

Mentoring an adolescent isn't necessarily more difficult than mentoring a younger child, but it is different. That means that your training for these mentors and for mentors whose matches are entering the teens will need to reflect the uniqueness of this period of life. But fear not, there are resources available throughout Virginia and the United States. The information below will help you find and access them.

How Do I Begin?

Every mentor needs to know the basics of strong mentoring, including beginning the relationship, building trust, testing the relationship, increasing independence, and moving on. In addition, mentors of adolescents need a general understanding of adolescent development and how teens are influenced by family, peers, community, school, relationships with adults outside the family, and other factors.

Who Can Help?

For resources on training mentors to work with adolescents, you may want to do a little research. Here are organizations that offer training and or training resources that may be relevant:

- The *National Mentoring Center* (www.nwrel.org/mentoring/publications.html) offers a wide variety of publications and training materials for programs and mentoring professionals. All publications are available for download on their Website and may be reproduced and incorporated into other materials as long as appropriate citation is included.
- The *National Mentoring Partnership* (www.mentoring.org) has a wide range of resources to support mentoring programs, including *How to Build a Successful Mentoring Program Using the Elements of Effective Practice*, a comprehensive tool kit containing tools, templates and advice for implementing quality programs, and the *Research Corner*, where you will find the latest research on mentoring theory, practice and programs. Potential mentors will also benefit from information about mentor roles and stories of mentor-mentee pairs.
- *Search Institute* (www.search-institute.org) offers training in building Developmental Assets. Teaching mentors about the assets and what they can do to help youth get them is a great way to help them see the power and potential they have to make a difference.
- Virginia Mentoring Partnership (www.vamentoring.org) offers technical assistance and training support to help start and sustain quality mentoring initiatives, and to prepare both mentors and mentees to make the most of their mentoring relationships. VMP provides mentor and mentee training and training curricula, and offers consultations services and resource development for mentor programs as well.

Try It!

Networking with colleagues in other organizations isn't usually a top priority for busy, dedicated program providers. But sometimes one call, email, or visit saves hours of time and effort. This week, reach out to one person who works with mentors of adolescents. Ask about their training: issues they address, resources they use, frequently asked questions, and so on.

At the very least you'll have checked in with someone who can empathize with the professional challenges you face!

What Can You Do Right Now?

You may not be in a position to revamp your entire training system, but every little step you take makes a difference. You can start by using this simple activity developed by the National Training Institute for Community Youth in Washington, D.C.

Activity: *Walk About, Talk About*

1. Have half your group form a circle facing outward. The other half of the group should form a circle around the others so that each person is facing a partner.
2. Let participants know that they will be asked to introduce themselves to their partners and to talk about a specific topic that you will provide. After each topic they will rotate and repeat the process with new partners and a new topic.
3. Allow two or three minutes of discussion per topic. Then yell “switch,” or use some other attention getter to let people know it’s time to find new partners.

Topic 1—Talk about something you were good at when you were a youth (after this topic have the inner circle rotate four people to the left).

Topic 2—Talk about how it felt to do that thing you were good at. How did you know you were good at it? (Then have the outside circle rotate five people to the left, as long as this leads them to new partners.)

Topic 3—How did you learn to do that thing? Was there someone who taught you? Was there some place you went? Who took you there? Who else was there?

- Participants can sit down after the last topic. Then debrief by asking for volunteers to talk about the thing they were good at and whether there were adults who helped them. If so, what do they remember about those people?
- Close by describing how as youth the adults in our lives had power to help us be and feel successful. They could also make us feel incompetent or like failures. We can learn from these experiences, positive or negative, and draw on them as we form our mentoring relationships with young people.

Makes You Think

The following list of “requests” from adults was written by a 16-year-old and published in the “New Zealand Herald” as well as in *The Spirit of Mentoring: A Manual for Adult Volunteers* (Robin Cox, 2005).

