

# Key traits young people look for in trusted adults

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One in every two young people relies in some way on a trusted adult who is either a paid or volunteer worker in their community, new UNSW research suggests.

The in-depth study involving six communities across Australia also reveals the characteristics young people look for in adults when developing significant relationships.

The findings presented at the [2013 Australian Social Policy Conference](#) at UNSW highlight the importance of adults outside the home in helping

young people navigate their way to [adulthood](#).

Lead author, UNSW [researcher](#) Associate Professor Kristy Muir, says interestingly many significant adults did not realise the impact they were having.

"A lot were surprised. They just thought, 'I'm the soccer coach', but they were really pleased to learn they were making a difference to these young people's lives," says Muir.

Key findings:

- About 44% of participants had a family member or family friend they ranked as a trusted adult
- Significant adult relationships matter to young people regardless of whether they are working, unemployed or in school.
- The advice and support they seek from trusted adults differs with economic engagement: Young people in school or work had conversations around problems with friends and pathways to future work or [educational achievement](#), and, for those who had dropped out or were at-risk of leaving schooling, it was about how to re-engage with education and feel valued.

The study identified the key traits young people looked for in these relationships as:

- Trust: Young people must inherently trust the significant other adult.
- How conversations are constructed: 'Talking' not telling. Discussions are generally reciprocal, not forced and there is a level of equity, but also recognition that the trusted adult has [wisdom](#).
- The way advice is delivered and on what basis: Trusted adults ask

young people questions and are interested; the relationship is respectful and non-judgmental.

- How adults make young people feel: Young people feel listened to, understood and important.

Associate Professor Muir says the trusted adults were often people who went beyond what was expected of them.

"Very few young people identify school counsellors as a trusted adult because they are doing what they expect of them, but there were cases where young [adults](#) would turn to their early childhood teacher for advice," she says.

The full program for the 2013 Australian Social Policy Conference, which ends today, is available [here](#). This is the 14th conference hosted by UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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