

MENTOR TRAINING AGENDA

- I. Welcome/Overview of Training Session
- II. Introductions and Expectations
 - A. Participant introductions (via pair interviews or substitute ice breaker or introduction exercise)
 - B. Identify participants' concerns and expectations
- III. Overview of Specific Mentor Program Structure
- IV. Mentor Roles and Tasks
- V. Stages of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship
- VI. Communication Skills
- VII. Exploring Diversity and Its Impact on the Mentoring Relationship

MENTOR TRAINING AGENDA

(Detailed)

I. Welcome and Introduction

- A. Overview of mentoring program
- B. Organizational partner (if there is one)
- C. Individuals – their names, positions and experience, or not, as mentors

II. Mentoring

- A. What it is and what it's not – brief description
- B. Personal mentors – participants share memories of their own mentors and the qualities that made them exceptional
- C. Condense descriptions into the ideal mentor – with emphasis on “there for me,” “listened to me,” “nonjudgmental,” “caring,” and so forth
- D. Remind mentors of the descriptions that are not there – because they're not important – for example, “wealthy,” “famous,” powerful, and so forth

III. Our Qualifications

- A. Our best characteristics – group describes the qualities about themselves of which they are most proud.
- B. Review our characteristics and compare them to those on the mentor list – we have what it takes!
- C. Review key qualities of a good mentor – caring, consistent, nonjudgmental listener and friend.

IV. Youth Today

- A. What do we know about them? Let's brainstorm adjectives we hear in the media that describe youth.
- B. Highlight the derogatory expressions that arise – make a list.
- C. Ask participants to think about young people they know well – a child, grandchild, godchild, etc. Do these children fit the list of scary adjectives from part A?
- D. So we don't want the media to describe youth for us. Let us start with a clean slate.
- E. Describe simple characteristics of young people to be mentored – depending on age.
- F. Ask participants if the people we will be mentoring might have stereotypes about us. Let's brainstorm the adjectives that young people might have about adults.
- G. Highlight the less than flattering expressions that may come up. Ask participants how we can counteract these stereotypes.
- H. Refer back to the qualities that make a good mentor. Can we use the positives to counteract the negatives?

V. Mentoring Relationship

- A. Describe young people
- B. Goals of programs
- C. Goals of individual meetings
- D. Ground rules:
 - a) Boundaries
 - b) Limits
 - c) Trust
 - d) Confidentiality
 - e) When youths need help – risky or dangerous behavior
 - f) When mentors feel stuck
 - g) Fun
- E. Initial Meetings:
 - a) Strategies
 - b) Expectations
 - c) Plan together
 - d) Brainstorm activities and discussion points

VI. Goal Setting

- A. Realistic and personal
- B. Achievable
- C. Turn short term into long term
- D. Develop step-by-step plan
- E. Celebrate achievements
- F. Reframe setbacks

VII. Review Topics

- A. Ask for questions
- B. Assign homework
- C. Explain report mechanism and certificate

VIII. Conclusion and Thank You (on behalf of the young people)

MENTOR TRAINING EVALUATION

Date: _____

Please take a moment to respond to the following questions. Your comments are valuable to us.

Please circle appropriate response:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The workshop was well-designed (pacing, adequate time for Q&A, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
2. I received information that answered my questions about mentoring.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The materials and handouts provided useful content both in the session and for future reference.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The trainer(s) was/were knowledgeable and helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have a better sense of what it takes to be a mentor.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The workshop met the stated objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
7. This workshop was valuable and I would recommend it to others.	1	2	3	4	5

8. Was there anything you would have liked to spend more time on? What? Why?

9. Was there anything you would have liked to spend less time on? What? Why?

10. What did you like best about the training?

11. What two things could you suggest to improve the training?

12. Please let us know of any additional training topics you would like to see offered.

PAIR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please choose a partner for this exercise, preferably someone you do not know. Each participant gets an allotted amount of time to interview the other person, record the answers to the following questions and introduce his or her partner to the group. **DO NOT RECORD LIFE HISTORIES.** Particular attention should be given to questions #4 and #5 as this information will be recorded by the trainer to determine what topics require more time and what concerns and expectations can realistically be addressed in this four-hour training.

1. Please share with me a little about yourself, particularly anything you feel is relevant to mentoring.

2. Why did you volunteer for this mentor program?

3. What strengths do you feel you bring to this volunteer position?

4. What concerns do you have about being a mentor? Please record at least one concern to share with the group.

5. What are your expectations for this training session?

GUIDELINES FOR MENTORS

It's not possible to anticipate every situation and the appropriate behavior to apply when one is mentoring. However, here are a few suggestions to use as general guidelines:

Do:

- Get to know your mentee. Try to really understand how things are for him or her now.
- Be positive, patient, dependable, honest and sincere.
- Be consistent, but flexible. Expect changes in plans.
- Encourage, praise and compliment – even the smallest of accomplishments.
- Be an active listener. Use language that's easy to understand.
- Give concrete explanations.
- Be straight, honest and sincere (people pick up on falseness and shallowness).
- Ask for opinions and participation in decision-making.
- Work with your mentee. Share your knowledge rather than giving advice.
- Be enthusiastic – it's contagious.
- Stress the positive.
- Be firm. Have your mentee assume responsibilities and hold him or her accountable.
- Help your mentee use mistakes as learning experiences.
- Be fair – they'll notice if you're not.
- Help identify your mentee's talents, strengths and assets.
- Tell your mentee about yourself, especially what you remember from your high school years.
- Help them identify the significance for their own lives of the information you are discussing (e.g., possible future profession, similar experiences, etc.) – tell them how they can use the information.
- Have activities planned in advance.
- Take the initiative. A mentee who fails to call or attend must be pursued and the coordinator notified of the situation so that issues can be resolved and sessions can begin again, if applicable.
- If you're going to miss a mentoring session, call the coordinator and leave a message for the mentee. It is important to let the mentee know you did not forget about your mentoring session.
- Learn to appreciate your mentee's cultural and ethnic background. Strive toward cultural reciprocity.
- Be open to what your mentee can teach you or share with you.
- **Honor Your Commitment – This is extremely important! You'll hear this over and over again!**
- **HAVE FUN!**

Don't:

- Expect to have instant rapport with your mentee.
- Be lenient in order to be liked – it won't earn their respect, and they need consistency and structure.
- Lecture, moralize or preach.
- Tell them what to do (instead, you should suggest, invite, encourage).
- Share personal problems unless it is to explain your current disposition (e.g., tired or irritable).
- Make promises you can't keep.
- Be convinced that what mentees say is always what they mean.
- Pry into the young person's life. If a mentee pries into your affairs, it is okay to say that some things in your life are private just as they are in his or her life.
- Be afraid to admit that you do not know an answer or that you have made a mistake. Find the correct answer and learn together. It helps the mentee to see that you are learning too.
- Interpret lack of enthusiasm as a personal rejection or reaction to you.
- Be sarcastic or use excessive teasing.
- Refer to youths that reside in public housing as being from "the projects."
- Lend money.
- Violate confidences, with the single *exception of crisis intervention situations*, in which case you must contact the coordinator privately and immediately.
- Forget your own adolescence. What do you wish an adult had said to you or done for you at that time in your life?
- Attempt to become a surrogate parent to a child.

MENTOR ROLES AND TASKS

Here are some games to play that present a mentor's roles and responsibilities (as well as what he or she is not responsible for). This is one of the most important sections in the training, so the more fun it is, the more memorable it will be.

What Is and What Is Not a Mentor?

Real-Life Mentors

For people to really understand what a mentor is, it helps to have them think about someone who has been a mentor for them in their own life. This activity is a good lead-in to the "what is a mentor" piece of the training.

- Ask if anyone has had a mentor before. (Often, no one will answer "yes" because they think mentors have to be people you meet through mentoring programs.)
- Explain that a mentor could be anyone older in his or her life who has offered advice, guidance or a listening ear (such as a teacher, sibling or neighbor).
- Ask again who has had a mentor (you will find more positive responses this time). Ask these people to share with the group who their mentor was and what qualities made him or her a good mentor.

Mentor Family Feud

Beforehand: Prepare a flip chart with two columns as follows (or use whatever words you think best describe a mentor's role):

A Mentor Is:

Friend
Guide
Listener
Confidant
Resource Broker

A Mentor Isn't:

Parent/Guardian
Social Worker
ATM
Babysitter
Disciplinarian

Cover up the answers with slips of paper so that you can reveal them as people guess them correctly. Split the audience into two teams. Pick one team to go first. They must pick a column (what a mentor is, or what a mentor isn't) and try to guess one of the answers. You can tell them that these are all nouns and were generated by conducting a large survey. These responses are the top five recorded answers from the survey.

Qualities of a Good Mentor

While you are discussing what a mentor is, you may want to have the group think about what the qualities of a good mentor are. Have them brainstorm a list of qualities that their own mentors have had, the kind of mentor they want to be, or the kind of mentor they would like to have themselves. This brainstorming exercise can help clarify what a mentor is and can give the volunteers a list of qualities to aim for.

A Mentor Is . . .

- **A trusted guide or friend**
Young people today do not get much of an opportunity to be friends with adults, especially adults who are going to listen to them.
- **A caring, responsible adult**
He or she provides access to people, places and things outside the mentee's routine environment.
- **A positive role model**
A mentor may be a positive role model. A role model is someone the youth aspires to be like, whereas a mentor is someone who offers to help the youth be whoever he or she wants to be. Today, youth have many role models; however, they are not necessarily positive role models.

Key Qualities of a Good Mentor

- Good listener;
- Persistent;
- Committed; and
- Patient.

A Mentor Is Not . . .

