Chapter Four
‘The Mentor/Mentee Relationship’

The *relationship* is what mentoring is all about. Like all relationships, it is unique unto itself and it is the quality of the relationship that will determine the effectiveness of the mentoring.

In this chapter, we will explore several aspects of the mentor/mentee relationship including the following:

- Stages of the relationship
- Building trust
- Keys to mentor success
- Problem solving
- Difficult mentor responsibilities: Issues of child abuse and neglect
- Handling common attention seeking misbehaviors
- Motivating and encouraging children

**Stages of the Relationship**

- **Building trust** - This is the first step in developing a relationship, and it is possibly the hardest. It is a time for each of you to feel the other out and decide what things you have in common. Many children may be protecting themselves from disappointment and being deserted by other adults so it may take a long time before they will open up to you. All relationships are different (as are all people), and will develop at different rates. As a mentor, you need to be **consistent** and let the child know you will be there for him through everything (unconditional love and acceptance).

- **Testing** - Once the child begins to trust you, they may begin to test you. They may try to see how much they can get away with when spending time with you. They may make unreasonable requests, miss appointments, show mixed emotions each time you are together, tell you things just to see what your response will be, etc. This is because they are really testing the trust you have begun to develop. Some children can be very slow to trust. Stick to your limits and your confidentiality and they will come to trust you.
• **Problem solving and goal setting** - Now that the child trusts you, you can begin to problem solve and set goals together. What would your mentee like help with? Help your mentee learn to problem solve and make decisions. Help your mentee start feeling responsible for their own life.

• **Honeymoon** - We have a goal and it’s time for the honeymoon stage. The relationship is going well, the two of you have fun together and are getting your needs met. This is the time to create special memories of your time together.

• **Closure** - The end of the school year is coming and may be time to end the relationship. The child may be moving to a new school or you may be moving on and not mentoring next year. Even if you are coming back next year, you will not see the student for 3 to 4 months. This could be a hard transition for your mentee, especially if they have really come to respect you. Begin to prepare for closure 2 to 3 weeks in advance of the last meeting. Discuss the change that is about to occur. Conversations may be centered around:

  - What it will mean to you to have this interaction end
  - How the mentee feels about not seeing you
  - How the mentee feels about the time you spent together
  - What you can do to make this time easier
  - General conversation about meeting people throughout a lifetime, that some will remain friends for life, others will come and go - what the impact of this might be

You may want to give the child a special reminder of your time together. This should be small and meaningful. Maybe you discussed or did something that created a lot of energy and there is an item that you can give that will remind the child of that time.

Encourage the child to talk to the mentor coordinator, a teacher or school counselor if they want a mentor next year.

Remember, each child is unique and has his own needs - hopefully by now you have found out a bit about the child and can make this a special time.

• **Evaluation** - Now it is time to evaluate the relationship. How did it go? What changes would you make? Did you notice any changes in the child? How was the experience for you? It is very important to the program that all participants involved evaluate the program so it can continue to be enhanced for the benefit of all involved. Check with your program to find out what evaluation processes are used.
Building Trust

• Children do not give their trust or affection quickly, particularly when they have frequently had adults come and go in their lives and disappoint them.

• The child will test the mentor at the beginning of the relationship, especially if adults have repeatedly disappointed them. From their perspective, not having a relationship is better than trusting, and then losing the person.

• In general, young people of all ages believe they are not respected by adults and worry about whether a mentor will like them or think they are incapable. Thus it is your responsibility to take the initiative and make the mentee feel more comfortable in the relationship.

• To “make a connection” means to gain the trust of the child and to foster mutual respect. The mentor needs to like and respect children and must be willing to make a sustained personal commitment for the connection to be made.

• Effective listening skills lead to good communication, which in turn is the foundation for relationship building. These skills are based on respect, honesty and responsibility.

• Be caring, warm, friendly, and understanding. Convey that you care.

• Be there consistently- children can tell how much you care from how much you show up. The message the mentors provide is twofold: the child is worth your time and effort because they are a valuable human being, and you can offer ways to expand their horizons and to increase the likelihood that they will achieve success.

