



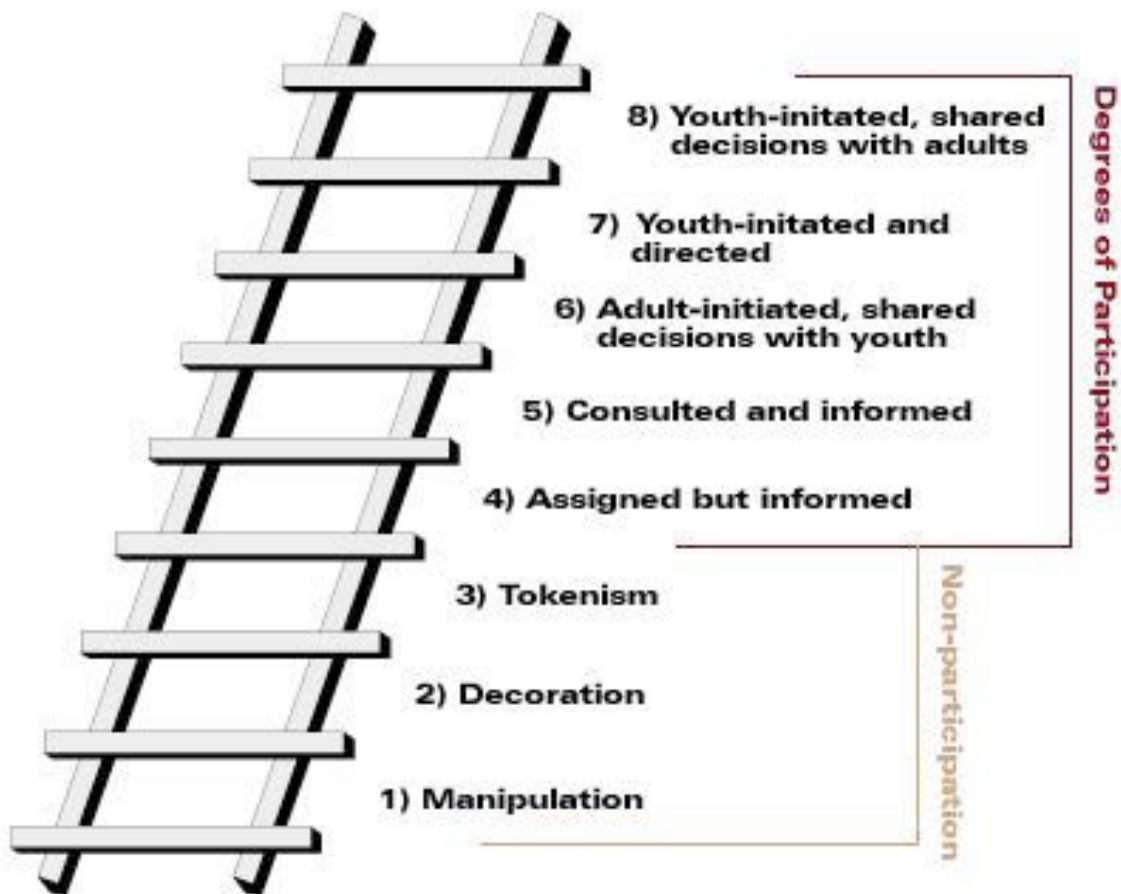
Engaging Foster Care Youth and Alumni

Levels of youth/alumni participation	Example	Who makes the decisions?	Roles and responsibilities	Level of leadership development and skill building
Youth-led	Youth plan, implement and evaluate a program	Youth make all the decisions; they may consult adults	All carried out by youth. Adults may mentor or coach youth.	High
Youth engage in partnerships with adults/allies	Working together at every stage, this team plans and facilitate an event	Decision-making and planning is shared.	Share roles and responsibilities, based on skills and interests	High
Adult/Ally-led with youth consulted	Youth give input on a project and help run a portion of the program	Youth input is sought, but adults/allies make the final decisions	Youth input into a significant activity, with adult/ally approval	Medium to High
Adult/Ally-led with youth interests considered	A program is designed and developed by professionals, but with consumer interest in mind	Youth have little role in decision-making, and are not asked to share their input.	Low level of meaningful involvement between youth and decision-makers	Low
Adult/Ally-led, with "token" youth/alumni as decoration	One consumer representative on a board; outnumbered in terms of voting, and assumed to represent all foster youth	Youth have little/no opportunity to share input, and have no real decision-making power	No meaningful role for youth. Also referred to as <i>tokenism</i> or <i>window-dressing</i> .	Low to Nonexistent