Mentors must understand that they cannot be all things to their mentees. Quite often when mentors run into problems in their relationships, it is because the mentor, the mentee or the parent/legal guardian did not understand the proper role of a mentor.

The mentor may have taken on one of the following inappropriate roles:

A parent/legal guardian

The role of a parent or legal guardian (governed by law) is to provide food, shelter and clothing. It is not the mentor's role to fulfill these responsibilities. If the mentor believes his or her mentee is not receiving adequate support, he or she should contact the mentor program coordinator rather than trying to meet the needs of his or her mentee.

A social worker

A social worker is a licensed professional with the necessary skills and training to assist in family issues. If a mentor believes there is something wrong in the mentee's home life, the mentor should share this concern with the mentor program coordinator and not assume the role of a social worker and attempt to solve the problem.

A psychologist

A mentor is not a formal counselor or therapist. A psychologist or psychiatrist is a licensed professional.

*It is more appropriate for a mentor to act as a **resource broker** and show the mentee how to access the services and resources he or she needs than to provide those services.*

The Four Primary Tasks of a Mentor

Establish a positive, personal relationship with mentee:

- Establish mutual trust and respect;
- Maintain regular interaction and consistent support; and
- Make your meetings enjoyable and fun.

Help mentee to develop or begin to develop life skills:

- Work with your mentee to accomplish specific program goals (e.g., drop-out prevention, general career awareness); and
- Instill the framework for developing broader life-management skills, (e.g., decision-making skills, goal-setting skills, conflict resolution, money management).

Assist mentee in obtaining additional resources:

- Provide awareness of community, educational and economic resources available to youth and their families, and how to access these resources. Act as a resource broker as opposed to a resource provider;
- Act as a guide and/or advocate, coach and/or model; and
- Avoid acting as a professional case manager. View the role of a mentor as a friend rather than a counselor.

Increase mentee's ability to interact with people/groups/things from various backgrounds (cultural, racial, socioeconomic, etc.):

- Respect and explore differences among people/groups from various backgrounds. Do not promote values and beliefs of one group as superior to those of another; and
- Introduce mentee to different environments, such as workplace vs. school setting; discuss differences in behavior, attitude and style of dress.

TIPS FOR BUILDING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

1. Be there.

When you show up for every meeting with your mentee and strive to make things work out you send your mentee a strong message that you care and that he or she is worth caring about.

2. Be a friend, not an all-knowing authority.

Be the adult in your mentee's life who is just there without having to fix him or her. Hanging out and talking is surprisingly helpful to a young person's healthy development. Young people learn more conversing with adults than they do just listening to them. In the words of a mentee:

"My parents lecture me all the time. Why would I want my mentor to be the same way? I have the best mentor in the program, but sometimes he tries too hard to be a mentor instead of just being himself. What I mean is that he thinks he always has to share some wisdom or advice, when sometimes I would rather just kick it and joke around."

Of course, when your mentee comes to you for help or advice, it is appropriate to help them develop solutions. It's also okay to check in with them if you suspect that they are struggling with something. They just don't want non-stop advice. So, take the pressure off of yourself and just enjoy your mentee's company.

3. Be a role model.

The best that you can do is to lead by example. By becoming a mentor, you've already modeled the most important thing a human being can do: caring about another. Here are some other ways you can be a positive role model for your mentee:

- Keep your word: Call when you say you will. Do what you say you will. Be there when you say you will;
- Return phone calls and e-mails promptly;
- Have a positive outlook;
- If your program has group sessions, participate fully;
- If you enter a competitive activity with your mentee, keep it in perspective and by all means do not cheat (or even fudge a little) to help your mentee win, get a better place in line at an event, etc.; and
- Let your mentee see you going out of your way to help others.

4. Help your mentee have a say in your activities.

Some mentees will have a lot of suggestions about what you can do together, but most will need a little guidance on your part. If your mentee doesn't have any preferences, start by giving them a range of choices. "Here are some things we can do. Which ones sound good to you?"

5. Be ready to help out.

When your mentee lets you know that he or she is struggling with a problem, you can help out by following these tips:

- Be there for your mentee and make it clear that you want to help;
- Be a friend, not an all-knowing authority: Don't fix a problem. Ask questions and help your mentee figure out how to come up with answers;
- Model ways to solve problems. You can also be a role model by describing how you overcame a similar problem in your life. Metaphor is a great teacher;
- Give your mentee a say: Once he or she comes up with a solution, don't try to come up with a better one, but help explore all the possibilities and offer support; and
- Be ready to help out by checking back and seeing how things worked out.

RESPONSIBLE MENTORING

The EMT Group

(www.emt.org/publications.html)

Difficult Issues

By Dustianne North, M.S.W.

Sensitive issues that come up between a mentor and mentee require different levels of response and intervention. These issues have been grouped below as delicate topics, issues of concern and crises requiring intervention. However, any of these issues may move up or down this continuum depending on the seriousness of the actions involved.

