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Re-Imagining Student and Youth Engagement: Awareness to Action

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Disclaimer

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

- → Explain the inherent power differential that exists within the youth-transition relationship.
- → Explain why shifting the power differential in the youth-transition relationship from being the “adult” to being an active adult ally supports student and youth engagement and meaningful involvement.
- → Explain a process that can help adults recognize and shift from being the adult to being an active adult ally.
- → List strategies to support continuous engagement of students and youth

Bio: Melissa Diehl – Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

- Cake Connoisseur, Professional Soft-Pants Wearer, & Elephant Enthusiast
- Professional Background
  - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor
  - VR Statewide Training Coordinator
  - RSA Liaison
  - Technical Assistance – TACE, WINTAC, NTACT:C
- Education
  - Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
  - Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning
- Areas of Expertise
  - Leadership and Professional Identity Construction
  - Training and Development
  - Federal Policy Oversight and Implementation

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Bio: Sandi Miller – Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

- Vegetarian, Strength-Training Junkie, & Lover of Ted Lasso
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  - VR Blind Agency Director
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  - Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
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  - Working with individuals who are Blind or have Vision Impairments

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Bio: DJ Ralston – Pronouns: they/them/theirs

- Trans-Masculine/Non-Binary, Queer, Geriatric Millennial, & Muppet Fanatic
- Professional Background
  - Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Public Workforce Development
  - Technical Assistance – Disability and Employment
- Education
  - Certified (Partner) Work Incentive Coordinator
  - Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
  - Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning
- Areas of Expertise
  - Supporting LGBTQIA+ Populations including LGBTQIA+ Students & Youth
  - Social Social Security Work Incentives and Financial Empowerment
  - Relationship Building, Partnership Development, and Training Development

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~~Rapid~~ Engagement of Students and Youth

- Awareness
- Analysis
- Action

Awareness

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Awareness: Let's Play a Game

- "Because I said so"
- "As long as you're under my roof, you will live by my rules."
- "I'm not asking, I'm telling"
- "When you pay the bills, you can do whatever you want"
- "Do as I say, not as I do"

Awareness: Surfacing Assumptions through Critical Self-Reflection

→ Reflect on your own experience of adolescence and young adulthood.

- Think about the statements we just walked through – how many of those statements did you hear while you were a teenager (how many fingers could you put down)?
- How many of you were raised in an era where social norms dictated that the adult(s) were always correct (i.e., respect your elders) even when or if the adult(s) were not correct?
- Think about our major American institutions and their cultures (i.e., Schools, Social Services etc.), what are the underlying assumptions about adults and youth?

Awareness: Recognizing and Unpacking Our Mental Models (Underlying Assumptions)

- **Mental Models are the frames** we employ to help us make sense of and navigate the world. Largely based on our cultural and social experiences and interactions, they shape our:
  - reasoning
  - what we think
  - how we understand
  - how we simplify complexity
- In essence, **mental models**, often play a big role in **what and how we "know"** something, however, mental models can also mistake experience for objective fact. In other words, mental models also contribute to underlying assumptions.

