

# TIPS and TOOLS for being a MENTOR

This guide was based on information found from [www.beamentor.org](http://www.beamentor.org)

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## **ROLE OF A MENTOR**

Your job is NOT to be parent, therapist or social worker. But some of their traits will be a part of the mentor's role:

- Supporting
- Nurturing
- Advising
- Listening

### **Academic Support**

Evaluating educational choices; directing them to educational resources. Helping them think about their careers and future goals.

### **Role Modelling**

They will be watching you! Point out, bring to attention, demonstrate, and explain your own actions and values; help your mentee see and strive for broader possibilities than they may see in their present environment by believing in them first.

### **Attention and Concern**

Many youth do not receive enough from the adults in their lives; mentors can fill in these empty spaces with dependable, sincere, and consistent attention and concern.

### **Accountability**

A commitment made to a mentee for a meeting together, an activity, or an appointment should be a mentor's first priority, barring emergencies. This consistent accountability has several benefits:

- Sets a good example for mentees to see and emulate
- Cements trust between mentor and mentee
- Creates mutual expectations that can be met

## WHAT CAN A MENTOR DO?

Group activities are fun, but it is expected that a mentor and mentee will spend one-on-one time together. You can set up standard meeting times each week when it will be most convenient for you to sit and talk. This should be above the open-door policy you have for your mentee - you are their go-to person.

**Arrange one or more job shadows.** Have your mentee follow you around as you perform your work. Or, if they aren't interested in your area arrange to have your mentee meet with a colleague. You can also shadow your youth for a day!

**Talk.** Tell your youth those things that you wish you had known when you were in high school. You can do this anywhere, any time – over lunch, on the phone – whatever works. These aren't instructional talks on how they should do things, but rather times for BOTH of you to share your stories.

**Ask Questions.** Teenagers need somebody to ask, "What do you want to do after this?" and "What's your plan for how to get there?" They will also need help answering those questions. They might not have the answers, that's okay, you should still ask.

**Tutor.** Mentors should feel free to help mentees with homework. Getting involved with their curriculum is a good way to relate to youth and gain insight into how they think.

**Attend youth activities.** If your youth is involved in other activities attend those functions, when appropriate, to show support.

**Do things in groups.** Mentors should be encouraged to join in activities with other mentors and mentees.

**Be honest.** If you're having a rough day, if you don't know an answer - be honest. This is a relationship, you do not need to be the perfect knower of all things!

Get creative. The goal is to share experiences that the mentees usual environment does not provide.

Always set your boundaries, when are you unavailable and what you are NOT prepared to do.

## WHAT SHOULD A MENTOR NOT DO?

What you should not do is just as important as what you should do. We all know the importance of listening and being heard. Your words and actions matter.

Mentors need to be extra careful of what they say and how they behave. You are placing yourself in a position of trust and therefore your words and actions mean more to your mentee than other people.

You should also be aware of your boundaries. Every mentor program is different but consider the following roles that a mentor should not have:

- Parent
- Social worker
- ATM
- Teacher
- Spiritual guide
- Friend
- Uber driver

## **Confidentiality:**

The youth may be unsure whether the feelings and information they disclose to their mentors will be passed on. Early in the relationship, mentors must provide reassurance:

- Be clear of what is confidential and what is not.
- If the mentor feels it is important to involve another member of staff, it will be discussed first with the youth.
- If there is threat of physical harm to the youth or to others, the mentor must break confidentiality to seek protection for the endangered person (including the threat of suicide).

## **PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE MENTORS**

- Involve mentee in deciding how you will spend your time together.
- Make a commitment to be consistent and dependable.
- Recognize that the relationship may be fairly one-sided for some time.
- Pay attention to the mentees need for fun.
- Respect the mentee's viewpoint.
- Allow the mentee to make mistakes.
- Separate your own goals from those of the mentee – leave your personal agenda behind.
- Do not focus on the negative aspects of the youth, neighbourhood, or parents.
- Seek and utilize the help and advice of others.

In your particular mentor-role your relationship will come to an end. Keep this in mind and have a plan for how this will look.

## **PRACTICES OF INEFFECTIVE MENTORS**

- Have difficulty meeting the mentee on a regular basis; create expectations that demand too much of the mentee, make them feel intimidated or inadequate.
- Attempt to transform or reform the mentee by setting goals and tasks early on; adopt a parental or authoritative role in interaction with the youth.
- Emphasize immediate behaviour changes rather than the development of mutual trust and respect.
- Attempt to instil a set of values inconsistent with those the youth is exposed to at home.
- Ignore the advice of others.

## STAGES OF MENTOR/MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

### Stage 1: Developing Rapport and Building Trust

One of the best ways to build trust is to help your mentee accomplish something that is important to them. Mentors must take the time to help mentees identify the goal(s) they want to accomplish, view it realistically, break it down into small steps, and explore ways of reaching the goal. Building trust takes time.