Delicate Topics

Generally speaking, delicate topics should be discussed only when initiated by the mentee. These topics can be touchy and strongly affect the relationship. Confidentiality takes on greater importance with these topics. Although mentors should be adequately trained to deal with these issues on their own, they should be encouraged to seek support and feedback from their supervisor and other mentors when their mentee has brought issues such as these to their attention.

Examples of delicate topics:

- Sex
- Peer pressure
- Hygiene
- Behavior
- School performance
- Self-image/personal insecurities
- Identity issues: class, cultural and sexual
- Others_____

Issues of Concern

Issues of concern are those that may have lifelong implications for the mentee, and therefore *the mentor needs to report them to the agency*. However, these issues do not necessarily require direct intervention. Because these issues may be part of ongoing situations and conditions that mentees face, mentors need to be trained and supported to accept these aspects of the mentees' lives without judgment. Mentors and mentoring programs should not focus too heavily on changing behavior when issues such as these arise. Nevertheless, by staying aware of the challenges their mentees must face, they may be able to help mentees ameliorate these problems over time.

Examples of Issues of Concern:

- Unsafe sex
- Fighting at school
- Depression
- Delinquent behavior
- Gang affiliation
- Substance abuse
- Verbal harassment: sexual, racial, bullying, others
- Others: _____

Crises Requiring Intervention

Crises involve issues of grave concern that generally require direct and immediate intervention. Some of these issues, like child abuse and neglect, are mandated by law to be reported to the county; others may require a referral of a direct intervention by the mentor program. **MENTORS SHOULD NEVER BE EXPECTED TO HANDLE ISSUES SUCH AS THESE ALONE.** In addition, many of these issues require collaboration with families of mentees, and this should be handled by the mentor program manager.

Examples of Crises Requiring Intervention:

- Child abuse and neglect
- Abusive relationships: sexual abuse, incest, dating violence/rape
- Chemical dependency
- Serious delinquency/arrests
- Suicidal behavior
- Mental illness
- Physical harassment: sexual, racial, bullying, others
- Other trauma
- Others _____

(“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.)

Courtesy of The Mentoring Partnership of New York, *Mentoring in the Faith Community: An Operations Manual for Program Coordinators.*

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 same level).
- Avoid judgmental statements such as “Why would you do something like that?” or “I think you know better.”
- Be honest if you are getting emotional or upset.
- Let mentee know that you are glad he or she came to you.
- Reassure mentee that his or her confidentiality will be honored.
- Use tact, but be honest.
- Allow mentee to talk at his or her own pace—don’t force an issue.
- Do not pry—allow 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 issue has been talked about, 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 mentee if confidentiality does not hold.
- Suggest that your supervisor may have some thoughts if you don’t know what to do.
- Ask mentee if he or she would like to talk to the agency with you if necessary.
- Provide information if mentee is unaware of resources or options.
- Brainstorm with 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 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: _____

(“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.)

STAGES OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Stage 1: Developing Rapport and Building Trust

The “getting to know you” phase is the most critical stage of the relationship. Things to expect and work on during Stage 1 include:

- **Predictability and consistency**
During the first stage of the relationship, it is critical to be both predictable and consistent. If you schedule an appointment to meet your mentee at a certain time, it’s important to keep it. It is understandable that at times things come up and appointments cannot be kept. However, in order to speed up the trust-building process, consistency is necessary, even if the young person is not as consistent as you are.
- **Testing**
Young people generally do not trust adults. As a result, they use testing as a coping or defense mechanism to determine whether they can trust you. They will test to see if you really care about them. A mentee might test the mentor by not showing up for a scheduled meeting to see how the mentor will react.
- **Establish confidentiality**
During the first stage of the relationship, it’s important to establish confidentiality with your young person. This helps develop trust. The mentor should let the mentee know that whatever he or she wants to share with the mentor will remain confidential, as long as (and it’s important to stress this point) what the young person tells the mentor is not going to harm the young person or someone else. It’s helpful to stress this up front, within the first few meetings with the mentee. That way, later down the road, if a mentor needs to break the confidence because the information the mentee shared was going to harm him or her or someone else, the young person will not feel betrayed.
- **Goal setting (transitions into Stage 2)**
It’s helpful during Stage 1 to take the time to set at least one achievable goal together for the relationship. What do the two of you want to get out of this relationship? It’s also good to help your mentee set personal goals. Young people often do not learn how to set goals, and this will provide them with the opportunity to set goals and work toward achieving them.

Stage 2: The Middle—Reaching Goals

Once trust has been established, the relationship moves into Stage 2. During this stage, the mentor and mentee can begin to start working toward the goals they set during the first stage of the relationship. Things to expect during Stage 2 include:

- **Closeness**
Generally, during the second stage the mentor and mentee can sense a genuine closeness in the relationship.

- **Affirming the uniqueness of the relationship**

Once the relationship has reached this stage, it's helpful to do something special or different from what the mentor and mentee did during the first stage, which helps affirm the uniqueness of the relationship. For example, go to a museum, sporting event, special restaurant, etc.

