

YOUTH SUCCESS MOVEMENT

Parent Council and Youth Council

How a village stops being run and starts being owned

Village Series · Document 6 of 10

For council members, and for the Village Leader who convenes them.

If you have just been asked to join a council

You do not need to read the whole Village Series. Read Sections 1 through 4 of this document, and the Village Introduction. That is enough to start. Your Village Leader will fill in the rest.

Youth Success Movement · Success4rkids · Gary S. Smith, Founder

Version 1.0

1. Why councils exist

A village is supposed to be owned by the people in it. That claim is easy to write down and very hard to keep, because in the first year a village has one person who understands the model, made the introductions, and answers the questions — and the fastest way to get anything done is for that person to keep doing it.

Two years of that produces a program with one employee. The families are recipients. When the founder moves, tires, or takes a job in another state, the whole thing goes with them.

The councils are the mechanism that prevents it. They are how decisions move out of one person’s head and into the community’s hands, early enough that the habit forms before anyone has settled into being served.

The test is simple.

If a council has no real decisions, it is theater, and everyone in the room will know it within two meetings. People give their time to something that matters and stop giving it to something that does not.

Two councils, not one

The Parent Council and the Youth Council are separate, equal, and both necessary. Parents and young people see completely different villages, and a council of adults guessing at what students want will guess wrong — confidently.

2. At a glance

	Parent Council	Youth Council
Who	Parents and caregivers who live in the village. Not only parents of struggling students.	Students who live in the village. Usually middle and high school age, though older elementary students can contribute well.
Size	Start with one or two. Three to six is a working council. More than eight and it becomes a meeting rather than a group.	Same. Two students who will tell you the truth beat six who are being polite.
Time	About two to four hours a month.	About two hours a month, and less during exams.
Meets	Monthly while the village is being built, then as needed.	Monthly. Keep meetings short and keep them on a predictable day.
Term	A year, renewable. Nobody is stuck.	A school year. Students graduate out, which is normal and healthy.
Requires	A short orientation and a signed confidentiality acknowledgment.	The same, plus a parent’s written permission for any member under 18.

	Parent Council	Youth Council
Paid?	Volunteer. Stipends or incentives may be offered as resources permit.	Volunteer. Where a village can afford it, a stipend for youth members is worth prioritizing — many of them have real financial pressure and time costs them more.

3. What a council actually does

Parent Council

- Recruits families into the village — a parent inviting a parent works where a leaflet does not
- Recruits Family Ambassadors, and council members frequently become Ambassadors themselves
- Tells the Village Leader the truth from a parent’s point of view, including the things the Leader would rather not hear
- Plans and runs gatherings, celebrations, and orientation events
- Helps decide what the village puts its energy into next
- Notices which families have gone quiet, in the way neighbors notice

Youth Council

- Recruits other students — peer influence moves young people in a way adult persuasion does not
- Tells the Village Leader what would actually motivate a student to do the work, which adults consistently get wrong
- Shapes anything aimed at young people before it goes out, not after
- Builds the spirit of the village, which is mostly a matter of whether anything feels alive
- Takes on village projects — events, service work, and later, village enterprises

Youth Council members are also the most credible people in a village to say that the training is hard and worth doing. A student will believe another student who says the plateau passes. They will not believe an adult who says it.

A village that has a working Youth Council has stopped doing things to young people and started doing things with them.

If the children in a village have no say in it, it is a program.

4. What councils decide, and what they advise on

This is the section that determines whether the councils are real. Be explicit about it at the first meeting, and do not quietly take decisions back once you have given them away.

The councils decide	
Gatherings	What the village does, when, where, and what it looks like.
Communication	What the village says, how often, and in what tone.
Priorities	What the village puts its energy into next, among the things it could reasonably do.
Recruiting	How the village invites families and volunteers, and who it approaches.
Discretionary funds	How any money the village raises for its own use is spent.
Projects	What the Youth Council takes on, and how.

The councils advise; the Village Leader or the Movement decides	
Safeguarding rules	The background check, the confidentiality rules, the no-one-on-one rule. These are not local decisions and cannot be waived by a vote.
The method	The diagnostic sequence, the tools, the thresholds. These come from the Movement and change centrally.
Ambassador assignments	Which Ambassador works with which family. This involves confidential information the councils do not see.
Individual families	Never a council matter. See Section 5.
Whether someone may serve	The Village Leader decides, following the checks. A council may recommend.

The first list is longer than most volunteer bodies are given, and that is deliberate. A council that only advises will discover it only advises, and will stop coming.

5. What councils never see

Council members do not have access to family records, assessment results, or Ambassador case notes. This is not a lack of trust. It is because the value of a council depends on families being willing to be honest inside the village, and that stops the moment a parent suspects their situation is discussed by a committee of neighbors.

- No individual family is ever a council agenda item
- If a council member learns something about a family personally, it does not come to the council
- Patterns are fine — “several families are struggling with the evening schedule” is useful. Names are not.
- Every council member signs a confidentiality acknowledgment at orientation

If a council member is also a Family Ambassador, they hold two roles and must keep them apart. What they know as an Ambassador does not come into the council room.

