

The WISDOM *of* AGE
A HANDBOOK FOR MENTORS

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Foreword

As the number of Americans over the age of 50 continues its pace as the fastest growing population, the need for positive adult role models has never been greater. MENTOR estimates that nearly 15 million young people could benefit from high-quality, formal mentoring relationships. Linking these youth with these older adults is a vital strategy to help close the mentoring gap. *The Wisdom of Age: A Handbook for Mentors* is a comprehensive resource designed to offer practical information as well as real tools to develop and strengthen successful mentoring relationships between 50+ mentors and today's young people.

Divided into three chapters, *The Wisdom of Age: A Handbook for Mentors* looks at defining the role and establishing the parameters of the mentor, becoming competent in today's youth culture and supporting and sustaining intergenerational mentoring relationships. Additionally, each section includes hands-on training tools and exercises. Written by Dr. Andrea Taylor, Director of Youth Development and Family Support at Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning, this handbook reflects her many years of experience and represents the most recent developments and research in the field of intergenerational mentoring.

The Wisdom of Age: A Handbook for Mentors was made possible by a generous grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and is the latest offering from MENTOR. For nearly two decades, MENTOR has worked to expand the world of quality mentoring. In collaboration with a strong network of state *Mentoring Partnerships* and with more than 4,600 mentoring programs nationwide, MENTOR helps connect young Americans who want and need caring adults in their lives with the power of mentoring.

We hope that you will use this handbook with great success. For further assistance, we encourage you to visit www.mentoring.org to find even more resources.

In Partnership,



Tonya Wiley
Executive Vice President



Kate Schineller
Vice President

Acknowledgements

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MENTOR

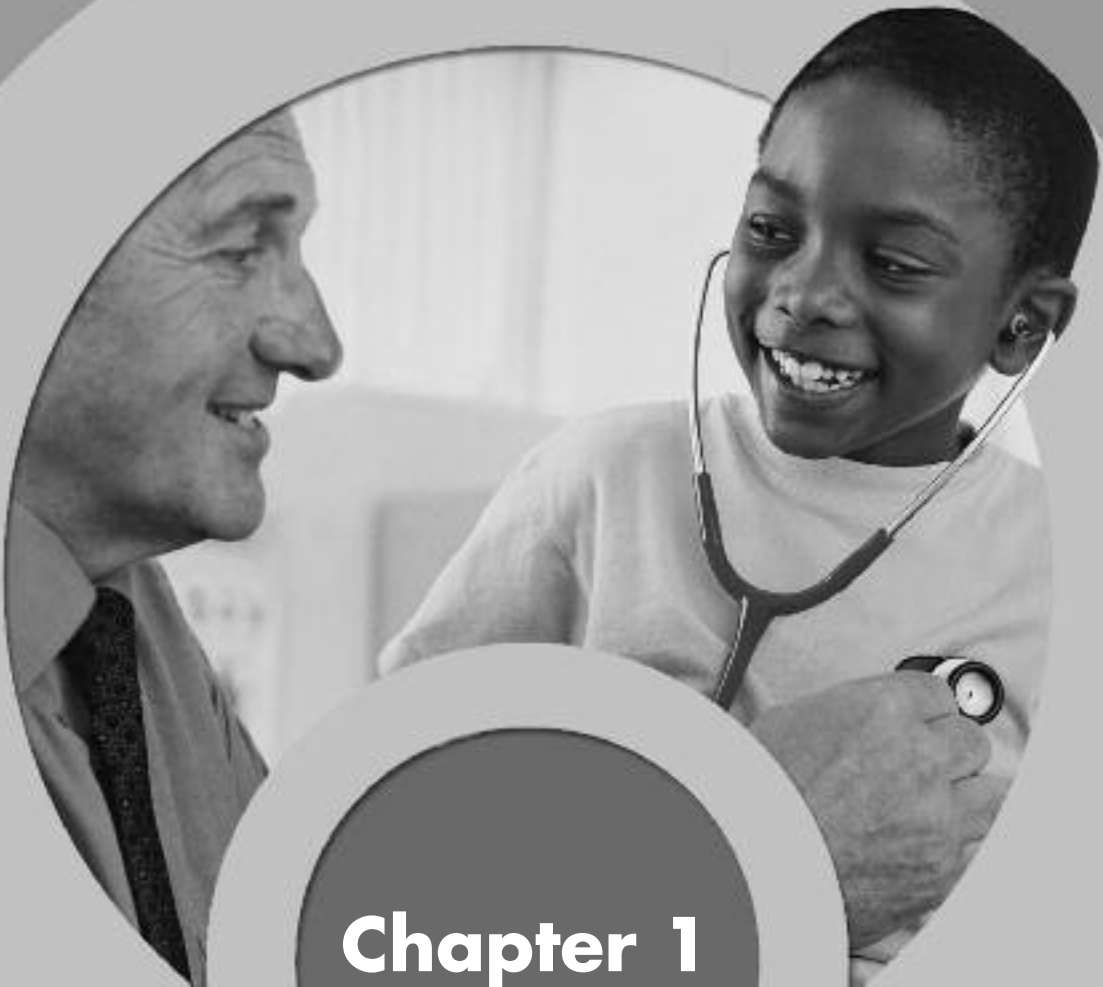
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Chapter 1

CHAPTER 1

Getting Started

Mentor Job Description

This is a sample and can be replaced or adapted by the by individual program.

Qualifications

- Age 50 or older
- A desire to work with and be accessible to mentee
- Warmth, openness, and patience
- Willingness to listen
- Ability to set limits and respond to supervision
- Ability to travel to and from the site of activities

Responsibilities

- Serve as a friend, advocate, coach, and listener to mentee on personal, school, career, and other issues
- Meet with mentee a minimum of two hours a week
- Participate in training and supervisory meeting with agency staff
- Participate in special group events and activities
- Complete project reporting forms

Benefits

- Giving and sharing your lifetime of experience
- Free attendance at selected community cultural, sports, and other events
- Greater awareness of community resources and the needs of today's mentees
- Opportunity to have a positive impact in your community

Compensation

e.g., monthly stipend, travel reimbursement, activity funds

Mentor Roles

Mentors assume various roles in their relationships with mentees. These roles overlap and change over time. In successful relationships, the number of roles that a mentor takes on often increases as the relationship develops.

Some of the roles you may assume are:

- **Teacher/trainer** Providing learning opportunities and offering your experience as a guide
- **Positive role model** Demonstrating exemplary behavior and offering values that will increase chances for success and happiness
- **Social supporter/guide** Providing encouragement to the mentee as he or she embarks on new experiences
- **Resource supporter/advocate** Speaking and acting on behalf of the mentee and helping the mentee access community resources
- **Challenger** Encouraging the mentee to maximize his/her potential
- **Friend/companion** Being consistently available and sincere; providing the mentee with a caring and unconditional friendship

The roles you play at any given time are determined by the mentee's needs, desires, and interests.

Guidelines for Mentors

The primary goal of this project is to provide support to vulnerable mentees through the development of a meaningful relationship with an older adult. Over time, your relationship will grow and trust will develop. The following are some basic guidelines that are further described later in the handbook.