• One of the best ways to build trust is to help the child accomplish something that is important to them. First, identify what is important; second, help the child look at the goal realistically; third, break it down to small steps; and explore ways of reaching the goal.

• Being one step ahead of the student will make you feel confident. However, do not be afraid to admit that you do not know an answer or that you have made a mistake. It helps the child to see that adults make mistakes too.

• Give your student a chance to tell you about any personal events that may have happened since the previous meeting - family events, sports, accidents, fears, accomplishments, concerns, etc.
• Help the student develop a positive self-concept by providing them with positive comments.

• It is important to remember to be yourself. Sometimes with the best of intentions, we try to “relate” to children and try to use their slang and be like “one of the gang”. Children can see through this facade and may find it difficult to trust people who are not true to themselves.

• Be patient, realistic and resilient - mentoring takes time spent regularly with your mentee-- and time and patience to see results. Sometimes it can take as long as six months to build a mutually satisfying, trusting relationship.

• You will not see instant turn-around in self-esteem, conduct or academics - however, mentors are usually making much more of an impact than they think they are.

Problem Solving

Problem solving is an inevitable part of life. Daily we are faced with decisions that have to be made. Often these decisions will have a lasting impact and affect others. Mentees need to be empowered to make decisions and solve problems on their own. From the simple problem of choosing what project to do with their mentor to the more difficult decisions related to handling negative peer pressure, youth should be encouraged to think things through and make their own decisions.

Decision making is not always easy. As a mentor you are encouraged to advise and support your mentee as they walk through the problem solving steps. But don’t solve the problem for them. Listed below are key differences between assisting and leading the problem solving session.

As a reminder, giving advice to the mentee is acceptable and often times warranted. If the mentor is an expert in a particular field, the mentee may benefit from specific knowledge or advice. Sometimes a mentee gets “stuck” after going through the problem solving process. In those instances the mentor can give advice about how to precede but not a solution to the problem.

One of the major obstacles youth face, regardless of age, is learning to make good, rational decisions. Often they simply do the first thing that comes to mind or what everyone else is doing, instead of examining their situation and thinking logically of their choices and the possible consequences of those choices.
The SODAS\(^1\) method can be used to help your mentee develop better problem solving skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Look at the situation and describe the problem.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Options</td>
<td>List at least three ways to solve the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>List at least three disadvantages of each option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>List at least three advantages of each option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>Select the best option based on the advantages and disadvantages and accept responsibility for positive or negative consequences.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The SODAS 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 a skill that can be taught and you can help your mentee learn it.

Even with the best efforts to problem solve effectively, there are times when conflict resolution is necessary. Conflict resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them. The disagreement may be personal, financial, political, or emotional, or all of these!

There are seven steps to successfully negotiating the resolution of a conflict\(^2\):

- Understanding the conflict
- Communicating with the opposition
- Brainstorming possible resolutions
- Choosing the best resolution
- Using a third party mediator
- Exploring alternatives
- Coping with stressful situations and pressure tactics

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\(^1\) Developed by Jan Rosa, 1973/Adapted from TeamMates Mentoring Program, Lincoln, Nebraska

\(^2\) Community Tool Box: Training for conflict resolution. [http://ctb.ku.edu](http://ctb.ku.edu)
Keys for Mentor Success\(^3\)

- Honor your commitment to the relationship and your meeting schedule. Inconsistency can do more harm than good.

- **Listen more**; talk less—especially when your mentee is dealing with a problem. Being a good listener - good communication - is a key to good mentoring.

- Respect your mentee; be willing to learn from them.

- Plan activities your mentee wants to do. Identify your mentee's interests and take them seriously.

- Be open, sincere, and resourceful; be yourself.

- Share common experiences, but keep the focus on your mentee.

- Remember that building a relationship takes time. Don’t expect intimacy right away or try to force disclosure of feelings and information. Allow the child to take the lead in establishing trust.

- View your role as being there to give and understand that, at least initially, the relationship may be one directional.

- Offer help and guidance when your mentee is ready and/or asks for it.

- Offer reassurance and understanding regularly.

- Make a connection with your mentee and use that connection to convey positive messages that will promote your mentee's growth and development.