- **Responsibility:** Give us a chance to prove to you that we can be responsible.
- **Respect:** Treat us like you’d like to be treated.
- **Trust:** Don’t judge us just because we are teenagers.... Not all of us are bad.
- **Give Us a Chance:** To make mistakes, learn from experience, and to explain our opinion or our side of the story.
- **Care:** Let us know you care.
- **Support:** We need support; we need to be reassured we are doing the right thing.
- **Understanding:** Listen to what we have to say and understand that we have stresses and problems too. Although they may seem insignificant to you, they are big to us. Being a teenager is not easy: understand this.
- **Balance:** Don’t leave us totally alone. We need you to catch us if we fall.
- **Give us praise:** When we do things that are good or make the right decisions.
- **Freedom:** It may be hard but let us go. We have to leave our own footprints and make our own decisions and mistakes. Part of growing up is finding out who we are, what we value and what we need as a person. Only we alone can make that journey.

Tools for Mentoring Adolescents:

#2 - Making the Most of Mentoring an Adolescent

So you're mentoring a teen? Well, congratulations! You've embarked on an important and potentially very fulfilling journey. You can be a good friend to a person at a critical stage of their development. And you can get a lot of it too. But there will also be times when you'll think you were pretty crazy to take this on. Adolescents are by nature unpredictable. They can't help it—their brains are still developing, especially the parts that will eventually help them control their impulses and make consistently rational choices. Right now they are hard-wired to be reactive and emotional. On the other hand, most teens have matured to the point where they have the capacity to at times be incredibly thoughtful, creative, compassionate, and sensible. And fun. They are beginning to understand themselves as individuals in relationships, their communities, and the world. So, as with many of the potentially great experiences in life, you're probably in for a roller coaster ride. If you are ready and willing, you can hang on and enjoy the thrills and spills and steady times in between! Here are some tips to make it worth the price of admission:

A Place to Start:

Begin by building mutual trust and respect with your mentee. That includes setting reasonable boundaries and working on having good communication (See handouts #5 & 6). In addition, a study of adults who work with adolescents (that includes you, a mentor!) found that adults who are most trusted and respected do the following:²

- Make it clear they see potential rather than problems in the young people they encounter.
- View the young person, not the “activities” they do with the young person, as the priority.
- Convey a sense of power and purpose for themselves and for the young people around them.
- Are described as authentic—real, not phony, with a genuine interest in and concern for young people.
- Are motivated to give back to their communities, neighborhoods, families, and organizations in return for the good things they received from caring adults when they were young.

Makes You Think

Today's teens live in a very different world than those before them. But some things, like some adults having negative perceptions of adolescents, haven't changed much. Check out this quote from Socrates, a philosopher, mentor, and teacher from the 5th century B.C.E:

“Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents, chatter before company; gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.”

The truth is that adults and youth are different, but that doesn't mean adults are right and youth are wrong.

Try It

Tell your adolescent mentee what makes life meaningful to you, and find out what's meaningful to your mentee. You may learn something interesting, and may each be pleasantly surprised by what you hear.

From Good to Great:

In order to be a great, and not just good, mentor to your adolescent mentee, you're going to have to take basic activities to the next level. You're going to have to give something of yourself, and expect certain things of your mentee. Here are some suggestions from *Mentoring for Meaningful Results* by Kristie Probst.³

- 1. Have a heart-to-heart about the ups and downs in every relationship, and stress that they are normal.** The key is to understand it and intentionally find ways to avoid a downward spiral from which it could be difficult to rebound.
- 2. Make plans together.** Brainstorm things that you'd like to do together. One match decided that at every visit they would take turns picking something totally spontaneous to do, and there could be no griping or whining about it.
- 3. Set goals for your relationship.** Make a timeline for all the activities you'll do over the next year. Throw in some really outrageous activities as well as some of your standard, tried-and-true activities. If you live in a rural area, consider an activity that gets you to a bigger city, or vice versa.
- 4. Empower your mentee to share her or his thoughts and feelings—it's crucial.** A natural pitfall for mentors is that they feel obligated to impart wisdom or advice to their mentee. Often, what adolescents need most is to have their mentors listen and empower them to work through problems on their own.
- 5. Be sensitive to your mentee's developmental stage and personal story.** Don't presume to know what is going on in your mentee's life. Today's young people are often dealing with a different set of issues than you may have faced in your youth. Things may be happening that are impacting how your mentee responds to your relationship. Let her or him know that you are there to support, and not judge, no matter what.