1. Be reliable.

Always try to visit your mentee when you say you will or call to cancel if there is a problem. Try not to break a date with your mentee. Trust is crucial in your relationship. Nothing undermines trust faster than broken appointments.

2. Be consistent.

Short, regular contacts (at least once a week) can often accomplish more than long, irregular ones.

3. Focus on your mentee.

Your primary relationship is with the mentee. Avoid including the mentee's family members except on rare occasions.

4. Respect the family.

As much as your mentee's family may appreciate and need your help, there may be points of disagreement between you and the mentee's parents regarding what is best for the mentee. It is important to respect the parents' wishes; your role is not to replace them. You are not a mediator between the mentee and his/her parents. Give periodic reports to your mentee's parent(s) about his/her progress. In addition, it is essential not to share with outsiders personal information about your mentee and his/her family.

5. Ask questions.

Everyone involved in the project is part of a team. We can help each other and our mentee by asking questions.

6. Praise your mentee.

Take every opportunity to give positive feedback to your mentee.

7. Be safety-minded.

Be aware of your surroundings and dangers that may exist in your mentee's environment.

8. Spend wisely.

Choose activities that will not overextend your financial resources. If you start to spend money too freely, the mentee may develop unrealistic expectations.

9. Use your imagination.

Simple ideas are often the most fun and educational.

10. Respect cultural differences.

Your mentee and his/her family may embrace different traditions and values than you. Be open-minded and understanding.

11. Set limits.

Establish norms of proper conduct without being harsh. Feel free to reject unreasonable demands by your mentee. Discuss with him/her the basis of your differences.

12. Include mentee in developing plans.

Ask your mentee to share in making decisions about your joint activities. Encourage creativity from your mentee.

13. Fill out all program forms in a timely manner.

If you need help, ask your coordinator.

14. Call the project staff for advice if a difficult situation arises.

Keep your sense of humor!

Relax! Be yourself! Enjoy!

Program Procedures and Policies

Confidentiality

As a mentor, you may learn private and personal information about your mentee and his/her family. It is important to keep such information private and not discuss it outside the agency.

During in-service sessions, you will be encouraged to share information about your relationship. Share only the information that is necessary to help you improve the situation or that you judge will not harm the family in any way.

You may be asked to sign a statement attesting to your understanding of the agency's policy on confidentiality.

As important as it is to maintain confidentiality, there are circumstances in which it will be necessary to share information *with the appropriate staff* of your mentoring program. Do not attempt to contact public officials on your own. Staff is trained in handling issues of safety for youth and they should be the first point of contact if you suspect any of the following:

1. Your mentee is in danger of hurting himself/herself.
2. Your mentee is in danger of being hurt by someone else.
3. Your mentee is in danger of hurting someone else.

Program staff will include confidentiality policies as part of the pre-service training. If you have additional questions, do not hesitate to follow up with program staff to gain further clarity and insight.

Absences

It is very important that once you are matched with your mentee, you develop a regular meeting schedule. As your relationship grows, your mentee will look forward to your meetings and may be disappointed when you have to cancel.

Illnesses, vacations, and unexpected problems cannot be avoided and may interfere with your scheduled visits. The following are recommended practices for dealing with absences.

Planned Absences (vacations, appointments, etc.)

Let your mentee know as far in advance as possible that you will be unavailable on certain dates. Remind your mentee of that date as it approaches. Let your mentee know when you plan to return and schedule your next meeting with your mentee. You must also inform staff of your planned absences and intended date of return.

Unexpected Absences (illness, accident, car trouble, etc.)

Call the agency or your coordinator as soon as possible to inform them of your difficulty. If possible, contact your mentee before the scheduled visit to let him/her know of your inability to meet. Remember to tell the mentee why you cannot meet. Let the mentee know that you will contact him/her soon about your next meeting together.

Emergencies

In the event on an emergency:

- Always call the program coordinator.
- If it relates to your mentee, call the parent or guardian and/or call emergency medical personnel (if appropriate).
- Complete agency incident report.

Grievance Procedures

Your agency will have its own process for handling grievances. If you have a grievance or complaint, you may want to handle it as follows:

- First, try to talk about your problem with the project coordinator.
- If, after sharing your concerns with the coordinator, you are still dissatisfied, make an appointment to talk to the coordinator's supervisor. If you still feel your grievance or complaint is not resolved, then consult the agency's personnel department.

Parental Permission

Families have signed consent forms to allow their children to participate in the program. It is important, however, to make sure parents and caregivers know when you and your mentee have an outing planned, where you are going, and what you will be doing, particularly if it is during an evening or weekend.

Safety Tips

You may find yourself going into unfamiliar surroundings when meeting your mentee. Although not all neighborhoods are dangerous, it is important to learn what to do to avoid and/or minimize problems. The following "three A's" are helpful hints that will make you safe in any environment.

AWARENESS **A**LERTNESS **A**VOIDANCE

Awareness

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Plan ahead. Be prepared.
- Know your route. Use well-lighted and well-travelled roads.
- Let someone know the route you will take and when you plan to arrive.
- Walk with a purpose. Don't walk aimlessly toward your car or public transportation.
- Avoid wearing conspicuous jewelry.
- Do not carry large sums of money or credit cards.
- Keep a hand firmly on your purse as you walk. If someone tries to grab your purse, especially if she/he is armed, let it go!
- Have keys ready if you are walking to your car or house. Don't fumble in your purse or pocket for them.

Alertness

- Be alert to potential dangers.
- Be alert to any activity near you.
- Be suspicious of people approaching your car asking for directions or change, or giving out flyers.
- Always give your car a quick inspection for any tampering.
- Check door handles, locks, and back seat before entering. If you think someone has tampered with your car, don't enter it.
- If you must travel with valuables, always keep them out of view.

Avoidance

- Don't drive without first locking your doors and closing your windows.
- Never leave keys in the ignition or the car running for any reason.
- Avoid parking in secluded, poorly lighted areas, especially at night.
- Have your keys out, ready to unlock and enter the car without delay.
- Don't get out of your car if you see suspicious people. If you are in doubt or are approached, drive away.
- Don't leave your car unlocked, even when running brief errands. Always take your keys with you.



Chapter 2

CHAPTER 2

About Youth Today

What's Happening to Young Adolescents?

