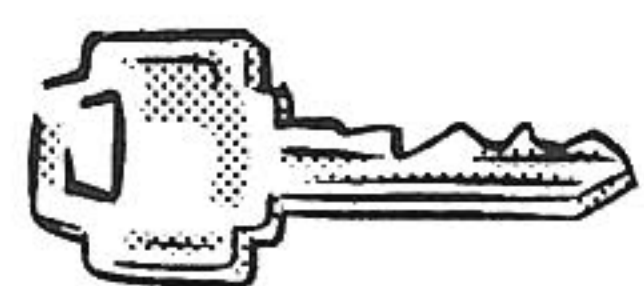


# 11 Teen Voice and Involvement

Resiliency research tells us it is critical that teenagers have opportunities to make real contributions to their communities. Effective cross-age teaching programs not only provide opportunities for teenagers to teach but also to have a voice in program planning.



## Key Research Findings

- Effective programs gradually increased the amount of influence teenagers had in the program and the level of responsibility they were expected to assume.
- The ideas and energy that teenagers brought to programs was encouraged and valued by program staff.
- Most teenagers welcomed opportunities to plan activities, pilot games, and train other teens.
- Teenagers expressed both surprise and delight at the impact they had on the younger children. Teens came to see themselves as positive role models and contributors.

*“But really, their honest motivation is that they want to feel they’re making a real contribution, that they can make a difference.”*

—PROGRAM DIRECTOR



## Tips from the Field

- From the beginning, involve teenagers in program planning.
- Allow teenagers to choose the activity or center they want to teach.
- Have experienced teenagers serve as mentors and trainers for new teens. Consider forming an advisory board of teens from past programs.
- Require the teenagers to propose alternatives for activities they consider too long or too boring.
- Involve the teenagers in program evaluation. Encourage them to keep journals or notes. Have them interview or survey the children at the end of each program.
- Give yourself a job to do, such as taking pictures or washing dishes, while the teenagers are teaching so you won't be tempted to interfere.

## What's the Worst that Could Happen?

Empower teen teachers by encouraging them to propose original activities. If teenagers suggest activities that might be of questionable value, help them make responsible decisions by asking: What is the worst that could happen? If the worst that could happen is the children will be bored, this activity might be worth trying. If the worst that could happen is that the children will be hurt, then try something else.