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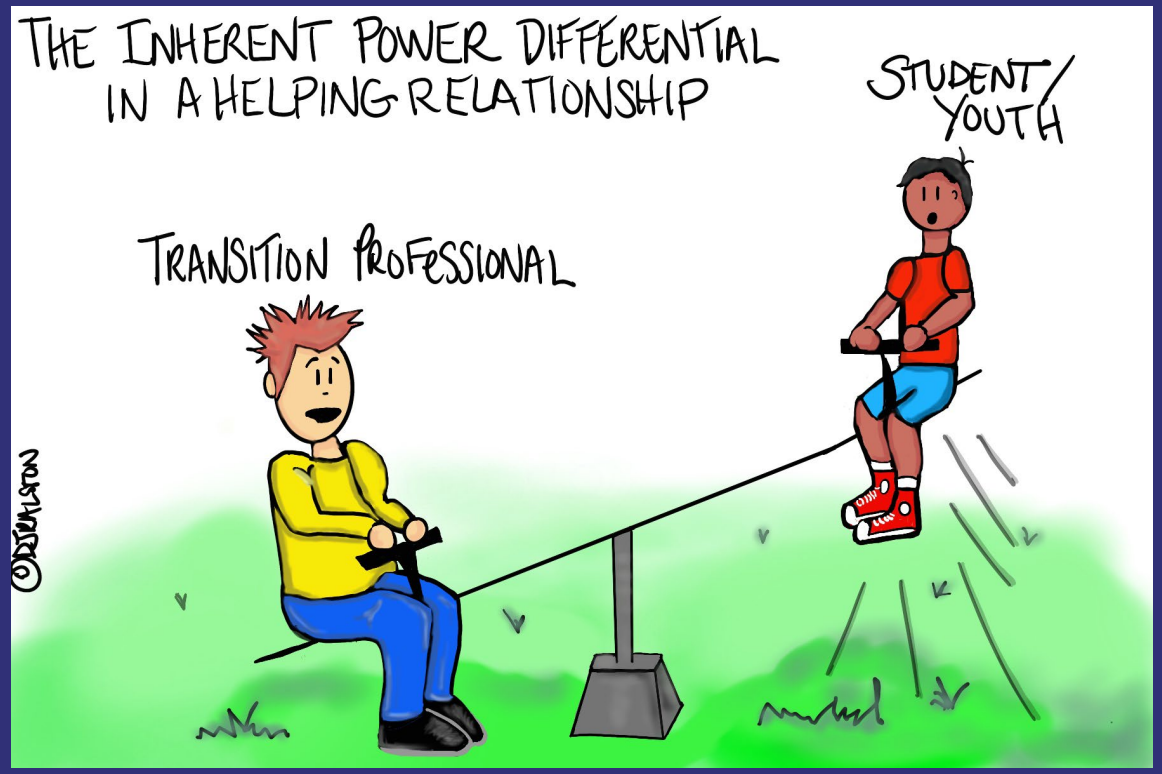
Source: Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging (see https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/healing_otherness_ppt.pdf)

Awareness: Recognize Power Dynamics

- Within the helping-relationship (such as that of a Transition Professional and a Student or Youth) there is always an inherent power differential because one party needs assistance which leaves them with less power than the person helping.
- In Transition helping-relationships that inherent power differential is typically compounded by cultural and societal norms associated with age difference.
- What other power differential often exists (hint: Abled vs. Disabled)



Awareness: Shifting the Approach

According to our partners at the **RAISE** Center:

- One of the key elements of youth engagement is creating a space where youth feel their actions and voice have value.

