

Youth Worker interview questions

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What to expect

Youth work interviews are usually run by a panel that includes someone with direct sector experience, often a team leader or program manager. Expect a mix of questions about your own track record with young people and scenario questions that test judgement, boundaries and safety awareness, since the role carries real risk and duty-of-care obligations.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about specific past situations with young people, used to check how you actually behave under the conditions the job creates, not just what you'd say in theory.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations involving disclosure, conflict or risk, used to test decision-making and boundary-setting in the moment.
- **Process:** Walk-through questions about how you run an intake, a group session or a referral, checking you have a workable method rather than good intentions alone.
- **Safety and reporting:** Questions about mandatory reporting, incident escalation and confidentiality limits, given the vulnerability of the client group.

Most panels open with context about the program and client group, move into two or three behavioural questions about your prior experience, then shift into scenario or case-study questions where you talk through how you'd respond to a specific situation. Some services add a short role-play or written case note exercise. The interview usually closes with practical questions about availability, WWCC and police check status, and willingness to work in higher-risk settings such as detention or outreach.

1. A 15-year-old you're supporting discloses they've been using drugs and asks you not to tell their parents. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Tests whether you can balance confidentiality, duty of care and mandatory reporting obligations without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state your immediate priority, explain how you'd assess the level of risk, describe what you can and can't keep confidential, and outline how you'd handle the conversation with the young person about next steps.

Example answer

"My first priority is understanding how serious the drug use is and whether there's immediate risk to their safety. I'd talk to them calmly, without judgement, and be upfront early that I can't promise total confidentiality if I think they're at risk, but I can promise I won't go behind their back. Depending on what they tell me, I'd assess against our service's risk thresholds and, if it meets the bar for a report, I'd explain that to them before I make it and talk through what happens next, rather than having them find out after the fact. I'd also loop in my supervisor to sanity-check the call, since these decisions shouldn't sit with one person alone."

2. Tell me about a time you built trust with a young person who was initially resistant to engaging with you.

Why they ask

Rapport-building with reluctant clients is core to the job and hard to fake, so panels probe for a real example.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result, with emphasis on what specifically shifted the young person's willingness to engage.

Example answer

"I was assigned a 16-year-old who'd been referred after multiple missed appointments with previous workers and gave one-word answers in our first two sessions. My task was to get enough engagement to actually assess his needs. Instead of pushing for conversation, I started meeting him somewhere neutral he chose and let him set the pace, talking about his interests rather than his problems for the first few weeks. Over time he brought up what was actually going on at home. The result was he stayed engaged with the program for the rest of the term and agreed to a referral to a family counselling service, which he'd refused outright at the start."

3. Walk me through how you'd run an initial intake interview with a new client.

Why they ask

Checks you have a structured, repeatable method for needs and risk assessment rather than relying on instinct alone.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step process walk-through covering preparation, the interview itself, and what happens immediately after.

Example answer

"I'd start by reviewing any referral information beforehand so I'm not asking the young person to repeat things unnecessarily. In the session, I'd focus first on rapport rather than jumping straight into forms, then move through strengths and support networks before risk factors, since starting with risk can shut people down. I'm listening for both what's said and what's avoided. Afterward, I'd write up case notes the same day while it's fresh, flag any immediate risk to my supervisor, and set a follow-up plan with clear next steps rather than leaving the file open-ended."

4. You're running a group session and two participants start arguing, and one becomes aggressive. What do you do in the moment?

Why they ask

Group facilitation involves managing conflict safely without losing control of the room or the relationship with either participant.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: immediate safety action first, then de-escalation approach, then how you'd follow up afterward.

Example answer

"My first move is to physically reposition myself between them if it's safe to do so and lower my voice rather than raise it, which usually helps de-escalate faster than shouting over the noise. I'd name what's happening calmly, ask the aggressive participant to step outside with me one-on-one, and get a co-facilitator or colleague to keep the rest of the group settled. Once things are calmer I'd talk through what triggered it, and afterward I'd note the incident properly and flag it to my supervisor, since a pattern of aggression might need a change to that person's program plan."

5. A young person you're mentoring keeps missing scheduled sessions. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Disengagement is common in this client group, and panels want to see persistence without being punitive.

How to structure your answer

Problem-solving approach: diagnose likely causes, describe your response, and explain when you'd escalate or close the case.

Example answer

"I wouldn't assume it's a lack of interest straight away. I'd try to make contact through whatever channel they actually respond to, sometimes a text works better than a call, and ask directly if something's changed rather than just rebooking. If transport or timing is the barrier I'd try to adjust the format, maybe a shorter session or a different location. If they're still not engaging after a few genuine attempts, I'd document that and discuss with my supervisor whether to keep the case open, step down contact, or close it with a clear pathway back in if they want it later."

6. Describe a time you had to make a mandatory report about a young person you were working with.

Why they ask

Directly tests experience with, or understanding of, the legal reporting obligations that sit alongside the caseworker relationship.

How to structure your answer

STAR with added focus on how you managed the relationship with the young person after the report, since panels want to see you protect trust as far as possible.

Example answer

"A client disclosed ongoing harm at home during a one-on-one session. My task was to act on our reporting obligations while minimising damage to the working relationship. I told her plainly that what she'd shared meant I had to make a report, explained roughly what that process involved, and stayed with her while she processed that news rather than rushing off to make the call immediately. I made the report the same day and documented it thoroughly. The result was she stayed engaged with our service afterward, partly because I hadn't hidden what I was doing or sprung it on her without warning."