- Set limits. If questions deal with sensitive areas (drugs, sex, alcohol), mentors should be mindful of their personal boundaries. You are not expected to divulge personal information. Only share in ways in which you are comfortable.

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\(^3\) Adapted from Understanding How Youth and Elders Form Relationships: A Study of Four Linking Lifetimes Programs. (1992) Melanie Styles & Kristine Morrow. PP/V. Philadelphia PA
Difficult Mentor Responsibilities: Issues of Child Abuse and Neglect

It is never easy to report or share concerns of abuse and neglect. However, child abuse and neglect is serious and must be addressed. If you suspect that the child you are mentoring is being abused, first report to the Division of Family Services then report it to the school coordinator or school principal. Even if the school is already aware of the situation, it is always better to report your suspicions.

In most states, including Delaware, a person who reports suspected child abuse in "good faith" is absolutely immune from criminal and civil liability. For that reason, most healthcare attorneys will advise a client "that it is far better, in theory, to be faced with defending a civil action for reporting suspected abuse rather than the bleak alternative of defending a civil action . . . if a child is injured or killed as a result of failing to make a report of suspected child abuse."\(^4\)

Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect\(^5\)

All suspected child abuse and neglect of any minor in the State of Delaware must be reported to the 24 Hour Division of Family Services (DFS) Child Abuse and Neglect Report Line at 1-800-292-9582. However, when a child’s life is in danger, you should call 911 immediately, before calling the Report Line.

Online reporting is also available at iseethesigns.org. Online reporting is not for all allegations of abuse and neglect, and the site will give you direction about whether a call to the Report Line is needed.

What should you do if you suspect child abuse or neglect?

- If you observe physical or behavioral indicators, ask Minimal Fact Questions, such as:
  - What happened?
  - When did that happen?
  - Where did that happen?
  - Did you tell anyone what happened?
- Write down the child’s exact words.
- Avoid expressing disbelief, shock or anger, etc.
- Avoid value judgments and accusatory statements.
- Thank the child for telling you and tell the child it is not their fault.
- Tell the child you have to report the abuse to a professional.
- Make a report to the Child Abuse and Neglect Report Line above.

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\(^5\) How to Identify and Report Child Abuse & Neglect in Delaware; Created by the Child Protection Accountability Commission (CPAC), January 2014
Actions to avoid
- Do not interview the child beyond the minimal fact questions
- Do not take pictures of the injuries
- Do not ask the child to undress
- Do not notify the parent/caretaker you are making a report

Information needed to make a report
- Demographics
- Known information about the following:
  - Parents or siblings
  - The alleged child victim’s physical health, mental health, educational status
  - Medical attention that may be needed for injuries
  - How the caregiver’s behavior is impacting the care of the child
  - If the child’s or DFS worker’s safety may be in peril

The following information is to make you familiar with the physical and behavioral indicators of child abuse and neglect. Please note that the presence of these indicators does not necessarily mean a child is being abused or neglected. However several of these indicators may lead you to suspect abuse or neglect and should be reported.

Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators
- Human bite marks
- Bald spots
- Unexplained burns on arms, legs, neck or torso
- Unexplained fractures
- Unexplained bruising, lacerations, or abrasions

Behavioral Indicators
- Reports injury by caregiver
- Shrinks at approach of adults
- Complains of soreness & moves awkwardly
- Inability to use an arm, inability to bear weight
- Cannot tolerate physical contact or touch
- Wears clothing that covers body when not appropriate

Neglect

Physical Indicators
- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress
- Consistent lack of supervision, especially in dangerous activities or long periods
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs
• Distended stomach, emaciated

**Behavioral Indicators**
- Is begging or stealing food
- Has consistent fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep
- States there is no caretaker at home
- Has frequent school absences or tardiness
- Lacks needed medical or dental care
- Abuses alcohol or drugs
- Early emancipation from family

**Sexual Abuse**

**Physical Indicators**
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Torn, stained or bloody clothes
- Pain or itching in the genital area
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Pregnancies
- Sexually transmitted infections