Early Adolescence (*begins at age 10 or 11 and merges with mid-adolescence at age 14 or 15*)

Physically

- Girls' growth begins and peaks earlier than boys'
- Reproductive system begins to develop
- Secondary sex characteristics begin to develop

Intellectually

- Beginning to move from concrete thinking (what is) to abstract thinking ("formal operations"—what might be true if...)
- Cannot always perceive long-range implications of current decision
- Expanded interests; intense, short-term enthusiasm

Socially and Emotionally

- **Self**
 - Preoccupation with rapid body change
 - Self-absorption, self-consciousness
 - Diminished self-esteem
- **Family**
 - Redefining relationship with family; moving toward more independence while still looking to family for guidance and values
 - Few major conflicts over parental control
- **Peers**
 - Increasing importance
 - Seeking to become part of group to hide insecurities from rapid changes
 - Comparing own normality and acceptance with same-sex peers
 - Moving toward more intimate sharing of feelings
- **Sexuality**
 - Defining self in terms of maleness and femaleness
 - Learning how to relate to opposite sex

Mid-Adolescence (*begins at age 14 or 15 and merges with late adolescence at about age 17*)

Physically

- Growth slowing; stature reaches 95 percent of adult height
- Secondary sex characteristics well advanced

Intellectually

- Growing competence in abstract thinking
- Capable of perceiving future implications of current acts and decisions, but does not always apply them
- Reverts to concrete thinking under stress

Socially and Emotionally

- **Self**
 - Reestablishing body image as growth slows
 - Preoccupation with fantasy and idealism as abstract thinking and sense of future develops
- **Family**
 - Major conflicts over control (rules, homework, curfew)
 - Struggle for emancipation, greater autonomy
- **Peers**
 - Strong identification with chosen peers to affirm self-image
 - Looking to peers for behavioral codes
- **Sexuality**
 - Testing ability to attract and parameters of masculinity and femininity
 - Developing sexual codes of behavior, personal value system

Source: Robert Johnson, M.D., University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Mentoring Manual Baltimore, MD. Abell Foundation, 1990.

Influences on Youth

To understand what is going on with mentees, mentors should have some idea of the environment (both neighborhood and family) in which their mentees live, typical behaviors of that age group, and pressures that they face. The following are key factors influencing the behavior of today's youth. Mentor training will expand on each of these topic areas, especially as they relate to your community.

Poverty

Many mentoring programs target youth who are poor. Economic realities often make it difficult for poor youth to perform well in school. Your mentee may also be very cautious about establishing a relationship with you. She/he may have difficulty trusting others, especially adults. Your mentee may project a feeling of hopelessness and be cynical about the future. If you are aware that these characteristics may be a means of coping with the stress of poverty, you will be better prepared to help your mentee.

Tobacco, Drugs, and Alcohol

Substance abuse is a serious problem affecting all populations in a community. Cigarette smoking is declining among males, but not among females. Many youth have tried marijuana, cocaine, crack, etc. Some have even sniffed glue to get a “high.” Alcohol abuse is probably the most prevalent intoxicant of choice for youth.

Injuries

Accidental injuries are the leading cause of death for persons 15 to 21 years of age. Automobile accidents account for most of these deaths, and the driver is often under the influence of alcohol.

Violence

Adolescent males are frequent victims and perpetrators of crimes. Homicide is the leading cause of death for African American males 15 to 21 years. There is also an alarming increase in youth carrying guns and knives for both attack and protection purposes. Escalating street crime raises a myriad of fears for a young person about his/her personal safety. Such fears often curtail extracurricular activities that occur in the evenings. This violence is present not only within the neighborhoods, but has also spread to the school environment. Metal detectors and security guards are now part of the landscape of many schools.

Suicide

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth. It is often difficult for youth to express their feelings of depression to adults, particularly their parents. Youth are also very reluctant to share their concerns about the potential suicide of a friend.

AIDS/STDs

Many teens have misconceptions about how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). STDs include herpes, syphilis, and, most seriously, AIDS. Most teens know that AIDS is usually transmitted by sexual intercourse, drug needles, and contact with HIV-contaminated blood. Many youth know that condoms can provide some protection from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. While many young people feel condoms should be used, those who are sexually active are not always responsible enough to use them consistently. Knowledge does not necessarily translate into action. Currently, the second highest rate of HIV infection is among adolescents.

Sexuality/Teen Pregnancy

More young teen boys and girls are becoming parents. Young women who are poor are more likely to become unwed mothers than affluent teens. This topic is often a very difficult one for mentors and mentees to discuss. Parents of your mentee may have some specific feelings about the mentor’s role in talking about this sensitive issue, particularly as it relates to birth control. While using contraceptives correctly certainly decreases teen pregnancies, their use is controversial with some. Additionally, the role of the teen father is often not discussed. Males are sometimes not aware of their responsibility in protecting themselves from sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted fatherhood.

Peer Pressure

Adolescence is a time when approval from peers is very important. Young people look to each other for approval. Youth need to understand that peer-influenced decisions can have lifelong consequences. A mentor can help by working with mentees on problem-solving skills that will develop their own sense of competence and responsibility.

Technology

Youth growing up today have never known a world where they could not keep in constant communication with their friends. Computers, cell phones, pagers, BlackBerrys, iPhones, and MP3 players are but a small sample of the available communication devices. Sending text messages has become so common that people of all ages can “talk” to one another without making a sound. Anything can be broadcast on YouTube, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace allow us to connect to an ever-growing network of people. While technology has tremendous advantages and can be lots of fun, it also presents significant challenges and even hazards. Sending e-mails or text messages should not become a substitute for face-to-face social interaction, and mentors can be very helpful in assisting mentees with basic social and communication skills. Mentors should be aware of whether mentees are spending too much time online and/or participating in inappropriate chat rooms. Mentees may need to be reminded that once they post photos of themselves or spread gossip about others in cyberspace, there is no way to “take it back,” and serious repercussions can follow them for many years.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying takes many forms but essentially involves taunting, teasing, and harassing online. It can be more brutal and destructive than schoolyard bullying because it can follow a child everywhere—a text message sent via cell phone is always present. By creating “bashing Web sites,” an entire group of youth can taunt and pressure one child—e.g., polls that circulate to vote for the “fattest, ugliest kid at school.” Passwords can be stolen and computers hacked. If your mentee talks to you about being a victim of cyber-bullying, take it seriously and share the information with program staff and families. You will also want to talk to mentees about not participating in acts of cyber-bullying.

Mentee in Trouble

Signs that an adolescent needs outside help:

Suicide

- Giving away possessions
- Making a will
- Talking about death or dying
- Prolonged depression
- Saying his/her family would be better off without him/her
- Being suddenly at peace (may indicate a decision to end the pain by ending life)
- Evidence of a plan and method

Drug or Alcohol Abuse

- Irrational or “spaced out” behavior
- A sudden increase in accidents
- Lying
- Loss of interest in school
- Secretiveness
- Spending a lot of time alone
- Severe mood swings
- Alcohol on breath
- Sleeping a lot

Physical Abuse/Sexual Abuse/Neglect (including incest)

- Non-accidental physical injury
- Frequent “accidents”
- Abrupt changes in personality
- Withdrawal
- Physical defensiveness
- Running away
- Sudden onset of compulsive and/or self-destructive behavior
- Reluctance to be with a particular family member

Other Warning Signs

- Major weight loss
- Poor self-image
- Problems at school
- Serious depression
- Law-breaking behavior

What to Do

Mentors are not professional counselors and are not meant to be. For many mentors, observing these warning signs in their mentees can be very daunting, and without the right support, you may not feel equipped to handle a situation.

Contact the staff of your mentoring program immediately if you suspect your mentee is experiencing any of these issues. Mentoring alone cannot solve these problems, but there is strong evidence that mentoring in conjunction with other supports and interventions can help mitigate the effects of depression, reduce recidivism among delinquent mentees, and lower rates of substance abuse.

Source: Shawn Bauldrey, *Positive Support: Mentoring and Depression among High Risk Mentees* (Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, 2006).

