- Addressing instead of avoiding conflict. Using appropriate words to express anger; being direct; working toward problem solving?
- Having fun as evidenced in smile, words, attitude, activity selection?

*The competent and effective youth worker...*

**Interacts with and relates to youth in ways that support asset-building.**

***Do you see yourself....***

- Using vocabulary consisting of “can do” words, like strengths, assets, youth leadership, opportunity and support versus words with a negative connotation like weakness, at-risk, deficient, deficit, criticism, or problem.
- Focusing on identifying, celebrating and building on the strengths and capacities of all young people.
- Understanding and using asset-based approaches in interactions with youth, parents and community.
- Offering encouragement and praise to youth who take initiative and leadership.
- Encouraging self-direction and personal responsibility for choices.

This assessment is based upon the Competency Observation Assessment Tool created by Kirk Astroth, Randal Batchelor, Pam Garza, Marge Scanlin, Barbara Taylor with inputs and revisions by the National Collaboration for Youth Program Group ([www.nassembly.org](http://www.nassembly.org) [www.nydic.org](http://www.nydic.org))