What Can You Do Right Now?

Here are four "categories" of things you can do today, tomorrow, later this week, and beyond to strengthen your mentoring relationship.

1. Academic Support

- Help with homework (but don't just do it yourself!).
- Work with your mentee's school or your mentoring program to find a tutor, if your mentee would like one.
- Help your mentee think about education beyond high school. Talk about and even visit places like trade schools, colleges, business schools, and other organizations.

2. Career Exploration

- Find out what your mentee is curious about in terms of careers.
- Help arrange job shadowing for both of you or just your mentee.
- Encourage and help with Internet research about various careers.
- Together with your mentee conduct informational interviews with people in careers of interest.

3. Social Experiences

- Take your mentee out of their neighborhood and yours, be a tourist in your own town.
- Expose your mentee to as many cultural and recreational experiences as you can (explore each other's cultural background).

4. Emotional Support

- Show attention and concern—supports that many mentees may lack in other parts of their personal environment.
- Be someone who will actively listen and give your mentee your full attention.
- Be someone your mentee can confide in (monitor your natural tendency to make assumptions- try to see things from your mentee's point of view).

Tools for Mentoring Adolescents:

#3 – Aren't Mentors for Little Kids?

- It is very likely that your adolescent mentee has asked or been asked this question. Yes, mentors are often adults who befriend young children. But there are lots of people out there who have and want mentors throughout their lives. Some adults even have mentors who are actually younger than them! Mentors are people who have life experience they want to share by spending time with a special person.
- Having a mentor can be a really great experience for an adolescent if both mentor and mentee keep open minds and help make it a good relationship. Here is some information you can use to talk to your mentee if he/she expresses or seems to have negative feelings about having a mentor or if you just need help communicating with your mentee.

Why Would Anyone Want a Mentor?

With a mentor you'll have a chance to learn and do lots of new things. Once you have built some trust you can talk to your mentor about things that are important to you and questions you have. Because every person is unique, every mentoring relationship is unique, but here are some basics:

A Mentor Can Be:

A friend—Mentors and mentees (a person who has a mentor) do fun things together. They also teach each other, help each other, and are honest with each other. And sometimes they might want to have conversations about things that make them feel worried or upset.

A role model—Mentors try to set good examples for how to live. Great mentors do their best to share what they are good at, as well as mistakes they've made and things they still want to learn.

A listener you can trust—Mentors are there to support you and help you when you need it. It's okay to talk about hopes and dreams, fears, and mistakes you've made.

A person who is proud of you—Over time your mentor will see you change and grow and see all the talents to have to share.

A Mentor Is Not: (unless specifically set up that way)

A mentor to your family—While getting to know your family can help your mentor understand you and your life, this is your friendship and your mentor is there for YOU.

A social worker or a doctor—Your life is complicated, everyone's is. In addition to being your friend, a mentor can get you in touch with other people in the community who can support you and help you along the way, as well as resources you may need.

A "fixer"—Your mentor is not trying to change you or make you "better." You have lots of gifts and talents and your mentor is someone who can help you be the best you can be.

An ATM machine—Your mentor is there to give you time, support, and friendship, not money or material things.

What Can Mentees Do?

As a mentee, you have a big role to play in making this relationship work for you. You can start by doing these things:

- **Give your mentor a chance**—At first it may seem like you don't have much in common or like you'll never figure out how to relate. But if you are patient and make an effort to have a positive attitude, you may be surprised by how much you enjoy your time together.
- **Show your appreciation**—Your mentor won't know what you like about the friendship unless you say something. Tell when you've had fun, when you are grateful for time or money your mentor has spent, or when you are just feeling good about the relationships.
- **Be open to new experiences**—You and mentor may visit places or do things together that you've never done before. Give each new opportunity a chance and you may discover things you really like!
- **Share what you know**—Your mentor can learn just as much from you as the other way around. Don't be afraid to share what you know, like, and do well.

