

adulthood and its effects on our youth

What is adulthood?

The oppression of younger people because of their relative youth; where young people have unequal footing compared to their older counterparts in a space (King and James). Youth experience adulthood in their schools, homes, and in community spaces.

It is most prevalent in spaces where adults need to assert their control, like in the classroom. Adulthood needs to be acknowledged because students need to develop self respect and agency as they grow into adulthood.

Where does it come from?

Implicit bias is at the root of all discrimination and oppression. It's when someone takes on a belief or attitude about a certain social group, based on how they grew up, and what they were told as a child. Implicit bias is done almost entirely unconsciously, which is what makes it so pervasive.

In the context of adulthood, people who have experienced adulthood in their youth are more likely to implicitly shape other young people's opinions about being young.

Finding adulthood in your actions

Some common phrases that come with adulthood: "You're too young/not mature enough." "You should have asked an adult first." "You should have asked permission first." "Children should be seen and not heard."

When these phrases are used, there is often an underlying issue that is not related to age. Age and youth are used as scapegoats to prevent young people from doing things. It shuts down the conversation because there is no way to magically become older. When you find yourself about to say these phrases, ask yourself: **Does this really have to do with this person's age? What is the underlying reason I am saying this?** If you can, it is always better to tell someone the real reason. How you and that person can work together to navigate beyond this? Adults should always consider if they are limiting someone's agency to be markedly different from their own. These ideas especially come into play as youth are on the threshold of adulthood, when practicing decision making and self-responsibility are key to their ability to transition into being an adult.

Common examples:

Responsibility delegation: youth might not be expected or allowed to take the lead on important projects worked on by both adults and youth. Especially when it comes to items that society puts value in, like money. Furthermore, youth's ability to take charge of their own education can be affected.

Positional power: Often adults have positional power over youth. The APA dictionary of Psychology says positional power "gives someone the right to make decisions and to demand compliance". For example, parents have some agency over their child's life, or teachers deciding how to use class time. These places of positional power can be abused, which causes distrust and lack of communication between adults and youth.

Physically: Spaces with adulthood have adults talking to adults, and any youth in the room excluded from the 'important' conversation.

"If there is a team of young people and adults, and all of the adults in the room are directing their questions at the other adults, and all of the attention is on the adults, the young people feel that. Or even how attentive people seem to be when an adult is talking versus when a young person is talking."

-Quinn Pursell (he/they), from Creative Youth Development.

Unfold this ZINE for works cited!!

Adulthood in education:

"I define adulthood as bias towards adults that can result in discrimination against children and youth. Since adults are the instigators, drivers, maintainers, reformers, leaders, and sustainers of schools, schools are inherently and implicitly biased towards adults." - Adam Fletcher from SoundOut.
All of the positional power adults hold in these spaces can result in adulthood. For people in these roles that are considered 'above' students, acknowledging adulthood in front of students often is one of the best ways to move beyond it.

Works Cited

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King, Katherine, and William, James. "The Problem with Adultism." Psychology Today, 29 September 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifespan-perspectives/202109/the-problem-adultism>. Accessed 14 March 2024.

What is Seeking Social Justice (SSJ) ?

We are a youth-led student organization at U32 Middle & High School. Our mission is to give youth in the area a voice in school policy, and teach them how to stand up to injustice.