- **The relationship may be rocky or smooth**

All relationships have their ups and downs. Once the relationship has reached the second stage, there will still be some rough periods. Mentors should be prepared and not assume that something is wrong with the relationship if this happens.

- **Rely on staff support**

Stage 3: Closure

If the rough period continues or if a mentor feels that the pair has not reached the second stage, he or she shouldn't hesitate to seek support from the mentoring program coordinator. Sometimes two people, no matter how they look on paper, just don't "click." Some mentor/mentee pairs don't need to worry about this stage until farther down the road. However, at some point all relationships will come to an end—whether it's because the program is over, the mentor is moving or for some other reason. When this happens, it's critical that the closure stage not be overlooked. Many young people today have already had adults come and go in their lives and are very rarely provided the opportunity to say a proper goodbye.

- **Identify natural emotions, such as grief, denial and resentment**

In order to help mentees express emotions about the relationship ending, mentors should model appropriate behavior. The mentor should first express his or her feelings and emotions about the end of the relationship and then let the mentee do the same.

- **Provide opportunities for saying goodbye in a healthy, respectful and affirming way**

Mentors shouldn't wait for the very last meeting with their mentees to say goodbye. The mentor should slowly bring it up as soon as he or she becomes aware that the relationship will be coming to a close.

- **Address appropriate situations for staying in touch**

Mentors should check with the mentoring program coordinator to find out the policy for staying in touch with their mentees once the program has come to an end. This is especially important if the program is school-based and mentors and mentees meet during the school year but the program officially ends before the summer starts. If mentors and mentees are *mutually* interested in continuing to meet over the summer, they may be allowed to, but with the understanding that school personnel may not be available should an emergency arise. Each mentoring program may have its own policy for future contact between mentors and mentees. That's why it's best for mentors to check with program personnel during this stage.

COMMUNICATIONS HABITS CHECKLIST

Please complete the following checklist. This information will not be shared with anyone else, so be honest.

Consider each statement carefully and respond:

F = Frequently

S = Sometimes

N = Never

When I listen to someone:

- ___ I am usually not available when someone wants to talk to me.
- ___ I fake attentiveness.
- ___ I get distracted easily.
- ___ I think about how I am going to respond while the other person is talking.
- ___ I interrupt to divert conversations.
- ___ I don't tell the person when there is something I don't understand.
- ___ I judge and evaluate the other person and his or her comments.
- ___ I advise or teach or moralize.
- ___ I often talk about myself.

When I talk to someone:

- ___ I get the feeling that they don't understand.
- ___ I express opinions as facts.
- ___ I'm reluctant to reveal my real feelings.
- ___ I use negative statements in problem situations.
- ___ I use examples and details to get my feelings across.
- ___ I choose the right moment to raise an issue.
- ___ I focus on letting the other person know how wrong he or she is in the situation.

EXAMPLES OF ROADBLOCKS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The following, while not always bad to use, have a tendency to close down communication rather than open up communication and should be avoided in conversations with mentees.

Ordering, directing, commanding

Telling the child to do something; giving the child an order or command.

“I don’t care what other children are doing — and you have to do the yard work!”
“Now you go back up there and play with Ginny and Joyce.”
“Stop complaining!”

Moralizing, preaching — shoulds and oughts

Invoking vague outside authority as accepted truth.

“You shouldn’t act like that.”
“You ought to do . . .”
“Children are supposed to respect their elders.”

Teaching, lecturing, giving logical arguments

Trying to influence the child with facts, counter-arguments, logic, information or your own opinion.

“College can be the most wonderful experience you’ll ever have.”
“Children must learn to get along with one another.”
“Let’s look at the facts about college graduates.”
“If kids learn to take responsibility around the house, they’ll grow up to be responsible adults.”
“When I was your age, I had twice as much to do as you.”

Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming

Making a negative judgment or evaluation of the child.

“You’re not thinking clearly.”
“That’s an immature point of view.”
“You’re very wrong about that.”
“I couldn’t disagree with you more.”

Withdrawing, distracting, sarcasm, humoring, diverting

Trying to get the child away from the problem, withdrawing from the problem yourself, distracting the child, kidding the child out of it, pushing the problem aside.

“Just forget it.”
“Let’s not talk about this at the table.”
“Come on — let’s talk about something more pleasant.”
“Why don’t you try burning the school building down?”
“We’ve all been through this before.”

(Excerpt from *Parent Effectiveness Training* by Dr. Thomas Gordan)

Courtesy of Mass Mentoring Partnership, *Mentoring 101 Training Curriculum*.

HELPFUL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The following four communication skills are very helpful for mentors to develop and practice. These skills are particularly useful when your goal is to open up communication with a young person. They are also useful skills that you can help your mentee develop:

Active Listening

Active listening is an attempt to truly understand the content and emotion of what the other person is saying by paying attention to verbal and non-verbal messages. The task is to focus, hear, respect and communicate your desire to understand. This is not the time to be planning a response or conveying how you feel.