Makes You Think

If you have a mentor, you're lucky and you are not alone. In fact, **3 MILLION** kids and teenagers in the United States have mentors.¹

Who Mentored You?

- Together with your mentee check out the Harvard Mentoring Project's Website at www.whomentoredyou.org to learn about famous, successful people and their mentors including: Quincy Jones and mentor, Ray Charles; Oprah Winfrey and her 4th grade teacher, Mrs. Duncan; and Colin Powell mentored by his father.
- Let your mentee know who mentored you or who currently mentors you!

Something to Talk About

Communicating with your mentor is one of the best things you can do to help make your relationship strong. The first or next time you meet with your mentor, try asking and answering this question: If you could have one hour today to talk to anyone in the world, living or dead, who would it be?

The answers should really get you thinking!

Every mentoring relationship cycles through phases as it matures. These phases tend to come in order, but there are many times when you'll feel you've looped back or jumped ahead.

Phase 1: *Beginning the Relationship*

Early on, you and your mentee will be testing the water with each other. Your mentee may feel nervous or wary, and may be on their best behavior for you. They may also get frustrated if things don't go as expected. You, on the other hand, may want to "fix" everything. You may find yourself adjusting your initial expectations about being a mentor once you've experienced it for real. And both of you may be trying to bridge each others' age, cultural, and lifestyle differences as well as finding things in common.

Strategies

- Be consistent and reliable.
- Show you are willing to listen.
- Focus on doing things *with* rather than *for* your mentee.
- Be aware of your own feelings about age, cultural, and lifestyle differences.
- Be nonjudgmental.
- Reach out, be available.
- Be open and honest about what you can, cannot, or have to do.

Phase 2: *Building Trust*

Now that the two of you know each other better and have some shared experiences, you and your mentee may experience greater trust. Your mentee may be opening up, having more self-esteem or simply feeling more confident because you have demonstrated that you care. As a result, your mentee may begin sharing more information, and perhaps relying on you more for support and validation. In this stage there is the possibility of your mentee becoming over-dependent upon you. You may be feeling overwhelmed by the issues and needs of your mentee, or you may be feeling more satisfaction with the relationship.

Strategies

- Be patient.
- Expect setbacks.
- If you think your mentee is becoming too dependent, set limits around the frequency and duration of visits and encourage him to broaden his support network.
- Be involved, yet keep perspective.
- Continue to be consistent and reliable.
- Continue to treat your mentee as capable.

Makes You Think - Research by Search Institute (www.search-institute.org) shows that only 20% of young people think that adults in the community value youth.¹ You can strengthen your mentoring relationship by demonstrating how much you value your mentee's ideas, perspectives, and companionship!

Phase 3: Testing the Relationship

Now that rapport and trust are built, it is typical for the mentee to start testing boundaries, perhaps to see just how much staying power the relationship really has. This testing may include inappropriate requests of you, or even resentment or hostility toward you. You may start resenting what seems like negative behavior, and you might also feel caught in the middle between your mentee, your mentee's family, and other service providers.

Strategies

- Don't take testing personally.
- Reinforce limits, if necessary.
- Continue to treat your mentee as capable.
- Reaffirm your intention to remain in the relationship.

Phase 4: Increasing Independence

Once you have come through the trust building and relationship testing, you may find your mentee becoming less dependent on you and finding other sources of support. On the upside, you might see an increased self-worth in your mentee. However, setbacks are still possible during this stage as your mentee may take bigger risks in life and in the relationship. As a result of all this, you may feel discouraged or less needed during this stage.

Strategies

- Point out the shifts you are observing in behavior and reinforce your mentee's efforts to seek support from others.
- Continue to support your mentee while encouraging independence.
- Expect some setbacks as a natural part of this stage.

When a Mentoring Relationship Ends-

Mentoring relationships evolve over time, and some eventually come to an end. Whatever the reason, it's important to talk with your mentee about the time you spend together, the experiences you had, things you learned, what you liked and didn't like, and so on. If appropriate, leave your mentee with some sort of memento, even just a note or greeting card, of your time together.

