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# Effective Mentoring

## Building an Effective Mentoring Relationship



### EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

What is an effective mentoring relationship? In a study of four Linking Lifetime 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 records, 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 too early and fully. There is the possibility your mentee may be testing you to see if you are "shockproof."

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- ***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 (ex. 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).*