Active listening is *not* nagging, cajoling, reminding, threatening, criticizing, questioning, advising, evaluating, probing, judging or ridiculing.

Skills to Use:

- Eye contact;
- Body language: open and relaxed posture, forward lean, appropriate facial expressions, positive use of gestures; and
- Verbal cues such as “um-hmmm,” “sure,” “ah” and “yes.”

Results of Active Listening:

- Encourages honesty — helps people free themselves of troublesome feelings by expressing them openly;
- Reduces fear — helps people become less afraid of negative feelings;
- Builds respect and affection;
- Increases acceptance — promotes a feeling of understanding; and

When you actively listen, you cooperate in solving the problem — and in preventing future problems.

“I” Messages

These messages give the opportunity to keep the focus on you and explain your feelings in response to someone else’s behavior. Because “I” messages don’t accuse, point fingers at the other person or place blame, they avoid judgments and help keep communication open. At the same time, “I” messages continue to advance the situation to a problem-solving stage.

For example: “I was really sad when you didn’t show up for our meeting last week. I look forward to our meetings and was disappointed not to see you. In the future, I would appreciate it if you could call me and let me know if you will not be able to make it.”

Avoid: “You didn’t show up, and I waited for an hour. You could have at least called me and let me know that you wouldn’t be there. You are irresponsible.”

Take care that the following actions and behaviors are congruent with an honest, open heart:

- Body language: slouching, turning away, pointing a finger;
- Timing: speaking too fast or too slow;
- Facial expression: smiling, squirming, raising eyebrows, gritting teeth;
- Tone of voice: shouting, whispering, sneering, whining; and
- Choice of words: biting, accusative, pretentious, emotionally laden.

Results:

“I” messages present only one perspective. Allowing the other person to actually have a point of view and hearing it doesn’t mean that he or she is right. “I” messages communicate both information and respect for each position. Again, this skill moves both parties along to the problem-solving stage.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing focuses on listening first and then reflecting the two parts of the speaker’s message — *fact* and *feeling* — back to the speaker. Often, the fact is clearly stated, but a good listener is “listening between the lines” for the “feeling” part of the communication. Using this skill is a way to check out what you heard for accuracy — did you interpret what your mentee said correctly? This is particularly helpful with youth, as youth culture/language change constantly. Often words that meant one thing when mentors were young could have an entirely different meaning for youth today.

Examples for *fact*:

- “So you’re saying that . . .”
- “You believe that . . .”
- “The problem is . . .”

Examples for *feeling*:

- “You feel that . . .”
- “Your reaction is . . .”
- “And that made you feel . . .”

Paraphrases are not an opportunity to respond by evaluating, sympathizing, giving an opinion, offering advice, analyzing or questioning.

Results:

Using active listening skills will enable you to gather the information and then be able to simply report back what you heard in the message — the facts and the attitudes/feelings that were expressed. Doing so lets the other person know that you hear, understand and care about his or her thoughts and feelings.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are intended to collect information by exploring feelings, attitudes and how the other person views a situation. Open-ended questions are extremely helpful when dealing with young people. Youth, teenagers especially, tend to answer questions with as few words as possible. To maintain an active dialogue without interrogating, try to ask a few questions that cannot be answered with a “yes,” “no,” “I don’t know,” or a grunt.

Examples:

- “How do you see this situation?”
- “What are your reasons for . . . ?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “How does this affect you?”
- “How did you decide that?”
- “What would you like to do about it?”
- “What part did you play?”

Note: Using the question “Why did you do that?” may sometimes yield a defensive response rather than a clarifying response.

Results:

Because open-ended questions require a bit more time to answer than close-ended questions (questions that can be answered by “yes,” “no,” or a brief phrase), they give the person a chance to explain. Open-ended questions yield significant information that can in turn be used to problem solve.

EXPLORING AND VALUING DIVERSITY

Stereotyping

This unit addresses one of the most critical training needs that has surfaced in surveys of mentors and volunteer coordinators: the need to help mentors deal with diversity. Some mentors talked about “culture shock” in reference to their initial apprehension and lack of familiarity with, and/or understanding of, the world from which their mentees came. When you think about it, it is normal and natural to feel a certain amount of apprehension about meeting someone for the first time, especially if it’s expected that you will become a trusted friend. Add to that a significant difference in age, in socioeconomic status and/or in racial and ethnic background and it is easy to understand why this is such a critical issue for mentors.

Toward a broad definition of cultural diversity

Many mentor programs prefer to match mentees with mentors who come from similar backgrounds in terms of race, socioeconomic status, etc. Often this is not possible, and mentors are matched with young people who may look and act very differently than they do and whose backgrounds and lifestyles may be dissimilar to their own.

Culture, in this sense, is more than race or ethnicity. It encompasses values, lifestyle and social norms and includes issues such as different communication styles, mannerisms, ways of dressing, family structure, traditions, time orientation and response to authority. These differences may be associated with age, religion, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. A lack of understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity can result in mentors becoming judgmental, which may prevent the development of a trusting relationship.