**Behavioral Indicators**
- (Younger) Exhibits extremely sexualized behavior/language that is significantly different from same-aged peers
- (Older) Exhibits sexual behavior involving coercion/manipulation of another child
- Bedwetting/soiling
- Runs away, attempts suicide
- Fear of a specific individual
- Refusal to be left alone
- Significant change in behavior/mood/appetite
- Drop in school performance/attendance

**Emotional Maltreatment**

**Physical Indicators**
- Lags in physical or emotional development (e.g., walking, talking, non-organic failure to thrive)

**Behavioral Indicators**
- Ongoing sleep/appetite disturbance
- Persistent bedwetting/soiling
- Frequent disruptive or aggressive behaviors
- Reports lack of attachment to parent
- Severe withdrawal (e.g., never responding to cuddling, never smiling or making sounds)
- Social isolation
• Starting fires or cruelty to animals
• Fearfulness and clingingness
• Chronic head banging
• Inappropriately adult

Attention Seeking Misbehaviors

A child that wants attention will get it by some means. This is usually done in a positive way. They draw a picture, perform a play or offer an adult the best of what they have as a way to get attention. It's normal for children to need attention and approval. However, attention seeking becomes a problem when it happens all the time. Even charming attention seeking can become controlling. Many children make tragedies out of trivial concerns to get your sympathy.

As long as attention is given when needed, which is usually the case, things run smoothly. However, some children seem to have an insatiable desire for attention. They get positive attention galore yet they want more. They misbehave and quickly realize that certain behaviors can't be ignored by adults and engage in them. Attention seeking, the most notorious reason for misbehavior in young children, can be the seed for discipline problems in later childhood and adolescence.

When handled correctly, your mentee’s need for attention can be a helpful tool for improving their behavior. Eliminate not the need for attention, but those attention seeking behaviors that are excessive or unacceptable.

Motivating and Encouraging Children

As mentors one of the jobs we may take on is that of motivating a child who may be underachieving. It is easy to know what to say to the child who is doing well and has obvious success. Finding something helpful to say to the child who is not the best, whose attempts have not yet been successful, or who is so discouraged that they are afraid to try is much harder.

To encourage a child:

• Focus on what is good about the child or the situation. See the positive.

• Accept the child as they are. Don’t make acceptance dependent on behavior.

• Have faith in the child so that they can come to believe in themself.

• Recognize improvement and effort, not just accomplishment.

• Show respect for the child. It will lay the foundation for self-respect.

Encouragement builds feelings of adequacy by recognizing successes and showing the child exactly what was done well. Make statements such as:

“You read all the words in that paragraph correctly.”
This identifies the accomplishment for the child. It is not necessary for the child to be a top reader for encouragement to be given.

“You remembered that word from the last time you saw it!”
This recognizes a success for the child and gives them something to build on.

“I believe you can handle this.”
Show that you mean it by letting the child continue even if they fail at first. Remember that children may have to try many times before they succeed. Having confidence in the child helps a child to develop confidence in themself.

“Thank you for your help cleaning up the room. I’d be late getting back to work if I had to do it all myself.”
This tells the child what they did that was helpful and why it made a difference to you. This teaches the child that they have an effect on others and can be a contributing part of a group.

“I know you worked very hard on that. I saw you concentrating on what you were doing.”
This recognizes effort even when there is no immediate improvement.

Be specific about what has gotten better.

“You are improving in creative writing. This story had a beginning, a middle and an end.”

“You played by the rules today. You moved only one space at a time.”

“This handwriting is neat. Every word is clear.”

“When we met at the beginning of the year, you made the “J” in your name facing the wrong way. Now you write it the way it should be!”

“Even though you were frightened of the new situation, you did just what you were told. You handled it well in spite of being afraid.”

“By sitting with your friend until the nurse came, you helped them feel better after they got hurt.”
Encouragement is a statement of accomplishment with no strings attached and it must be sincere. Children will recognize efforts to manipulate them if what you say is not true.

The benefits of an encouraging comment can be destroyed by the addition of a demand for further improvement. If we say to a child, “Congratulations. You got two more words right on the spelling test this week than you did last week” and then follow it up with “Now, let’s see if you can keep it up and do even better next week” we will defeat ourselves in our efforts to encourage the child. This is giving with one hand and taking away with the other. It shows doubt rather than confidence and may result in the children doubting themself. They may decide that it’s better not to try than to try and fail.