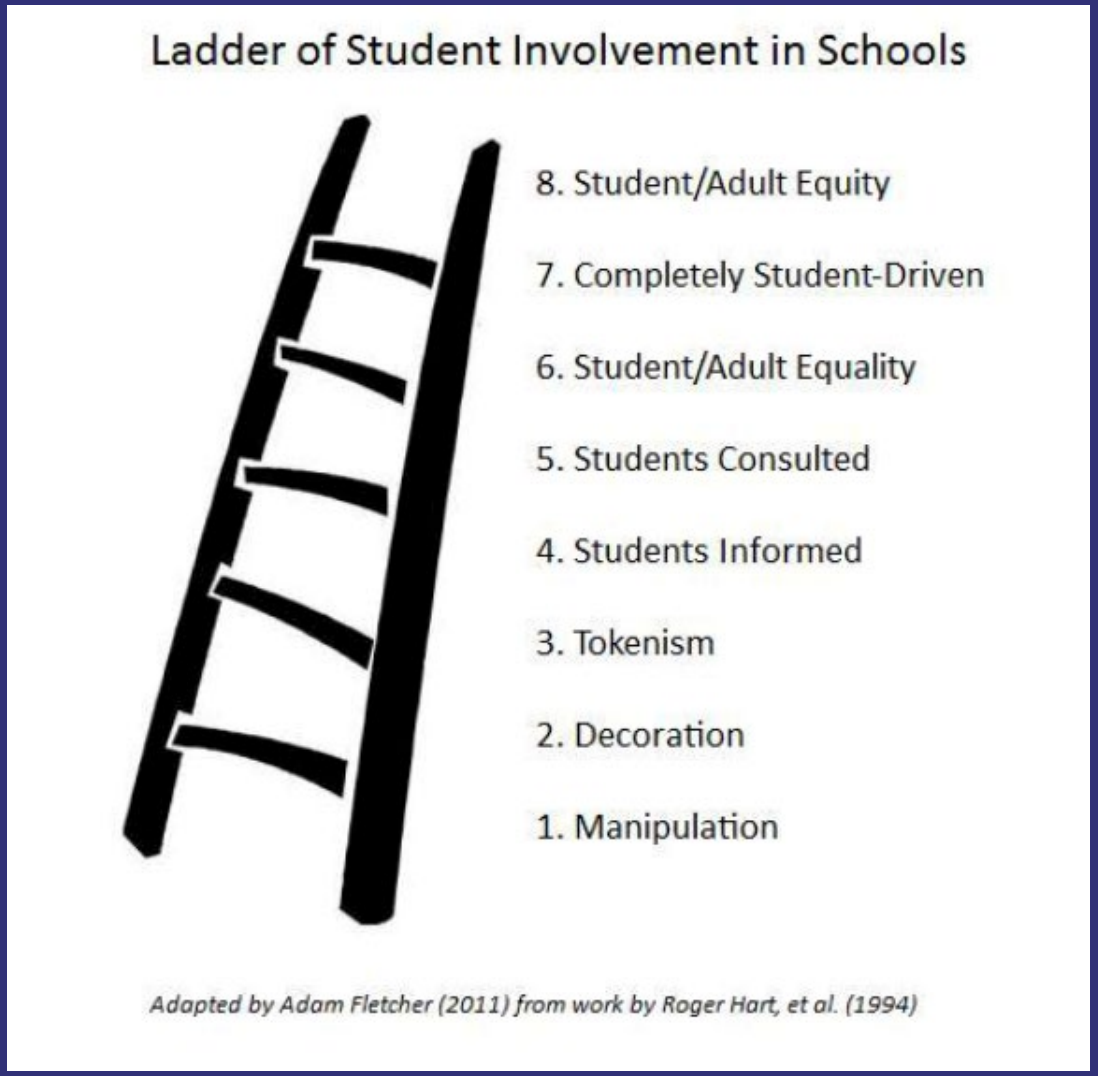
- Part of creating that environment is making sure the adults supporting those youth change their mindset from being the adult “in charge” to an adult ally that works in partnership with the youth to achieve group goals or activities.

Awareness: Authentic Engagement

According to the **RAISE** Center:

- Authentic youth engagement is present when young adults are provided opportunities to consistently participate in decision making, take ownership of work, initiate conversations and plans, and able to give feedback that impacts programs, services, and/or systems that serve them.

Analysis: Ladder of Student Involvement



Analysis: Ladder of Student Involvement Defined

Ladder Rung	Defined
1. Student Manipulation	Compelled or forced to attend without regard to interest
2. Student Decoration	Simple presence of students is all that is required - their active involvement is not considered
3. Student Tokenism	Students are involved only to reinforce the perception they're involved
4. Student Informed	Student input does not have to be implemented – meaning their input is not considered unless it actively aligns with what the adult has already determined to be the priority
5. Student Consulted	Students have limited authority and it is subject to adult approval
6. Student - Adult Equality	While this is a 50/50 split of authority, obligation and commitment it does not consider specific developmental needs and without recognition students may lose interest and become disengaged.
7. Completely Student-Driven	Adults take on only a passive role while students are then often perceived as less considerate and informed and absent of understanding of larger impact to the student community – validity also often questioned.
8. Student - Adult Equity	Full Equity with adults understood as a 40/60 or 20/80 split and requires a conscious commitment by all participants.

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Ladder of Student Involvement adapted from Hart – Adam Fletcher (2011)

Analysis: Student/Youth Voice and Input

- **How does your agency gather input from youth and families about what they need beyond the CSNA?**

- **Other Considerations when and where input can be solicited:**
  - When services are offered
  - Where services are offered
  - From whom services are offered
  - What services are needed
  - How services are delivered
    - Innovative and flexible strategies
  - What supports do students and families need to stay engaged

Analysis: How do students move through the continuum of services?

