

Engaging Youth in Leadership Roles When Advocating for Body Confidence

Young people are a primary target of a diet industry that tries to sell products by making them believe they are not good enough. This industry – and the beauty industry in general – makes money by undermining body confidence... and it works. Eleven percent of teens report ever using dietary supplements for weight loss.

¹ Nearly 35% of high school boys report using muscle-building protein powders or shakes.

² About 17% of high school senior boys have used creatine, an underregulated supplement, in hopes of building muscle.³

Advocacy is the application of pressure and influence on the people and institutions that have the power to give you what you want. Our number one job is to make it EASY for decision-makers to give us what we want! (And hard for them to ignore us!) The power of grassroots advocacy cannot be overstated. Who better to amplify the message than local youth?

When a key decision-maker hears directly from their constituents on an issue, it matters. While lawmakers like to hear from adult constituents, it is the voices of young people that resonate and can be especially impactful.

Youth advocates can be trained and mobilized to speak with their peers, the media, and decision-makers about the issue. Our body confidence campaigns must have youth in leadership positions because they are the ones most harmed by the industry practices we are seeking to change. Adult leaders and career advocates must make room at the campaign decision-making table for local youth. That means:

- ✓ Changing coalition culture to be more youth-friendly, such as holding meetings at times and in locations convenient to youth;
- ✓ Compensating active youth leaders for their time working on the campaign;
- ✓ Training youth to develop the skills needed for effective advocacy;
- ✓ Empowering youth by asking them to lead the development of a survey to gauge their peers' experiences with dietary supplements, digitally altered ads, or weight discrimination and create a strategy to recruit youth to fill out the survey; and,
- ✓ Including youth at every step of the process, such as: collecting the data that define the problem, speaking with the media, testifying at public hearings, recruiting other youth from key legislative districts, enlisting organizations to sign on to the organizational statement of support, etc.

With some preparation, youth advocates will be well equipped to share their personal stories from lived experience to lawmakers, media outlets, and social media posts. Using the tools below, you can work with youth to hone their pitch and ensure they are heard.

Tools:

- [Telling Your Personal Story](#) – build confidence in sharing your story
- [Developing 27-9-3 Pitch](#) – craft a catchy persuasive statement
- [Answering the Three Key Questions](#) – identify your target
- [Pathways of Influence](#) research – know your target audience

Remember, you want to raise the voices of youth in your community. An effective way to do this is by having your youth advocates develop a survey and administer that survey to their peers in person, through social media, via text, or in another way. This is a powerful way for youth leaders to take the pulse of their generation. More importantly, it puts youth leaders in the driver's seat as the truth-tellers, exposing the many ways the diet industry and beauty industry have infiltrated their lives and begun to destroy body confidence. Collaborate with your teen leaders to create a survey that is user-friendly but can also dig into the truth surrounding weight-loss supplement and muscle-building supplement usage and where this pressure comes from. Once the data are collected and analyzed, schedule a meeting or presentation with your target lawmakers. Allow the youth the opportunity to share the information in their words.

Included is a sample [survey](#) recently utilized by youth in Massachusetts to reach their peers across the state. For more guidance on developing a youth survey, see our [Developing a Youth Survey](#) worksheet.

¹ Wilson KM, Klein, JD, Sesselberg TS, et al. Use of Complementary Medicine and Dietary Supplements among U.S. Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2006;38(4):385-394. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2005.01.010.

² Eisenberg ME, Wall M, Neumark-Sztainer D. Muscle-enhancing Behaviors Among Adolescent Girls and Boys. *Pediatrics*. December 2012, 130 (6) 1019-1026. <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/130/6/1019>

³ Miech, R. A., Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., Schulenberg, J. E., & Patrick, M. E. (2017). *Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use, 1975–2016: Volume I, Secondary school students*. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan. <http://monitoringthefuture.org/pubs.html#monographs>.