

Tips for Engaging Teenage Boys in CBITS Groups

Teenage boys engage best in CBITS when clinicians focus on building trust, using casual and relatable language, and taking a collaborative, respectful approach. Creating a comfortable environment, validating their experiences, and gradually introducing structure helps increase participation and supports positive outcomes.

Connection drives engagement. Engagement drives outcomes!

Partner with Them

Students who have struggled in other groups often respond well to:

- **Having autonomy and voice:** Incorporate different forms of communication, like note cards, to write down their experiences prior to the first session
- **Feeling respected and understood:** Frequently return to the group rules established in the first session to ensure they are still relevant and appropriate
- **Relationship-focused approaches:** Ensure examples and activities are specific and relevant to their lives and interests

Build Trust First, Skills Second

- Focus on creating a **safe, comfortable environment** before introducing clinical language or structured content
- Allow more **relaxed body positions** initially (sitting back, lounging appropriately), then gradually introduce more structure and expectations
- Use **individual check-ins** to strengthen relationships, which can improve group participation

Take a Collaborative, Non-Authoritative Approach

- Position yourself as a **partner**, not an authority figure
- Use **casual, conversational language** rather than a formal or clinical tone
- **Normalize** their experiences and reactions
- **Validate** their perspectives frequently and authentically
- **Example validation statements:** “That makes sense,” “I’m glad you shared that,” “A lot of people would react that way.”

WORD CHOICE

Avoid overly clinical terms like “depression,” “anxiety,” or “trauma” early on

Instead, use accessible phrases such as “bad things that happened,” or “stressful stuff”

Why? This approach helps reduce defensiveness and stigma

BODY LANGUAGE

Use **open, relaxed body language**; avoid appearing overly formal, rigid or clinical

Sit at their level rather than standing over them

Be genuine; adolescent boys are highly attuned to **authenticity**

MOTIVATION AND REINFORCEMENT

Incorporate **incentives and rewards** like snacks, points, or small privileges

Provide **opportunities for positive recognition**, especially in ways that matter socially