Ladder of Youth and Alumni Engagement

Voices of Youth was a groundbreaking program, based out of New York and Texas, that came into existence shortly after the passing of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act. At a time when the value of youth voice was not yet widely recognized, VOY was a pioneer program that inspired others to follow their example. Before this program ended, it won multiple awards and was considered to be one of the most innovative foster care programs in the country.

The diagram below was developed by to measure the level of foster care youth and alumni participation and engagement:



The Role of An Ally / Adult Supporter is Similar to being a Coach or a Mentor

	Coaching	Mentoring
Time	Short-term commitment, purposeful focus	Long-term commitment, slow-paced progress
Focus	Specific Achievement	Broad life issues
Goal	Improve performance	Individual growth and maturity
Process	Coach develops specific tasks to help the young person develop the skills to meet performance goals.	Mentor acts as facilitator to allow the young person to discover their own potential.
Requirements	Expert in that area	Willing to be a sounding board; good listener; seeks to understand youth point-of-view
Roles	Direct the young person towards an end result.	Facilitates self-discovery by the young person.
Responsibility	Assess and monitor progress toward specific performance goals	Share knowledge and experiences, but allow youth to discover their own direction.
Power	Coach has authority	Power-free relationship
Pressure	Can be high-pressure	Low-pressure
Results	Tangible: Improved performance, due to increased knowledge, skills and abilities	Intangible: Better self-understanding

**Source: Starcevich, M. "Coach, mentor: Is there a difference?" CEO Center for Coaching, Inc.*



IMPROVING OUTCOMES AFTER FOSTER CARE.



STRATEGIC SHARING

1. What it is:

Strategic Sharing is an effective way of sharing our stories safely and intentionally in order to achieve a goal. To be successful as “agents of change,” it’s important for us to prepare ahead of time in order to make the most of each opportunity. This includes making thoughtful choices about which specific personal stories to share or not to share, so that the intent of our message isn’t misunderstood by the other person. We want our voices to be heard, our messages to be effective and our well-being to be protected.

2. Where it came from:

The concept of *Strategic Sharing* was created by former foster youth when the National Foster Care Movement first began in the United States in the 1990s.

3. Why it matters:

Every second of our personal experiences matters, but not everyone we meet deserves to know the most intimate details of our lives. As we work to improve outcomes for foster care youth and alumni, our goal in *Strategically Sharing* is to educate and inspire others to create positive change. We will be most effective in our role if we know who our audience is, and tailor our messages to topics that they can actually help to change.

We don’t want the stories we share to backfire, and negatively impact us, or harm our personal or professional relationships. Talking about painful experiences from the past can have emotional impact. We want to be especially careful about what we share if it might end up in the newspaper, on the radio or on TV. Some reporters have an “if it bleeds, it leads” philosophy, and we wouldn’t want a future employer to Google us, and immediately learn intimate details of our private lives.

4. Tips to share your story strategically:

It can be helpful to write down your purpose for sharing, and which specific puzzle piece of your life story to share. Think of it like a traffic light; some topics are green: safe to share in any context, others are yellow: proceed with caution, and other topics are red: a public audience doesn’t need or deserve to know. Self-disclosure can be like clothing, and we don’t want to be underdressed for an important occasion. Foster care doesn’t always reinforce healthy boundaries and equal sharing (i.e. casefiles). But when we *Strategically Share* our voices to make positive change as leaders, we have the power to choose what we share, connect it with the goal we are trying to reach, and claim the meaning that personal experience had for us.

5. How to handle intrusive questions:

Part of preparing to *Strategically Share* is creating a back-up plan for nosy questions. Remember that you don’t have to answer every question that your audience asks you. You can redirect to statistics, and the general experiences of all foster youth. You can politely decline: “*Thanks for the question, but that is not what I came here to talk about today.*” After sharing a part of your personal story, it can be helpful to debrief afterwards with someone you respect and trust.