The following strategies represent a continuum of options, depending on your level of interest and availability:

1. Work closely with program staff and the mentee’s counselors to learn about the treatment plan for your mentee and better understand your role.
2. Have regular contact with program staff either in person, via phone, or by e-mail.
3. Participate in support groups with other mentors.
4. Participate in training sessions that can help you learn more.

Remember, you cannot solve all the mentee’s problems, but your presence can be an important vote of confidence.

Youth Language—What does it all mean?

Sometimes you may feel that your mentee is talking a foreign language. Just as you had certain slang phrases when you were young, so will your mentee. On this page, keep a “dictionary” of the current “in” terms that mentees in your area are using. Share these with other mentors. Think about what you said to your mentee that meant the same thing. Share these with your mentee. That should be lots of fun!

Don’t forget...the same word may have different meanings depending on the context of the situation and the inflexion of the voice. Here are a few examples.

Word	Meaning	How it’s used
Aight	good, great	He’s aight! <i>(contraction for “all right”)</i>
Benjamins	any money, but specifically \$100 bills	It’s all about the benjamins!
Bobo	fake	That necklace is bobo!
Boo	sweetheart, particularly a boyfriend	He’s my boo.
Digits	phone number	He’s been tryin’ to get my digits.
Drama	very serious problem	We got a drama goin’ on.
Fly	looks good	That girl is fly!
Ghost	out of here, gone	I’m so ghost.
Homeboy	brother, friend	He’s my homeboy.
Peeps	family	My peeps are aight.
Phat	abundant, desirable	That car is phat.
Punk	someone who is scared	She’s punk.
Slammin	very attractive	My teacher’s slammin.
Wack	corny, boring	That movie was wack.

What's Hot and What's Not

Understanding the world in which young people live is important for the development of a meaningful relationship. Keeping up with teen fads is a challenge. Just when you thought you understood the latest styles, they change on you. Brainstorm with your mentee “what’s hot and what’s not” regarding:

Clothing _____

Music _____

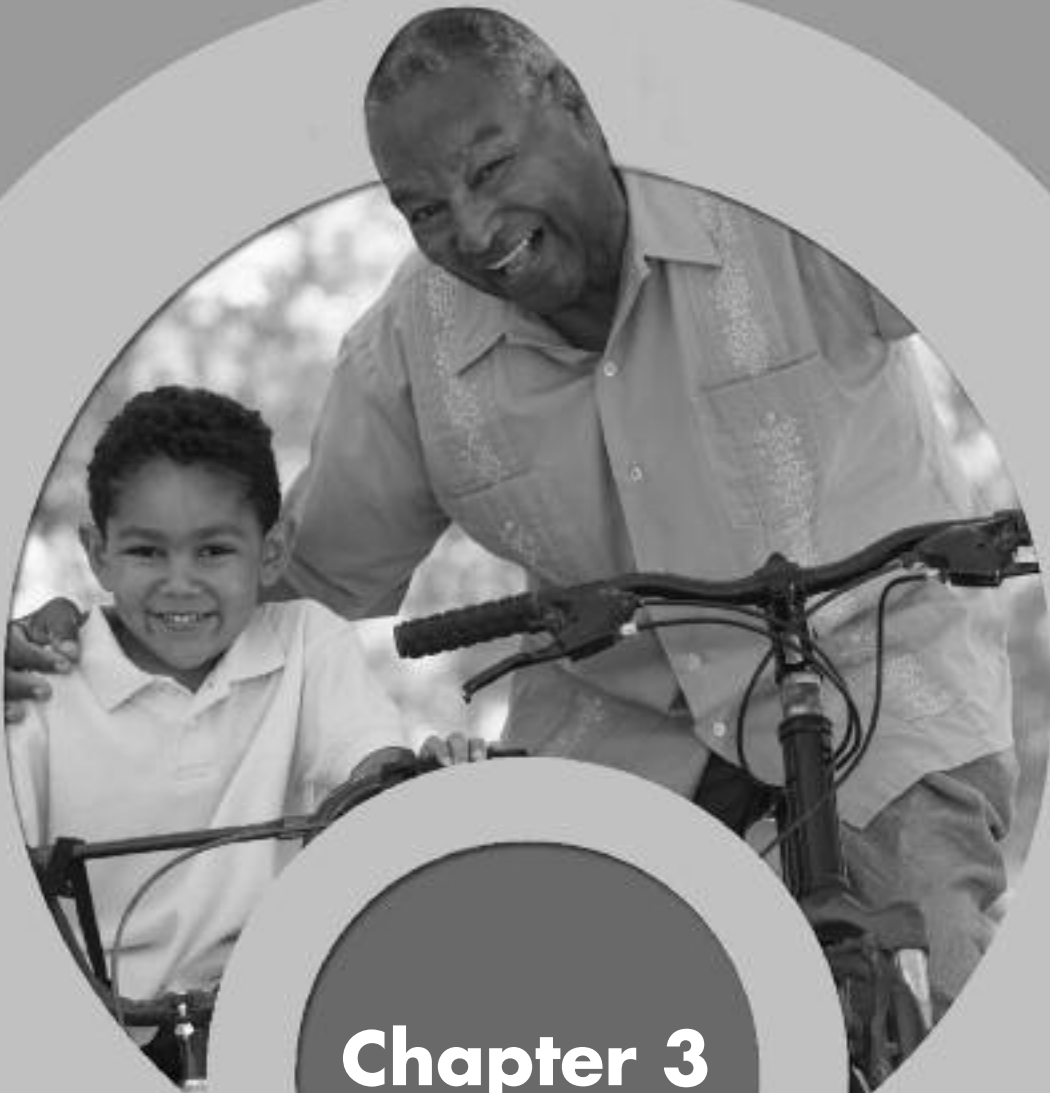
Entertainment (movies, video games, books, magazines, etc.) _____

Hairstyles _____

Food _____

Transportation: _____

Other: (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) _____



Chapter 3

CHAPTER 3

Building The Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Meeting Your Mentee

Now that you and your mentee have been matched, the next challenge is to develop your relationship. The following are some suggestions to help you get started.

Meet with key professionals involved with your mentee.

- Discuss with the appropriate counselor, teacher, or caseworker how your activities will fit into the overall plan for your mentee.
- Find out how ongoing communication between you and other professionals will occur.

Have the program coordinator introduce you to your mentee.

- The coordinator should introduce you to your mentee at the agency, school, or other surroundings that are familiar to you and your mentee.
- Talk about what you both like to do and the things you have in common.
- Take turns answering questions about your interests and hobbies. Discuss favorite music, movies, sports, books, school subjects, food, heroes, heroines, etc.
- Discuss basic expectations that you have about the relationship. Ask the mentee to do the same.

Try to make an initial contact with the mentee's parents prior to your first outing.

- If possible, meet the mentee's parents prior to your first outing, or arrange for a brief chat with them when you pick up the mentee for the first time. If this is not possible, give the parents a call to introduce yourself. If the mentee's family does not have a phone, drop them a short note.

Carefully plan your first outing with your mentee.