- How does your agency discuss what a student can benefit from as a potentially eligible student with a disability vs an applicant and eligible student with a disability on an IPE?
- How frequently are students and families offered the chance to apply for VR services?
- How does the agency monitor the movement of potentially eligible students with disabilities who apply?
- What do you know about students who are potentially eligible vs those that apply for VR and their likelihood to achieve CIE or enroll in PSE?
- What data do you collect and or review?
- Who do you partner with to understand the outcomes of youth?

Analysis: What does high quality engagement look like?

To ensure meaningful engagement all interaction should focus on the student and their goals

- Is eligibility determined as soon as possible?
- Is your agency using existing information including student/youth and family input (rather than referring out and over-assessing)?
- Are IPEs written with a projected post school employment outcome and the services they need right now and amended as early and often as necessary?
- Is there a plan for consistent and constant communication that is co-constructed with the student/youth?
  - What is the student/youth's preference for modality?
  - What is the student/youth's preference for frequency?

Action: Tips to Foster Engagement

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Action: Suggestions from the RAISE Center:

- **Develop a Youth Friendly Culture**
  - be flexible and creative in finding ways for youth to engage in services
- **Provide Information in Youth Friendly Ways**
  - have meetings in accessible locations, both virtually and in person
  - ensure information is easy to read and understand
  - use appropriate language, don't talk down to youth or use unfamiliar acronyms or complex jargon
- **Include Youth Voice at Every Level**
  - get youth involved in making decisions and supporting their thoughts/ideas
- **Partner with Youth-Serving Organizations**
  - Ask yourself questions such as: Where do youth in our community spend time, Who are the local experts we can learn from, What programs already exist that we can support, etc., and connect youth to these entities.
- **Build Relationships with Youth**

Action: Suggestions from the RAISE Center (Cont.)

- Have meetings outside of school hours.
- Provide a webinar or call-in option with an adequate sound system.
- Send meeting reminders in a preferred, accessible form of communication.
- Have meetings in an accessible location: ADA compliant, with parking or near public transport.

Action:
“Nothing About Us Without Us” - Youth Advisory Council(s)

- Gives youth an opportunity to develop their leadership skills
- Centers Youth Voice
  - Nothing About Us Without Us
- Youth Know What Youth will respond to and how to reach them (i.e. social media and other digital platforms).
- Youth can gain access to other youth in ways that programs struggle to.

Action: Peer Mentoring – A Tool for Engagement /Re-engagement

- Provides exposure to new experiences and opportunities- builds self-advocacy, cultural strengths, values, pro-social behavior and empowerment
- Peer mentoring can connect youth to others who share a common trait, such as an disability, or who had just traveled a path the mentee was about to go down, such as heading into freshman year at a new school.
- Peer support is viewed as providing unique leverage for influencing change.
- Promotes connectedness to school and school engagement or retention by increasing social support, social acceptance, connectedness to peers, teachers, and staff, and belonging at all school levels

Mentoring may look different than traditional one-on-one mentoring; may include family and community; group style; be part of an existing program (cultural or faith-based, or after school programs, Boys & Girls Clubs of America)