What can you do?

As in many other situations, knowledge is the key to understanding. Below are descriptions and examples of different diversity issues. Each has the potential to cause misunderstandings between a mentor and a mentee. However, cultural understanding is not something you can learn exclusively from a textbook. Talk to your mentee about his or her background and ancestry, about what life is like at school or home or with his or her friends. Find out the reasons for what he or she does. Your program director, other mentors, friends and coworkers may also have insights into cultural differences.

As you begin to learn and understand more about your mentee, you will be less likely to make negative value judgments. We hope that these examples will help you become more knowledgeable about and encourage you to explore your mentee’s cultural background.

Ethnic Diversity

If your mentee comes from a different ethnic background, learn about the values and traditions of that culture. Such things as the role of authority and family, communication styles, perspectives on time, ways of dealing with conflict and marriage traditions vary significantly among ethnic groups.

For example, people from Scandinavian and Asian cultures typically are not comfortable dealing directly with conflict. Their approach to problems or disagreements is often more subtle

and indirect. Consequently, a mentee from one of these cultures may find it difficult to discuss a problem with candor. Similarly, many Asian and Hispanic families emphasize respecting and obeying adults. For them, disagreeing with an adult, particularly a family member – or in this case a mentor – is forbidden. Conversely, the role and style of communication of some African Americans is much more direct and assertive.

Many Asian cultures have unique courtship and marriage traditions. For example, a Hmong girl typically marries before age 18 and most often is expected to marry a Hmong man of her parents' choosing. She may have no choice about whom she marries.

Ethnic groups can also vary in terms of their beliefs about and orientations toward time. For instance, some Native Americans may follow an inner clock, which they believe to be more natural, rather than adhering to a predetermined agenda or timetable.

Families that have recently arrived in this country often develop distinct reaction patterns. Children of recent immigrants typically react negatively to their parents' insistence that they follow the "old ways." These children are often ashamed of their culture and their traditions. They may even be ashamed of their parents. Mentors can help their mentees celebrate the uniqueness of their culture by showing curiosity and interest in the history and traditions of their mentees' cultures.

Obviously, these are gross stereotypes. They are used here only to demonstrate the range of diversity among different ethnic groups. It is your task as a mentor to learn about ethnic diversity from your mentee, from your observations and from discussions with program staff so that you can better understand the context of your mentee's attitudes and behavior.

Socioeconomic Diversity

Often, mentors come from different socioeconomic backgrounds than their mentees. While one may have grown up on a farm, the other may never have been outside of the city. One may own a house, while the other may not know anyone personally who owns a new car, let alone a house. A mentee's family may move frequently, perhaps every few months, and may not have a telephone. A mentee may have to share a very small apartment with many people. A mentor must learn that many things s/he may have taken for granted are not necessarily common to all. These types of cultural differences are common between mentor and mentee and require time and understanding for an appreciation of their significance. Remember, however, that poverty is color-blind, i.e., many white people are poor, many people of color are not and dysfunction can occur regardless of income, geographic location or level of education. Try not to make assumptions.

It is important to realize that there are psychological effects of chronic poverty. Some mentees may develop a short-term "culture of survival" attitude. A mentor may comment that her mentee, who comes from a very poor family, spends large sums of money on things she considers frivolous (the example she gives is \$100 jeans). Poverty often prevents people from believing that their future holds any promise of getting better. Saving money and investing in the future is a luxury they don't believe they have. Buying a pair of \$100 jeans when you don't have enough food to eat may very well be a function of the "take what you can get while you can get it"

perspective of chronic poverty.

Youth Culture

Many of the characteristics of adolescence are normal, common, developmental traits and consequently don't vary significantly from one generation to the next. For instance, while many adults believe that, in general, teenagers are exceedingly more rebellious than they themselves were as young people, rebellion is a common (and perhaps necessary) ingredient in an adolescent's transition into adulthood. Most of us, as teenagers, dressed very differently—perhaps even outrageously—by our parents' and grandparents' standards. We did things our parents didn't do, spoke differently, etc.

Take the time to remember what it was like to be your mentee's age. If you think about the following questions, you'll find that much of what you went through at that age, your mentee is also going through:

For example, when you were in ____ grade:

- What was a typical day like?
- What was really important to you at that time?
- What was your father/mother like? Did you get along? Were you close?
- Think of your friends. Were friendships always easy or were they sometimes hard?
- In general, did you feel as though adults typically understood you well?

However, it is also important to remember that some things, particularly sociological trends, do change dramatically and result in very different experiences from one generation to the next. There is significantly more alcohol and drug abuse today than there was when you were growing up (although, to be sure, alcohol and drug abuse have always existed); sexually transmitted diseases are more common and more dangerous; crime and violence have drastically increased throughout the country, particularly in urban areas; single-parent families have become more common and greater demands are being placed on all families.

