

Problem Solving

The “SODAS” Method

One of the major obstacles that mentees face is learning to make good, rational decisions. Often college students simply do the first thing that comes to mind or what everyone else is doing, instead of examining their situation and thinking logically about their choices and the possible consequences of those choices. This is a simple method that can be used to help your TeamMate develop better problem-solving skills.

Situation

- Look at the situation and describe the problem.

Options

- List at least three ways to solve the problem.

Disadvantages

- List at least three disadvantages of each option.

Advantages

- List at least three advantages of each option.

Solution

- Select the best option based on the advantages and disadvantages.

This method helps to examine problems in a rational way that is easy to remember. For most of us, this process seems very simplistic, but many young people have never had the guidance of a trusted adult and do not know how to look at situations realistically. This is something that can be taught. Practice using this skill.

Developed by Jan Rosa, 1973

Guidelines for Handling Difficult Situations

Regardless of the real-life situations that mentors will encounter, there are a few guidelines that apply in almost all cases (Faddis, et al. 1986b). Several suggestions are offered below to guide mentors as they interact with mentees in difficult situations.

1. Face the problem

Ignoring it won't make it go away. If a problem is really a problem, it's best to deal with it early before it gets bigger.

2. Think beforehand about what you want to accomplish in dealing with a sensitive issue

For example, do you want only to know whether or not the student is aware of a behavior and its effect, or do you want to import your viewpoint? Do you want to change the student's behavior? Knowing your purpose helps keep things focused.

3. ***Bring things up early in a visit***

Don't wait until the end of the visit or for an "opportune time" to present itself. There is probably never a good time to bring up a hard topic and so it's best to get to it right away.

4. ***Separate the behavior from the person***

Speak objectively about the behavior and positively about the person. For example, "I like your energy, but when you do ____ it puts me in an awkward position."

5. ***Don't overdo humor, teasing, or jokes***

A teenager will not always grasp issues presented in a half-joking but serious manner. The best guideline is to stay serious but supportive, don't tease or joke, and save humor for lighter times.

6. ***Discuss sensitive issues in a quiet place, if possible***

A quiet space in the hallway, classroom or a conference room might be a good place to meet. You may even want to take a walk to talk.

7. ***Reinforce at a later time something positive about your student***

Emphasize that the issue was about behavior and nothing personal.

8. ***Consult your local TeamMates Post-Secondary Coordinator for support and guidance.***

Adapted from: A Training Guide for Mentors, Smink