

The Mentoring and Leadership Development Institute

The Role of a Mentor

Mentors' roles fall into four categories:

- ⌚ Providing academic help and tutoring
- ⌚ Providing career exploration assistance
- ⌚ Providing emotional support
- ⌚ Providing social experiences

It is common to hear the mentor described as:

- ⌚ Coach
- ⌚ Guide
- ⌚ Role Model
- ⌚ Advocate
- ⌚ FRIEND



Any and all of the following are important activities that mentors provide in the lives of their youth:

Academic Support

Keeping youth in school; helping them graduate from school; evaluating educational choices; directing them to educational resources.

Role Modeling

Pointing out, bringing to attention, demonstrating, and explaining your own actions and values that offer the youth the best chances for success and happiness; helping youth see and strive for broader horizons and possibilities than they may see in their present environment.

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 youth 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 youth to see and emulate
- ⌚ Cements trust between mentor and youth
- ⌚ Creates mutual expectations that can be met

Listening

The other adults in the young person's life may not have the time, interest, or ability to listen, or they may be judgmental. 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.

WHAT MENTORS ARE NOT

There is no expectation that volunteer participants in mentoring programs will take on the roles of PARENT, professional COUNSELOR, or SOCIAL WORKER. But some of their traits will be a part of the mentor's role:

- ⌚ Listening
- ⌚ Nurturing
- ⌚ Supporting
- ⌚ Advising

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. Mentoring is not a PANACEA for all the problems and deficiencies facing youth and their families. THE ESSENCE OF MENTORING IS THE SUSTAINED HUMAN RELATIONSHIP. Mentor programs can enhance the efficacy of this relationship by providing support activities and opportunities for development of social skills of the youth through group activities.

SO WHAT EXACTLY DOES A MENTOR DO?

Mentors commit to spending a minimum of four to six hours each month with their youth. Group activities are fun, but it is expected that the mentor and youth will spend time together, just the two of you. This time may be spent in a number of ways. The Mentor Site Coordinator will ask you to document your activities and hours regularly. The following are some recommended activities that youth and mentors have found valuable in the past:

Expected Activities

- ⌚ Make a point of meeting your youth's parent(s), early in the relationship
- ⌚ Attend periodic group youth/mentor meetings
- ⌚ Attend periodic Advanced Mentor Trainings
- ⌚ Attend special events such as Recognition and Awards Event

Suggested Activities

- ⌚ **Arrange one or more job shadows.** Have your youth follow you around as you perform your work. Have your youth follow a worker that has agreed to

host your youth for a prearranged period of time. Or be a youth for a day - shadow your youth.

- ⌚ **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, walking in the park, on the phone – whatever works.
- ⌚ **Ask Questions.** Teenagers need somebody to ask, “What do you want to do after high school?” and “What’s your plan for how to get there?” They will also need help answering those questions.
- ⌚ **Attend recreational and/or cultural activities.** Youth need more exposure to enriching activities such as visits to museums, attending plays, concerts, or sporting events. These experiences can pique interest and encourage youth to pursue new areas of learning.
- ⌚ **Tutor.** Mentors should feel free to help youth with homework. Getting involved with their curriculum is a good way to relate to youth and gain insight into the educational program. Mentors may also arrange for someone else to tutor the youth.
- ⌚ **Attend youth activities.** If your youth is involved in extracurricular activities, is employed, or is involved in activities outside of the school environment, attend those functions, when appropriate, to show support.
- ⌚ **Do things in groups.** Mentors should be encouraged to join in activities with other mentors and youth. Participants in mentor programs enjoy meeting, interacting, and sharing experiences with one another.

You need not limit your activities to this list of suggestions – be creative. The goal is to provide experiences that the youth’s usual environment does not provide. The more “real world” exposure a mentor can provide a youth, the more that youth will learn. Youth will gain new perspectives on the working world and their own education and potential.