- Focus activities around the mentee's interests.
- If the coordinator has a list of the things your mentee likes to do, ask for a copy of it.
- Think ahead about what you will say to your mentee.
- Do not force your mentee to talk about intimate details of his/her life, family, or problems.
- Meet in a neutral setting (shopping mall, restaurant, library, community center, agency, etc.) until you feel comfortable and safe in each other's environment.
- Call your mentee the day before to verify the date and time of your meeting.
- Focus on the positive accomplishments of the mentee, no matter how small they might be. Pay compliments regularly.
- Keep alert for clues about what motivates your mentee. This will help you plan for future activities.

Share information about yourself to stimulate conversation.

- To "jump-start" a conversation with your mentee, you may want to share some personal details about yourself (e.g., your age, your neighborhood, information about your family).
- Try to discover similarities between your family and your mentee's. Feel free to discuss those "strange people" in your family. This can help your mentee feel that he or she is not the only person who has family members who are "different."
- Discuss your career and what kind of education and training you needed to do your job. If you feel comfortable, also talk about your growth in salary over the years, working hours, and your feelings about your job environment. This is a good time to throw in the "work ethic" notion without preaching about responsible behavior. Use this discussion to initiate conversation about your mentee's career plans and how she/he can get there.
- Talk about your regrets in life as well as those things that make you proud.
- Talk about your faults and your strengths.
- Talk about successes that were not easily obtained and hardships you have faced and overcome.

Effective Mentoring Relationships*

What is an effective mentoring relationship? In a study of four Linking Lifetimes programs, Public/Private Ventures attempted to define effective adult/mentee relationships and determine whether such relationships do in fact develop in an intergenerational setting.

Based on this study, the following are recommended strategies for interacting with your mentee.

- **Understand the mentee’s reluctance to trust.** Many of the young people in this program have been disappointed by previous relationships with adults. Be patient. It may take a while for your mentee to overcome his/her hesitance and begin to trust you.
- **View your purpose in the program as being available to give,** understanding that, at least initially, the relationship will be one-directional.
- **Offer reassurance and support.** It’s important to offer reassurance and kindness to your mentee and remind him/her that you’re available to talk at any time. Don’t be afraid to tell your mentee that you care about and believe in him/her. Too many young people rarely hear those words.
- **Suggest ways to solve problems.** Try to listen carefully and offer possible solutions without passing judgment. Practical suggestions rather than criticism or preaching are usually most helpful for your mentee. Whenever possible, try to think together of ways to solve a problem, rather than tell your mentee what you think she/he should do.
- **Identify the mentee’s interests and take them seriously.** Try to include your mentee in determining both the activities you engage in and the areas in which you offer help.
- **Do not force the mentee to talk about personal issues.** Delving into your mentee’s personal or family life, particularly early in the relationship, is usually not productive. It’s unwise to ask mentees to discuss information they may be ashamed of, such as poor school performance, criminal record, or abusive family behaviors. If your mentee resists sharing information, don’t push. Silence does not necessarily mean rejection. It’s important not to measure a relationship’s success by the extent of the mentee’s disclosure.

On the other hand, you may be surprised by how much your mentee shares with you early on without any prompting or inquiry from you. It’s important to determine why this information is being given so early and fully. There is the possibility your mentee may be testing you to see if you are “shockproof.”

- **Have realistic expectations.** Many mentors get discouraged when they feel their mentees aren’t “turning their lives around” or making huge improvements. Although you certainly will have an impact on your mentee, it is unlikely that she/he will be totally transformed by this relationship. Gains may seem small (e.g., showing up for meetings, expressing appreciation, missing fewer school days), but they are nonetheless signs of progress. Adjusting your expectations and understanding that your mentee may not always express gratitude directly will help prevent mentor “burnout” and frustration.
- **Try to relate to your mentee’s personal experiences.** Although you may not have faced the same problems as your mentee, try to remember some of the difficulties you had growing up.
- **Attempt to understand your mentee’s family, social class, and culture.**

* Adapted from Melanie B. Styles and Kristine V. Morrow, *Understanding How Mentees and Elders Form Relationships: A Study of Four Linking Lifetime Programs* (Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, June 1992).

Stages of the Mentor-Mentee Relationship

The mentor-mentee relationship often goes through at least three major stages. It is important to understand these stages so you can be prepared to respond appropriately.

The first stage of a mentoring relationship is Familiarization and Testing; the second stage is Commitment and Work; and the last stage is Termination and/or Closure. Since each relationship is unique, the amount of time spent in each of these stages will vary.

Stage 1: Familiarization and Testing

In this stage you and your mentee are trying to get to know each other. Many mentees may be uncommunicative, answering questions with shrugs or one-word answers. There may be some jousting between you and your mentee to test the limits of the relationship. This is particularly true of those mentees who really want to see how far they can “push” you or trust you to be there for them. This pushing or testing might be demonstrated by the mentee:

- Missing appointments
- Giving you the silent treatment
- Making unreasonable demands
- Having angry outbursts
- Cursing to get a reaction

In Stage 1, the tone for the relationship is set. You should:

- Be on time for meetings
- Request that your mentee be on time as a matter of respect for you
- Express realistic expectations of the mentee
- Try to make only promises that you can keep
- Provide unconditional friendship and support
- Engage in activities that the mentee suggests
- Understand that your mentee may not be comfortable just talking
- Let the mentee know how his or her behavior is affecting you

While you should respect the confidences shared by the mentee, you should counsel your mentee that information that may be detrimental to him/her should be shared with the project coordinator. Encourage the mentee to share such information with the coordinator or other proper authorities.

Stage 2: Commitment and Work

In Stage 2, there is a deepening of the relationship. You and your mentee may begin to spend more than the required time together and may call each other frequently on the phone. You may notice visible signs of caring for each other, such as remembering special occasions. However, it's possible that as your relationship proceeds, your mentee may exhibit behavior that is problematic. Stage 2 is a time for the hard work that can really make a difference for your mentee in the long run.

Goal setting is particularly important during this stage. The most successful mentoring relationships involve helping mentees develop specific skills and competencies. It's important to work with your mentee in developing goals, even if you think she/he should be working on certain things. Otherwise, you will be just another adult telling him/her what to do.

Stage 3: Termination and/or Closure

It is hoped that this formal mentoring relationship will grow into a more natural one that will sustain itself without agency supports. However, some relationships will not continue, and others will end prematurely due to geographic moves, illness, incompatible relationships, mentee confinement, etc. How a relationship ends is key to how you and especially the mentee will think about and value the experience you shared.

Planned terminations can be facilitated in the following ways:

If you initiated the termination:

- The mentee should be alerted well in advance of your departure from the relationship.
- The reasons for the departure should be discussed with the mentee by you and reinforced by the project's coordinator.
- Mentees may feel they are being abandoned and may demonstrate anger. Allow them to grieve and be appropriately angry. In relationships that were less intimate, this process will of course be less painful to the mentee.
- If possible, continue contact with your mentee by phone or letters.

If your mentee initiated the termination:

- Don't view this separation as a failure but as an opportunity to continue the relationship at a new level.
- Engage in letter writing and phone calls.

In both instances, focus on the:

- Progress you made
- Fun you had
- New ways you plan to keep in contact

Problem Solving

The goal of many mentoring programs is to impart life skills to the youth. One important component of life skills is the ability to set positive goals and deal effectively with conflict. There is a limit to how effectively life skills can be taught without giving young people an opportunity to actively engage in practicing skills.