Try It -

Research shows that empowering your mentee to select activities you'll do together is one factor that contributes to a strong, successful match. At your next visit create two "idea" jars, one filled with low-cost things that you'd like to do, the other filled with low-cost things that your mentee would like to do. Then draw and do one activity from each jar at each visit.

Tools for Mentoring Adolescents:

#5 – *Let's Get Real: Promoting Positive, Honest Communication with Your Mentee*

Good communication is key to a successful mentoring relationship, and it starts with listening. It is sometimes said that most of us only listen with part of our attention because we are so pre-occupied by waiting for our own turn to talk! The ideas in this handout will help you give 100 percent to communication with your mentee...whether you're speaking, listening, watching, or just being quiet together.

▪ **Engaging in Good Conversation-**

Conversations are the foundation of strong relationships, and strong relationships are the goal of meaningful mentoring. Engaging in the art of conversation does not always come naturally to people, and for many adolescents it can be a territory in which they have yet to build skills. Below are some tips for making conversations work.¹

- **Keep it Going.** Asking follow-up questions or providing open-ended responses to questions are great ways to keep a conversation going. The idea is not to debate a topic, but to learn more. Try, for example, simply saying, “tell me more about that.”
- **Conversation Doesn't Have to be “Heavy.”** It's perfectly okay to talk with your mentee about neutral topics like favorite foods, the weather, movies, and so on. In fact, it can be a good way to build the rapport that's needed to address more personal or sensitive issues. Having many light friendly conversations can pave the way for being able to comfortably discuss more difficult issues.
- **Be Prepared for the Unexpected Answer.** You may ask a question and get an answer you did not want or expect. Try to suspend your own judgment and let young people express their ideas and opinions.
- **Listening is Most Important.** Conversations with young people are better when mentors practice the art of listening—it shows that we care about them.
- **Timing can be Everything.** If you ask a question that is met with silence or “the look,” maybe this isn't the best time for a conversation. Or it could be that the specific question triggers a bigger issue and the timing isn't right yet to “go there.”
- **If You Ask a Question, Answer the Question.** By sharing your own answers to the questions that you ask your mentee, you equalize the boundaries in your communication. If, in contrast, you are always the one eliciting information from your mentee, he or she might feel “in the hot seat” and become less comfortable opening up to you.
- **Try Walking or Driving and Talking.** Sometimes the physical movement, repetition, and quiet companionship of walking together make it easier to talk together too. Similarly, riding in the car provides a quiet, protective environment where eye contact isn't necessary, but where you are in close proximity in a fairly comfortable setting. All of these factors can help the conversation flow.

What Can You Do Right Now?

There are simple techniques you can start using right away to promote positive communication with your mentee without necessarily showing that you agree or disagree with what you are told.



Try It!

The next time you are with your mentee, see if you can listen twice as much as you speak!

Makes You Think

“We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

Epictetus, Greek philosopher

For example:



Encourage—Show interest (*Can you tell me more?*)

Clarify—Get all the information and clear up any confusion. (*How did you react when that happened?*)

Restate—Check meaning and interpretation by repeating back what you think you’ve heard. (*So what you are telling me is...*)

Reflect—Help sort through feelings. (*It sounds like you feel pretty angry about what happened.*)

Summarize—Put together key ideas and facts. (*These seem to be the key ideas you’ve expressed...*)

Validate—Acknowledge the worthiness of your mentee. (*I’m glad you are willing to talk about this.*)

Encourage fantasy—Encourage your mentee to develop a vision. (*Forget the rules for a moment. If you had a magic wand, what would you do?*)

Talking about Tough Stuff:

Most mentors find that at times they need or want to talk with their mentees about sensitive topics like sexuality, alcohol and other drug use, school concerns, hygiene, and others. It’s important to be aware that both you and your mentee might feel anxiety in these situations. You’ll want to take things slow, realize that you don’t have to address all issues or questions at once, call on your mentoring support person if you need to, and do your best...no one expects you to be perfect. Here are some other tips that might help:

- Use “I” statements to express your feelings without blame or judgment. For example, *I feel sad that we are arguing about this because I’d really like to work with you to help you figure this out.*
- Listen; really listen by asking open ended questions, clarifying things that are confusing, paraphrasing to make sure you understand, and letting your mentee tell “the whole story”.
- Show your engagement and openness through your body language. Face your mentee, make eye contact, and relax your body.
- Stay focused on what’s happening now and what you hope will happen in the future. The past is done.
- Keep the conversation about the problem at hand and the needs and issues of the situations. Avoid making the conflict about certain people or their “positions” in the disagreement.