6. Running a Youth Council safely

A Youth Council is a group of minors meeting with adults. The rules below are not optional and are not adjustable by any village.

☐	Written permission from a parent for every member under 18 Before their first meeting. Renewed each school year.
☐	Two adults present at every meeting Never one adult alone with young people, in person or on a video call. If the second adult does not turn up, the meeting is rescheduled.
☐	Meet in public or supervised places A school room, a library, a community centre, a congregation hall. Not a private home, and not an adult's home.
☐	All adults present have passed a background check Including the Village Leader and any volunteer helping to run the meeting.
☐	Communication runs through parents, or in a group visible to adults No private one-to-one messaging between an adult in the village and a student. This is the same rule that governs Ambassadors and it applies here without exception.
☐	Parents are welcome to attend Some will want to at first. That is fine and it usually stops once they see what happens.
☐	Photography only with written parental permission And never with a location or a full name attached.

Give them real work anyway.

The rules above exist to protect young people, not to keep them at arm's length. A Youth Council that is carefully supervised and given nothing to do is a waste of everyone's time. Supervise properly, then hand over something that matters and let them get it wrong occasionally.

7. Starting a council

Start smaller than feels respectable

One or two people is a council. Do not wait until you can fill a table, because you will wait a year and the village will meanwhile have formed the habit of running through you.

The first two members matter more than the next ten. Look for people who will disagree with you out loud, who are already trusted by others in the boundary, and who turn up when they say they will. Enthusiasm is common; reliability is not.

How to ask

Be specific and be small. “Would you join our Parent Council?” sounds like a committee and a year of Tuesdays. “I want to start something and I need two people to tell me when I am getting it wrong — about two hours a month” is a different question, and it gets a different answer.

For the Youth Council, ask the young person directly rather than asking their parent to volunteer them. Then get the parent’s permission. In that order.

The first meeting

Keep it to an hour. Cover four things:

- Why the village exists, in your own words, in five minutes
- What this council decides and what it does not — Section 4, said out loud
- What the confidentiality rule means in practice — Section 5
- One real decision, made that evening, by them

That last point is the whole meeting. Bring something genuine and unresolved — when the first gathering should be, what it should be, who to invite — and let them settle it. A council that makes a real decision at its first meeting understands what it is. A council that receives a presentation understands that too.

8. How a meeting runs

Forty-five to sixty minutes. Predictable day. Same shape every time, so nobody has to wonder what they are walking into.

Minutes	What	Notes
5	Welcome	Who is here. Anything good that happened since last time — start with that, always.
10	What happened	Where the village stands: families, volunteers, what is coming up. Numbers only, never names.
10	Follow-up	What was decided last time and what came of it. If nothing came of it, say so plainly and work out why.
20	The decision	The real work. One or two things that genuinely need deciding, decided here.

Minutes	What	Notes
10	Open floor	What is the Leader missing? What are people saying in the village that has not reached this room?
5	Who does what	Every action has a name and a date attached, or it will not happen.

Four habits that keep a council alive

- Send a short note within two days: what was decided, who is doing what, when you meet next. Three sentences is enough.
- Never cancel two meetings in a row. A council that skips twice usually does not come back.
- Report back on the things they decided. Nothing kills a council faster than deciding something and never hearing of it again.
- Let them be wrong sometimes. A decision you would not have made, carried out by people who own it, beats a better decision that nobody feels responsible for.

9. Growing and refreshing

Councils should turn over. That is a sign of health rather than a problem.

- Recruit from the families the village has helped. They believe it because it happened to them.
- Expect Parent Council members to become Family Ambassadors. That is a promotion, not a loss — and it is one of the main ways a village staffs itself.
- Expect Youth Council members to graduate and leave. Ask them, before they go, to bring in whoever replaces them.
- Set terms of a year so that stepping back is normal and nobody has to resign from anything.
- Aim, over time, for a council that reflects who actually lives in the boundary rather than who is easiest to recruit.

10. How councils fail

What happens	What causes it
It becomes an audience	The Leader presents and the council listens. Fix it by bringing a genuinely unresolved decision to every meeting.
Decisions get taken back	The council decides something, the Leader quietly overrides it. This is fatal and it happens fast. If a decision cannot really be theirs, do not put it in front of them.
It drifts into complaints	Real frustration with the school or the district fills the room. Hear it once, then bring the group back — a village built on resentment does not last.
A family gets discussed	Someone raises a specific household. Stop it in the moment, kindly and clearly, the first time it happens. The first time sets the rule.

What happens	What causes it
The Youth Council is decorative	Students are invited, thanked, photographed, and given nothing to decide. They will not come back, and they will tell their friends why.
It stalls quietly	Two cancellations, a gap, and it never restarts. The predictable day and the two-day note exist to prevent exactly this.

What you are actually building

A council is not a committee and it is not an advisory board. It is the answer to the question of who holds this village when the person who started it is gone.

Get that right and the village survives everything else. Get it wrong and you have built a very good program.