The Across Ages program, an evidence-based model project (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), utilizes the Social Competence Promotion Program for Young Adolescents (Weissberg, Caplan, Bennett, & Stroud, 1990. New Haven CT. Yale University Press.), which empowers young people to take responsibility as problem solvers.

The problem-solving process consists of six steps:

1. Stop, calm down, and think before you act.
2. State the problem and how you feel.
3. Set a positive goal.
4. Think of lots of solutions.
5. Think ahead to the consequences.
6. Go ahead and try the best plan.

Mentors can also use the problem-solving model to address issues that may arise with mentees. For example:

A mentor, Mr. C., describes his frustration and anger when his mentee, George, behaved very badly on the subway returning home from a basketball game. This was the third time in two weeks that this type of thing had occurred. Mr. C. was concerned because some of the behavior was both inappropriate and unsafe, such as trying to pry open the subway doors when the train was in motion.

Mr. C. made it a point to visit the mentee's classroom regularly and stay in touch with his teachers. The reports on his progress and behavior, which had been more positive when they first got together, were dismal and disappointing. The mentor found himself making threats ("I can't trust you"; "I'll never take you anywhere again"). He realized this was the kind of experience the boy had with most adults and knew this was not a good tactic. He genuinely wanted to make a difference for this young man. Together with the program coordinator and some of his fellow mentors, he applied the problem-solving process to his dilemma.

Step 1: Stop, calm down, and think before you act.

Mr. C. was calm, although he admitted he had not been the last time he and George had been together. He reminded himself how important it was to model this type of behavior for the child. "I realize it's important for me to act the way I want him to act."

Step 2: State the problem and how you feel.

"The problem is George is acting badly in school and also sometimes when he is with me. I feel angry, upset, and disappointed."

Step 3: Set a positive goal.

“I want to help George do better. He’s a smart boy and I know he really has a lot going for him.”

Step 4: Think of lots of solutions. (Mentors helped Mr. C. generate solutions.)

- Talk to George’s mother.
- Talk to school guidance counselor.
- Tell George you (Mr. C.) will not see him until you get a better report.
- Spend more time with George in the classroom.
- Set a goal with George. Have him “earn” a trip with you—something he chooses that he really wants to do.
- Request a second mentee who will set an example for George when you all go out together.

Step 5: Think ahead to the consequences.

- “If I talk to George’s mother, she will put him on punishment and then he really won’t trust me.”
- “If I talk to the school guidance counselor, she will think I’m a failure at this mentoring business. She was the one who recommended that George have a mentor in the first place.”
- “If I tell George I won’t see him until I get a better report, I think he’ll feel like I’m just another adult who gave up on him.”
- “If I spend time with George in the classroom, it could go both ways. He might feel I was paying attention to him because I really cared, or he might feel I didn’t trust him.”
- “If we decide together on a trip—I know he loves hockey and he’s always wanted to go to the Spectrum to see a game—he might really work on his behavior. I know I can’t make it too long a time; maybe two weeks of good reports from his teachers and following through every day on something to help his mom.”
- “If I ask for another mentee, I think George would give up. He’s always being compared to other kids who act better than he does.”

Step 6: Go ahead and try the best plan.

“I think I’ll try two things: We’ll work together on setting a goal around changing his behavior and I’ll spend time with him in the classroom. The kids usually love it when I come in.”

Source: Andrea Taylor and Jeanette Bressler, “Mentoring across Generations: Powerful Partners for Positive Youth Development” Kluwer/Plenum Press. New York. 2000.

Goal Setting

After you and your mentee have gotten to know each other, you should meet with your program coordinator to discuss developing short- and long-range goals. Goals can be changes in behavior, such as the previous example with George, or working toward something as ambitious as becoming class president.

A goal should be:

- **Realistic** (If it is too difficult, it will lead to frustration.)
- **Challenging** (If it is too easy, there is little incentive to achieve it.)
- **Specific** (You need to know what you want to do.)
- **Measureable** (You need to know when you have accomplished it.)
- **Timely** (It should have a deadline so you won't put it off.)

Steps in Goal Setting

Have the mentee identify some positive things she/he would like to accomplish. This might be something like getting a driver's license, finding an after-school job, passing an English course, or attending school every day.

- 1. Select one or two goals to work on.** Help your mentee select goals that are realistic and achievable. You want your mentee to set his/her sights high but also be assured of some success.
- 2. Discuss with your mentee how his/her parent or guardian may feel about these goal plans.** If a parent counts on your mentee for babysitting during the school day, regular school attendance may not be a goal supported by the family. If the mentee's efforts are not supported or understood by the family, achieving the goal will be more difficult.
- 3. Brainstorm ways to reach the goal.** Brainstorming is a process that involves thinking of as many ideas as you can for reaching a goal, even if some may seem silly or unrealistic. You and your mentee should write down all of your ideas. Later, you can help him or her select the best ones.
- 4. Identify small steps for reaching the goal.** Most goals require more than one step to complete. Recognize the mentee's attainment of each small step to reach his or her goal.
- 5. Identify obstacles that might prevent completion of the goal.** This will need to become part of the action plan for accomplishing the goal. For example, if a parent objects to the mentee's getting a driver's license, your mentee will have to think of ways to approach the parent to obtain permission. If no one can teach your mentee to drive and she/he does not have money for lessons, what else can be done to accomplish this step?
- 6. Decide on a deadline for accomplishment and reevaluation of the goal.** This is an important step. If the process drags on too long, your mentee may get discouraged and quit. A deadline gives him/her something to work toward. Opportunity for reevaluation gives you a chance to check his/her progress. Encouragement from you may be all that is needed to keep your mentee on course.

Developing Effective Communications Skills

Tips For Effective Communication

Talking and communication are not the same! There are three basic skills: Listening, Looking, and Leveling.

Listening Listening does not have to be passive. It can be as active as talking, if you do it right. To listen effectively, you should:

- Pay attention.
- Not think ahead to what you are going to say (ignoring the speaker while rehearsing your own comments).
- Not interrupt.
- Listen for feelings underneath the words
- Keep an open mind—don't judge immediately.
- Encourage the speaker to continue and clarify what has been said.

Looking People communicate with both verbal and body language. Pay attention to the whole person. Take note of facial gestures and body movements. There are clues that will help you more fully understand what the person is saying. Some helpful tips:

- Make eye contact.
- Show that you are listening by leaning forward, saying “Uh-huh” or “Go on.”
- Check out what you are understanding; repeat back what you heard. Ask if that's what the mentee “said.”

Leveling Leveling means being honest about what you are feeling and thinking. Tips include:

- Be honest in what you say.
- Speak for yourself. Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements.
- Deal with the other person's feelings. Don't give unwanted advice or try to change the other's feelings. Just listen and try to understand.

Adapted from “Bridging the Gap: What's Happening Now?” Hatcher, Robert, Bridging the Gap: What's Happening Now. Atlanta, Georgia: Printed Matter, Inc., 1983.

Discussing Delicate Issues: Guidelines for Mentors

Put the mentee at ease.

