

Guidelines for 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.

- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **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."
- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **Reinforce at a later time something positive about your student.** Emphasize that the issue was about behavior and nothing personal.
- ◆ **Consult your local TeamMates Match Coordinator for support and guidance.**

Adapted from: A Training Guide for Mentors, Smink

A Mentor's Roles

Be an advocate. Mentors are advocates who help their mentees be successful in school. Mentors connect youth to academic resources and community support.

Remember you are a support. You should not see your role in the relationship as a savior. Young people are capable of solving problems and have gifts and talents to offer the world.

Be a friend and have fun. Having fun and getting to know the mentee is the primary goal of any mentoring relationship. Share some of your hobbies and interests with your mentee. [See #17 under Development Assets, p. 46]

Allow the mentee to have a voice and choice in deciding on activities. Ask your mentee what s/he would like to do during your match meetings. Do things together that support your common interests.

Be positive. Offer encouragement and assistance. When times are tough for your mentee, be positive about his/her future. Celebrate academic and life successes.

Let the mentee control the direction of conversations. Don't push your mentee to tell you everything. Allow your mentee some time to get to know you and build trust.

Listen. Sometimes your mentee will need to vent about school, home, or friends. By listening to your mentee, you will learn a lot about him/her.

Respect the trust your mentee places in you. Don't judge your mentee or provide unwanted advice when s/he tells you about personal matters. Your mentee will already be getting a lot of advice from authority figures; your job is to be a consistent, non-judgmental friend.

Remember that the relationship is with the mentee. The focus of the match is on your mentee's needs, not those of the family or parent.

Remember that you are responsible for building the relationship. Take the initiative to set up meetings with your mentee. Keep in mind that sometimes mentees are shy about connecting with adults.

Problem Solving

The “SODAS” Method

One of the major obstacles that mentees face is learning to make good, rational decisions. Often youth 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)

Mentoring Resources

Mentoring

TeamMates Mentoring Program www.teammates.org or 1-877-531-TEAM

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership www.mentoring.org.

A web site dedicated to the national mentoring effort. Good general information on mentoring and ideas for National Mentoring Month can be found at this site.

National Mentoring Center and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
NWREL www.nwrel.org . Search for a technical assistance publication about a number of mentoring topics. They can be downloaded and printed free of charge.

Stand By Me (2000) author: Jean Rhodes -- a book that looks at the research done on mentoring programs and highlights the elements of successful mentoring relationships.

Mentoring for Meaningful Results -- a book from the Search Institute with Asset-Building tips, and activities for youth and adults. You can borrow one of these books from your local TeamMates Chapter Coordinator.

Post-secondary Education

EducationQuest

www.educationquest.com

KnowHow2Go

www.knowhowtogo.org

Youthhood

www.youthhood.org

Assistance for specific mentee issues:

TeamMates Safety and Ethics Hotline: 1-888-788-7727

Anorexia & Related Eating Disorders: www.anad.org

Eating Disorder Recovery: www.edrecovery.com

Partnership for a Drug-Free America: www.drugfreeamerica.org

Girl's and Boy's Town National Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-448-3000

National Adolescent Suicide Hotline: 1-800-621-4000

National Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453

Nebraska Abuse Reporting Hotline: 1-800-652-1999

Iowa Abuse Reporting Hotline: 1-800-362-2178