For example, one mentor had a conversation with his mentee about school dances, which, for the mentor, were filled with fond memories of discovering dating and dancing. For the mentee, on the other hand, school dances were dangerous, since gunfire was a common occurrence. Obviously, it is important to be aware of these generational changes in lifestyle and children's coping responses to their life circumstances.

Remember. . .

The following are some suggestions that may help you successfully handle diversity:

- Keep in mind that **you are the adult**—you are the experienced one. Imagine, for a moment, what your mentee might be thinking and feeling. In general, young people of all ages, but particularly teens, believe they are not respected by adults and worry about whether a mentor will like them or think they're stupid. They are coming to you for help and may already feel insecure and embarrassed about the problems in their lives. Thus, it is your responsibility to take the initiative and make the mentee feel more comfortable in the relationship.
- It's also important to remember to **be yourself**. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, we try to "relate" to young people, use their slang and be like "one of the gang." Mentees can see through this facade and may find it difficult to trust people who are not true to themselves.
- Furthermore, *you may learn a lot* about another culture, lifestyle or age group, but you will **never be from that group**. Don't over identify with your mentee; s/he realizes you will never know exactly what s/he is feeling or experiencing. A mentee may actually feel invalidated by your insistence that you know where s/he is coming from. There is a big difference between the statements, "I know exactly what you're feeling" and "I think I have a sense of what you're going through." It is helpful to paraphrase what you think your mentee has said or is feeling and to give examples of similar situations that you have experienced.
- If something about your mentee is bothering you, first determine whether the behavior is simply troubling to you because you would do it differently or it is truly an indication of a more seriously troubled youth.

If, in fact, you feel that a troublesome situation is harmful to your mentee or others, you have an obligation to discuss this with your program coordinator. The coordinator will know when and where to refer the young person for professional help. For example, if it is a serious problem — your mentee's abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, for instance — the program coordinator may refer the mentee to an adolescent drug abuse program. It's important to know what you should and should not do or say to your mentee. You are not expected to solve the problem or to be a therapist, but there may be situations where you can help. For instance, your program coordinator might suggest that you actively support your mentee's attendance and participation in support groups, or s/he might suggest that you talk with your mentee about similar situations that you have either experienced or heard about and the ways in which these problems were successfully overcome. Get suggestions from your program coordinator about ways in which you can be helpful and supportive.

Some behavior is not necessarily indicative of a serious problem but can nonetheless be troublesome. For example, being chronically late for appointments, adopting certain styles of dress or excessive swearing may have negative consequences. While your mentee has the right to make decisions about dress, speech and other behavior, you can help by letting him or her know:

- How the behavior makes you feel;
- What judgments others may make about the mentee as a result of the behavior; and
- The reactions and consequences s/he might expect from others.

EXAMPLE: Let's say your mentee usually wears torn jeans and a leather jacket with signs and symbols on the back and is quite proud of his or her unusual hairstyle. Although these outward differences made you uncomfortable at first, you (being the great mentor that you are!) have gotten beyond these "troubling" aspects and realized that, in this case, "different" does not mean "bad."

Now your mentee is looking for a job. Initially, you had decided to say nothing about the importance of appearances during job interviews, but your mentee is having trouble getting a job. You might ask him or her something like:

- Why do you think you didn't get the job?
- What do you think was the interviewer's first impression of you? What do you think gave him or her that impression?
- Do you think the impression you gave is one that is helpful in getting a job? What can you do about this?
- If you were 30 years old and owned a business, would you be hesitant to hire someone who looked and dressed in a way that was completely foreign to you?

You might also discuss ways in which your mentee could keep his or her individuality and identity (both very important needs in adolescence) yet make a more favorable impression. A typical response from a young person might be to refer to the "hypocrisy" and "material values" of the adult culture. Don't mislead or misrepresent the truth — the fact is, like it or not, there are standards and norms in certain situations with which one is expected to comply.

Cultural Reciprocity

An important but often forgotten aspect of cultural diversity is the mutuality of the mentoring relationship, which is what we call cultural reciprocity. This phrase refers to the fact that mentors and mentees alike can benefit from their increased understanding of others who may at first seem unfamiliar. For the mentor, a greater breadth and depth of understanding of others can facilitate better relationships at work, at home and in other social situations. As your mentee begins to trust and know you, s/he will begin to learn about life outside a limited circle of peers and discover new opportunities and ways of doing things: you can be a model for your mentee. The more options we have, the better off we'll be.

Remember: Our lives are enriched by diversity!

**MENTOR TRAINING
LETTER OF COMPLETION AND SAMPLE CERTIFICATE**

(Date)

This letter confirms that (name of participant) has attended the class (name of training class) on (date).

Signature of Program Director

Name of Program Director

(name of mentoring program)

Is pleased to present this

Certificate of Completion for

*(name of training program, i.e. How to be a Great
Mentor)*

to

(name of participant)

Program Director

Date