- Stay calm.
- Use body language to communicate attentiveness (e.g., maintain eye contact, sit at the same level).
- Avoid judgmental statements such as “Why would you do something like that?” or “I thought you knew better.”
- Be honest if you are getting emotional or upset.
- Let mentee know that you are glad he or she came to you.
- Reassure the mentee that his or her confidentiality will be honored.
- Use tact, but be honest.
- Allow the mentee to talk at his or her own pace—don’t force an issue.
- Do not pry—allow the mentee to bring up topics he or she is comfortable with.
- Do not collaborate with mentee’s family to provide discipline.
- Other thoughts _____

Honor the mentee’s right to self-determination.

- Focus on the mentee’s feelings and needs rather than jumping to problem solving.
- When the issue has been discussed, ask, “What do you think you would like to do about this situation?” “How would you like me to help?”
- If you are not comfortable with what the mentee wants to do, ask yourself why before you decide whether to say so.
- If what the mentee wants to do is not possible, explain so gently and apologize.
- Ask what alternative solutions would make the mentee comfortable.
- Encourage critical thinking through questions and reflections.
- Use the words “I don’t know—what do you think?”
- Other thoughts _____

Problem solve and offer resources.

- Know your appropriate role as a mentor.
- Be honest with the mentee if you need to share confidential information with the program coordinator. If you don't know what to do, suggest that your supervisor may have some thoughts.
- Ask the mentee if he or she would like to talk to the agency with you if necessary.
- Provide resources or options if the mentee is unaware of them.
- Brainstorm with the mentee and be creative in finding a solution—there is usually more than one way to handle a situation, and this process is educational for the mentee.
- Offer to accompany the mentee if he or she is uncomfortable with something he or she has decided to do.
- Be collaborative—you are a team.
- Follow through with any and all commitments.
- Other thoughts _____

NOTE: Responsible Mentoring—Talking about Drugs, Sex and Other Difficult Issues is a project of the Evaluation Management Training Group, Inc., funded through the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs., *Mentoring in the Faith Community: An Operations Manual for Program Coordinators* 2000 EMT Associates, Sacramento CA

Cultural Sensitivity

You may or may not come from a background similar to your mentee's. If not, how you handle economic and cultural differences will greatly affect how your relationship develops.

Ethnic Diversity

Learn about the values and traditions of your mentee's culture. Such things as the role of authority, communication styles, perspectives on time, and ways of handling conflict vary greatly among different ethnic groups. You might ask your mentee to teach you things about his/her traditions and culture. Discussions with your program coordinator and other mentors can further your understanding of your mentee's behavior.

Socioeconomic Diversity

Your mentee may live very differently from you. She/he may share small living quarters with many people, may not have a phone, or may not be able to go outside because safety in the neighborhood is such a serious problem. Your mentee may move frequently or may move in with different relatives, perhaps every few months. This could make it difficult for you to stay in contact.

It's important to be supportive of your mentee and not judgmental about the way she/he lives. Modeling values and behavior will be far more productive than lecturing your mentee about what she/he "should" do. Remember also that you cannot rescue your mentee. Family connections can be very strong, even if they don't fit into your idea of how they are "supposed" to be. It's more important to provide a relationship that will nurture self-development and a sense of dignity and self-worth.

Youth Culture

From generation to generation, adults have viewed the young as being more rebellious and outrageous than they were at the same age. Although you may not approve of your mentee's appearance or speech, it's important that you respect the mentee's individuality while insisting on certain standards. Try to determine why your mentee's behavior troubles you. Is it because it's not how you would do something, or because there is something more serious going on and she/he is really in trouble?

Establishing Relationships with Your Mentee's Family

Developing appropriate relationships with your mentee's family is often quite difficult. Parents don't always understand the mentor's role and therefore may not know how to relate to you. Parents may be threatened and try to prevent you, even in very subtle ways, from developing a relationship with their child. Sometimes the opposite may occur. Families may feel so overwhelmed with the task of child rearing that they may ask more and more of you in terms of helping out. It's important to build trust with your mentee and the family, as well as strike a balance with regard to your involvement.

In the beginning...

- **Work with your program coordinator** in making your initial contact with the family. The sponsoring agency has developed ways of informing parents about the program. Read any material that might have been sent out and talk with your coordinator about what has been said to the parents about the program.
- **Call and introduce yourself.** Make arrangements to visit with the family. It's possible the family may not be comfortable having you come to their home. If that is the case, you may want to suggest meeting for coffee or going for a walk.
- **Talk with the family** about the program and about your role as mentor. Most people don't know what mentoring really means, and some may fear that you will take over their role as the parent.
- **Share some information about yourself.** You could talk about what you did before you retired, what your hobbies and interests are, perhaps a little about your family, such as children and grandchildren.
- **Explain what kinds of things you and your mentee will be doing together** and how much time will be involved. Ask the parents about their ground rules, and make it clear that you will respect them. Discuss how you will make contact with the mentee. Ask what kinds of goals the parents have for their child.
- **Let the family know how they can get in contact with you**, and work toward establishing regular lines of communication.

As the relationship develops...

- **Respect and be sensitive to the family.** If your youth is from a different ethnic background, make an effort to learn about and understand that culture. If the family's style of discipline and communication is different from yours, do not be critical or judgmental. Be yourself and model the values and behavior you believe in.
- **Stay focused on your mentee.** Although you may want to help other members of the family, your primary goal is to be supportive of your mentee.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Don't compromise your relationship with your mentee by revealing to the parent what your mentee disclosed to you.
- **Stay out of family disputes** if possible.
- **Set goals primarily with your mentee.** You may use the family's goals to help understand your mentee, but don't allow them to take over the relationship. Remember, goals that are imposed from the outside probably won't be achieved.

If there are problems...

Do not hesitate to ask for help. You and your program coordinator can do some problem solving together. Preserving the relationship with your mentee is the most important thing you can do.

Ethical Issues in Mentor-Mentee Relationships

1. Promote the welfare and safety of your mentee.

Power/influence. It can be very tempting to think we know what is best for our mentee. Providing opportunities to mentees that they may not have access to is an important role of mentors. But what if those opportunities go against the family's belief system, family circumstances, or expectations? It is incumbent upon the mentor to be sensitive to the family's concerns and build rapport with the family to insure that a mentee doesn't feel compelled to choose between loyalty to the family or to the mentor.

SCENARIO: You have arranged for your mentee to participate in an intensive after-school enrichment program in math and science, but his family needs him at home after school to watch the younger children and start dinner because both parents are working. You are convinced your mentee has aptitude in science, and this program would boost his chances of getting into a summer program. His family can't afford extra child care and needs him to help out. What do you do?

Inappropriate boundaries. Boundaries clarify the limits of the mentor-youth relationship and can protect both mentors and mentees from exploitation and harm. The obvious example is prohibitions against sexual relationships, which are indisputable. Mentors, however, may function in a role similar to extended family, so it is important to be aware of touching or physical contact that may seem appropriate but might make a mentee—especially a younger child—feel uncomfortable.

SCENARIO: You and your 6-year-old mentee are going to the zoo. You are crossing a busy street and you take his hand. Once inside the zoo you take his hand again, as a gesture of connection and affection. His facial expression gives you the sense he feels awkward, but he doesn't say anything. What do you do?