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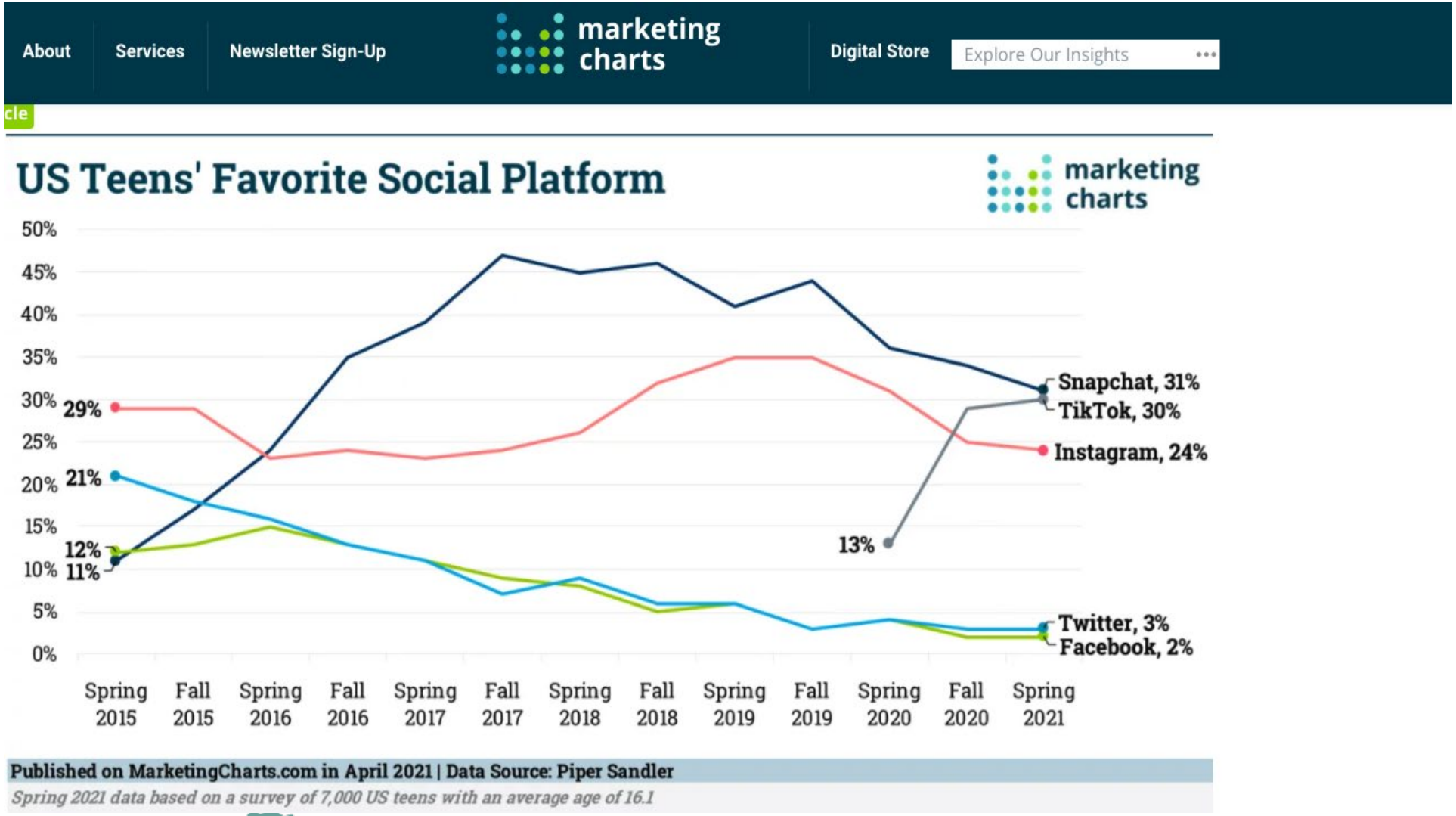
Action: Rethinking Technology



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Action: Rethinking Technology (Cont.)

- Leverage your newly-established Youth Advisory Council to create and run accounts on popular platforms
- Consider looking at youth/student Affinity Groups to learn more about the issues impacting/important to them.

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Action: YETI Top Ten Tips for Student/Youth Engagement

- Build in time to recognize understand, and use, the student/youth perspective on your meeting agendas
- Be open to student/youth's ideas and feedback even if it is difficult to hear
- Give students/youth tangible things to work on
- Take a young person at their word
- Respect boundaries set by young folks

Action: YETI Top Ten Tips for Student/Youth Engagement (Cont.)

- Take time to teach students/youth the system(s) including providing lists of typical acronyms
- Youth are EXPERTS on their own experiences
- Take time to learn about what the young folks who are being invited in teams/spaces with adults are passionate about
- Listen to and honor accommodation requests
- Social interactions and discussions are important

References

- Fletcher, A. Sound Out (2021) Adapated Ladder of Student Involvement (Hart, 1997)
- Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging (see https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/healing_otherness_ppt.pdf)
- Raise Parent Center (2022). Youth Engagement Toolkit Series

Find us:

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IDEAs that Work

Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

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