**Simple Words of Encouragement**

You’re so much fun to be around!

You get better at that every time you try.

Way to go!

You are so thoughtful!

This is a **big** improvement.

You are fun to work with.

Can I put this on the refrigerator so that I can see it every day?

You handled that beautifully.

You’re always teaching me something!

The time I spend with you is really special to me.

I really enjoy being with you.

What a super effort!

**There you go!**

That’s it.

You’re so helpful.

Thank you.

You’re going to make it!

We can do this **together**.

I know you worked very hard on that.

How did you do that?

I believe in you.

It looks like you put a lot of effort into this.

Now you’ve got the idea.

You make it look so easy.

That is an interesting point of view. **Tell me more.**

**Congratulations!**
Good answer. That’s good thinking. Tell me why you chose that answer.

Goal Setting

One of the most important areas in which you can help your mentee is by setting goals. The time for this activity should be fairly early in your relationship—as soon as you feel you’ve established a good level of trust and confidentiality.

It’s usually easier to start with long term goals and then look to see what short term goals present themselves as steps toward attaining the long term goal. For instance, getting good grades is a long term goal that requires shorter interim goals to achieve it, such as handing in homework regularly and on time, creating a quiet space to do homework, learning good study habits, etc.

On the other hand, your mentee may already have some short-term goals they want to achieve—like a good grade on a spelling test this week. If that’s the case, let them lead the way and help them go for it!

The main thing to remember is that your mentee’s goals must be their own, not goals someone else has set for them. Even extremely lofty goals should be respected, and you can show your mentee how to break down that goal into smaller steps on the way to reaching the goal. For example, a good education is an important first step in becoming president of a corporation.

One framework for identifying goals is S.M.A.R.T. goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely). For younger mentees, you can help to guide a goal for your mentee under this framework. For an older mentee, share this framework with them, and allow them to determine if this goal fits.

Specific: A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. Your mentee should be able to define what they want, so it becomes clear what the steps are to achieve the goal. The goal must be set and determined by the mentee.

As a mentor you should also try and assure that the goal is desirable. The goal should be something your mentee really wants to do, not something they feel they must do, or should do. For example, earning a living is something that we have to do, while learning to play baseball may be something we would like to do.

Also the goal should help them grow. The goal should never be self-destructive or be destructive towards others or society. Drinking a six-pack of beer before the next morning is believable, achievable, measurable and
controllable, but is not a goal to be supported. You should be able to guide your mentee toward constructive goals.

**Measurable:** Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal. If the goal is to get an "A" in algebra in the next grading cycle, then your mentee should know what grades he needs to get on tests and assignments.

**Attainable:** When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. The goals your mentee sets must be within his strengths and abilities while still including a bit of a challenge. For example, somebody who has never lifted weights before probably should not set a goal of a 300 lb. bench press by next week.

You should make sure that your mentee feels their goal is **believable.** Your mentee must believe they can reach their goal, and may need encouragement from you to continue to believe in their goals.

**Realistic:** To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. A goal can be both high and realistic; you are the only one who can decide just how high your goal should be.

Your mentee’s reaching the goal should not depend on someone else and should be something that is **controllable** by your mentee. For example, getting a job may depend on the job market and your mentee’s parents’ approval. However, talking to their parents about getting a job or developing a resume are things your mentee can control.

**Timely:** A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it there’s no sense of urgency. Remember the time frame for your mentoring relationship as a way to ensure that your mentee is able to accomplish a goal during your time together.

**Planning for Action**

After your mentee has finished identifying their goals, it's time to talk about an action plan. A good action plan will help your mentee recognize all the steps he needs to take to meet their goals. It also helps your mentee prepare for difficulties they might face. With your mentee, you'll want to discuss:

- What actions are needed to reach the goal
- Who will take those actions (if someone besides your mentee is involved)
- When the actions will be taken
- Resources needed in support of the action
- Difficulties your mentee might face, and possible solutions

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7 Adapted from Community Tool Box: [http://ctb.ku.edu](http://ctb.ku.edu)