Tools for Mentoring Adolescents:

#6 - Setting Mentoring Boundaries

It is extremely important for mentors to think in advance about setting appropriate limits with their mentee. It's good for the adult, the young person, and the relationship. Adolescent mentees are at a phase of life where they can and should be involved in discussions about those boundaries. However, there remain some things that you as a mentor will need to determine. Boundaries for adolescents need are different than with younger children, because adolescents are beginning to develop autonomy, a strong sense of personal identity, and more emotional, physical, and social maturity.

A Place to Start:

Though there isn't one set of boundaries that can be applied to all mentoring relationships, there are some minimums that are absolutely clear:

- ◆ Violence in the relationship is never okay.
- ◆ Romantic relationships between mentor and mentee are unacceptable.
- ◆ Mentors and mentee must never knowingly be put in danger.

Beyond these basics, the lines are less clear. Think, for example, about the following questions:

- ◆ Would you spend time in your home with your mentee?
- ◆ Would you bring your mentee to an R-rated movie?
- ◆ Talk with your mentee about sex?
- ◆ Tell your mentee about your own experiences using alcohol or other drugs?

The answers may be obvious to you...or maybe not. Mentors responses vary as much as mentors themselves vary. Know when and where you can go for help, talk to fellow mentors and/or program staff.

Try It

The next time you are with your mentee brainstorm a list of general "friendship guidelines." You may include things like: don't talk behind friend's backs, if a friend asks for help do what you can, show respect by showing up when you have plans, and so on. Then talk about whether some or all of these guidelines also apply to your mentoring relationships. You may also want to talk about when you should keep confidences and when you should ask for help (e.g., when someone may get hurt).

What to Consider:

If you are mentoring through an organization, your program staff may have provided you with clear guidelines regarding some boundaries. But even that won't help you "in the moment" when you're trying to deal with a specific situation. Here are five things you can consider as you make decisions about what is or is not acceptable in your mentoring relationship:

1. Is it safe? Is it legal? Is there potential for harm (physical, social, or emotional)?
2. Is it within the rules and guidelines established by your mentoring organization?
3. Have your mentee's parents told you what they expect and will accept, and is it within those guidelines?
4. Will it build Developmental Assets, positive internal and external strengths that help young people thrive, including:
 - a. Support
 - b. Empowerment
 - c. Boundaries and expectations
 - d. Constructive use of time
 - e. Commitment to learning
 - f. Positive values
 - g. Social competencies
 - h. Positive identity

(There are 40 Developmental Assets in all. For more information about how assets work, see www.search-institute.org.)

5. Does it fit your comfort level and expectations of your mentoring relationship?

If the answer to any of the five is no, this may be a sign of a potential boundary conflict. In any case, you must weigh the pros and cons and decide if potential benefits outweigh the potential negative consequences. If you have any concerns about an activity or decision then you should follow up with your program coordinator, your mentee's parents/guardians, or your mentee to clarify any gray areas.

Makes You Think

Adolescent brains are still in development and therefore they depend on adults to help them establish healthy, appropriate behavior boundaries and expectations. As noted by psychologist David Walsh, author of *Why Do they Act that Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen* (2004), "Adolescent brains get the gas before the brakes. Puberty gives adolescents a body that looks like an adult's and a brain that is prone to wild fluctuations and powerful surges. The brain's gas pedal is ready for a NASCAR-paced adulthood. But...the brain's got the brakes of a Model T.... Impulsiveness and risk taking come with the adolescent territory. So [supportive adults] have to function as the brakes—in part by setting and enforcing reasonable boundaries—until the teen brain installs its own set."