**Testing will occur.** Youth may be slow to give their trust, expecting inconsistency and lack of commitment, due to past experiences with adults. Youth are protecting themselves from disappointment. The mentor's trustworthiness and commitment may be tested. During the testing period, mentors can expect:

- Missed appointments
- Phone calls not returned
- Unreasonable requests
- Angry or sullen behaviour

Once the mentor passes the test, the real work of the relationship can begin. Mentors should remember that **the issue is not whether the mentee likes them.**

One misstep, though it may seem small to the mentor, can assume great importance to the youth. Through this difficult process, mentors need to be prepared to understand and to **refrain from personalizing the experience.**

Understand the differences in culture, experiences and language. Mentors need to be conscious that how they approach subjects and see things will be different from their mentees.

ACKNOWLEDGE that others will see a situation, person, or event differently.

UNDERSTAND that reasonable people can and will reasonably disagree about meanings and significance.

TAKE a conscious and healthy interest in how your mentee perceives the world differently than you do.

KNOW that reactions and judgements have a legitimate source – they make sense in the context of a mentees unique mix of cultural contexts. They help them survive and succeed there.

### Stage 2: Setting and Reaching Goals

Decide what your relationship will be, what do you want to accomplish during this year?

Use the SMART system of setting goals

S - specific

M - measurable

A - attainable

R - relevant

T - time-based

In addition to this you should help your mentee develop meaningful goals that they are motivated to achieve based on their skills, passions and interests. These will become clearer as you get to know each other.

If things still aren't working at this stage

- The match/fit between mentor and youth may not be right.
- Some youth have been so disappointed and damaged by earlier experiences they are unable to risk taking advantage of a helping relationship.
- Some youth will get stuck in the "testing" stage.

- Some youth may drop out of the program or school.
- The mentor may feel burdened by the relationship and feel angry or annoyed by the youth's behaviour or words.

### **Stage 3: Relationship Closure for Planned Terminations**

- Help youth grow from the process; reassure them about what they have learned and are capable of.
- Discuss some positive actions and directions for the future.
- Reassure youth about your confidence in them.
- Mutually agree about how, when, or if you will stay in touch.
- Follow through on that commitment.

Your mentees experience of adults might not be positive. They may not have people who have the time, interest, or ability to listen to them. Mentors can encourage young people to talk about their fears, dreams, and concerns. Staying neutral and not judging, but rather, sharing your own values, is important in listening. Remember, a mentor may be the ONLY adult in a youth's life who listens.

Through the mentors' sustained caring, interest, and acceptance, youth may begin to think of themselves as worthy of this attention. They may apply this new, stronger sense of self-confidence to other relationships and experiences. You will teach them value, and confidence by simply giving them your time.

You are not the saviour, problem solver or answer for all the problems in your students life. You are there to build a relationship, listen and help them make decisions for themselves.

**For this you are going to need support systems.** Your students will be going through a lot this year you are there to help them deal with their problems for themselves. But for that you can call on other experts.

Think about what you would do and who you would talk to if a student is dealing with problems of:

- Peer Pressure
- Substance Abuse
- Sexuality
- Child Abuse and Family Violence
- Depression and Suicide
- Faith and Religion
- Career Exploration and Part-Time Work

Put your network in place beforehand so that you can act positively in any given situation.

## **COMMUNICATING**

You are doing three things whenever your youth expresses his/her feelings:

1. Listening carefully to what your youth is saying.
2. Formulating in your own mind what your youth is expressing.
3. Repeating back to him/her in your own words the feelings they have just expressed to you.

When a mentor uses this technique, the youth will really know the mentor understands, because he/she will hear his/her own feelings coming back to them from the mentor. Be careful you don't repeat the exact words your youth has used so you won't sound like an echo chamber. Paraphrase in your own words.

A dramatic change may not take place in the child as a result of listening to and repeating his or her feelings. However, it is a powerful way for keeping lines of communication between you and your youth open. It lets your youth know that you understand how he/she feels and that their feelings are respected and valued.

## **RULES OF COMMUNICATION**

1. Make your communication positive.
2. Be clear and specific.
3. Recognize that each individual sees things from a different point of view.
4. Be open and honest about your feelings.
5. Accept your mentee's feelings and try to understand them.
6. Be supportive and accepting.
7. Do not preach or lecture.
8. Learn to listen.
9. Put away distractions, close laptops, turn off phones.
10. Allow time for your youth to talk without interruption; show you are interested in what he or she has to say.
11. Get feedback to be sure you are understood.
12. Listen for a feeling tone as well as for words.
13. Ask questions when you do not understand.
14. Set examples rather than giving advice.