Multiple roles. You are available to your mentee to guide, coach, and support her, but you also may have professional expertise or financial stability that your mentee or her family does not have. However, you should avoid entering into professional, financial, or other relationships with your mentee or her family if it will challenge your ability to be an effective mentor or will harm your mentee.

Scenario: Your mentee is looking for a summer job. You often hire teens for summer positions in your office. Should you hire her, or would it be better to use your knowledge and expertise to help her find a summer job? What do you think?

2. Be trustworthy and responsible.

Consistency and reliability serve as the foundation for trust and positive outcomes for youth. Early termination of a relationship, especially without explanation, can lead to detrimental outcomes, particularly for youth who have experienced disappointment in familial relationships with adults.

SCENARIO: You signed up to be a mentor because you really thought you could make a difference for a young person who needed some extra support. You have always been able to communicate with teens, including your own children and grandchildren, and you thought the experience of being a mentor would fill the void you feel now that the children in your family have grown up. The experience is not working out at all—your mentee doesn't return phone calls, often skips appointments, and doesn't share much about what's happening in his life. You can't seem to "get through," and it seems like he's just blowing you off. You have been together for three months and you feel like this is a waste of your time. What do you do?

3. Act with integrity.

Last-minute changes in plans, failure to communicate regularly with your mentee, and lack of respect for customs and protocol in a mentee's home, school, or community can erode or challenge a developing relationship. It's important not to take for granted the connection your mentee has with you.

SCENARIO: You and your mentee have planned a Saturday trip to a local job fair for teens looking for summer employment. On Friday your boss asks you to put in some extra time to help with a project that is approaching deadline. You know your mentee is looking forward to spending time with you and getting started looking for a summer job, but you also know there will be another job fair in a few weeks. What do you do?

4. Promote justice for young people.

Awareness and acknowledgement of our own prejudices, biases, and fears is an essential component of effective and enduring mentoring relationships. Showing a subtle lack of respect for a youth's family, promoting stereotypes based on race or ethnicity, or dismissing a youth's interests because they seem too rooted in his/her ethnic background can all harm a mentee's self-esteem and identification with his/her cultural heritage.

SCENARIO: You have recently started as a mentor in a program for children of incarcerated parents. Your church has been very involved in this program and you want to participate, but you are challenged by some of what you're learning about your mentee's family. His father, two uncles, and an older brother are all in prison. How do you talk to your mentee about his family when you are really shocked by what you are learning?

5. Respect the young person's rights and dignity.

This is probably one of the most challenging aspects of being a mentor. On the one hand, mentors want to build trusting relationships with their mentees. They need to be able to help mentees make sound decisions without telling them what to do, they need to be respectful of the mentee's goals and values, and they must keep confidential information confidential. On the other hand, mentors may be privy to very serious disclosures, from both the family members and the mentees. First and foremost, mentoring programs must provide training and ongoing support to help mentors navigate the slippery slope of disclosure, trust building, and confidentiality.

SCENARIO: You mentee's mother told you that she has been diagnosed with cancer and has been given a year to live. She doesn't want you to tell her daughter, nor does she want her daughter's school or anyone else to know. Your mentee has shared with you that her mother is angry all the time and always yelling at her and her sisters. You believe your mentee should know what is going on and that the school and mentoring program should be made aware. What do you do?

Rhodes, J., Spencer, R., Liang, B., Keller, T., & Noam, G. (in press). *Processes at the heart of youth mentoring*. *Journal of Community Psychology*.

Suggested Activities

Activities form the basis for developing and maintaining a trusting and caring relationship between mentors and mentees. Successful mentoring programs:

- Foster a sense of ownership and belonging among volunteers and participants. Be sure to get participants involved in planning program activities.
- Sponsor a mix of group activities that support program goals and encourage interaction among all participants in addition to one-to-one activities.

Group Activities

- Mentor-youth “getting to know you” workshops
- Mentor-youth talent shows
- Mentor-youth softball, soccer games, etc.
- Roller-skating or ice-skating
- Improvisational theater activities
- Field trips to sporting events, museums, historical sites
- Potluck meals and picnics
- And many others

One-On-One Activities

Academic Activities

- Help with homework
- Work on school projects
- Take out a library card and use the library regularly
- Learn to do research on the Internet
- Assist in researching a term paper
- Research college opportunities
- Complete applications for college
- Apply for financial aid
- Attend school events (plays, assemblies, graduations)

Hobbies

- Cook together
- Fix a broken door, or other carpentry activities
- Ride bikes
- Take a walk or hike
- Paint a kitchen; wallpaper a bathroom
- Play checkers, chess, Scrabble, or other board games
- Build a model plane, car, etc.
- Others?

Job or Career

- Help create a résumé
- Help mentee look for part-time or summer employment
- Assist in completing job applications
- Coach with interviewing skills
- Attend career fair
- Help mentee participate in “job shadowing” at different organizations
- Others?

Entertainment and Leisure

- Go to a movie
- Attend a sporting event
- Be a “tourist” in your own city or town
- Window shop
- Go to free open-air concerts
- Find a flea market
- Others?

Community Service Ideas

Engaging young people in service to their community unleashes youthful energy in ways that can solve real problems and meet vital needs. Community service can also be an important means for young people to learn new skills, gain a sense of independence, and boost self-esteem. Community service helps young people break through their segregation from the mainstream of society by giving them a chance to see the positive impact their actions can have on the larger world.

Community service activities are a great way for mentors and mentees to work together to address community needs and illustrate the theme of reciprocity that is the essence of mentoring. In devoting unpaid time to benefit others, youth are following the example of their older mentors. A goal is to encourage the mentees to make a lifelong commitment to service and volunteerism. Some suggested activities include:

- Friendly visiting with residents in nursing homes
- Chore service for older adults with limited mobility
- Pet therapy in nursing homes or children's hospitals
- Reading for the blind
- Helping in daycare centers after school
- Packing and distributing food for a food pantry
- Collecting and distributing clothes
- Collecting books, toys, and clothes for victims of natural disasters
- Helping to develop an online newsletter
- Planting and maintaining a community garden with residents from a senior center or assisted living facility
- Helping to deliver Meals on Wheels
- Volunteering for Habitat for Humanity
- Participating in the Martin Luther King Day of Service in January
- Others?

Useful Web Sites

In this fast-paced world of technology, many resources are available to us at the touch of a button and the click of a mouse. The following should be helpful in providing additional information about many of the topics discussed in this handbook.

Mentoring Best Practices, Resources, and Research

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership: www.mentoring.org

Confidentiality Policies and Practices

Non-profit Risk Management Center: www.nonprofrisk.org

Intergenerational Mentoring

Across Ages: www.acrossages.org

Intergenerational Practice and Research

Center for Intergenerational Learning: www.templecil.org

Intergenerational Policy and Programs

Generations United: www.gu.org

Cyber-Bullying

Committee for Children: www.cfchildren.org

Substance Abuse Prevention

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.samhsa.gov

Delinquency Prevention

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: www.ojjdp.gov

Suicide Prevention

Suicide Prevention Resource Center: www.sprc.org

