

BOOKER PROMISE

Bridging the Opportunity Gap

Building an Effective Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring is not easy. It can be difficult establishing a relationship with a mentee, especially if the student has had poor relationships in the past. You may encounter challenges and this is normal. It is important that you seek assistance, rather than giving up. Many of your peer volunteers may have had the same challenges; you can always reach out for assistance. Below are a few recommended strategies for building an effective mentoring relationship:

- **Be there.** When you show up for every meeting and strive to make things work out you send your mentee a strong message that you care and that he or she is worthy of your concern.
- **Be a positive role model.** Good mentors are respected by their mentees. A mentee can learn much simply by watching how their mentor behaves in any situation.
- **Be a friend, not an all-knowing authority.** Be the adult in your mentee's life who is just there without having to fix him or her. Hanging out and talking is surprisingly helpful to a young person's healthy development. Young people learn more talking with adults than they do just listening to them.
- **Understand your mentee's reluctance to trust.** Many young people have been disappointed by previous relationships with adults. Be patient. It may take a while for your mentee to overcome his or her hesitance and begin to trust you.
- **View your purpose as being available to give.** Understand that, at least initially, the relationship will be one-directional.
- **Offer reassurance and support.** It is important to offer reassurance and kindness to your mentee and remind him or her that you are available to talk at any time. Do not be afraid to tell your mentee that you care about and believe in him or her. Too many young people rarely hear those words. Highlight for your mentee any achievements they may have forgotten. Help build confidence by celebrating their successes.

- **Suggest ways to solve problems.** Try to listen carefully and offer possible solutions without passing judgment. Practical suggestions, rather than criticism or preaching, are usually most helpful. Whenever possible, try to think together of ways to solve a problem, rather than telling your mentee what you think he or she should do.
- **Identify your mentee's interests and take them seriously.** Try to include your mentee in determining both the activities you engage in and the areas in which you offer help. Some mentees will have a lot of suggestions about what you can do together, but most will need a little guidance on your part. If your mentee does not have any preferences, start by offering them a range of choices.
- **Do not force your mentee to talk about personal issues.** Delving into your mentee's personal or family life, particularly early in the relationship, is usually not productive. It is unwise to ask mentees to discuss information they may be ashamed of, such as poor school performance, criminal records or abusive family behaviors. If your mentee resists sharing information, do not push. Silence does not necessarily mean rejection. It is important not to measure a relationship's success by the extent of your mentee's disclosure. On the other hand, you may be surprised by how much your mentee shares with you early on without any prompting or inquiry from you. It is important to determine why this information is being given too early and fully. There is the possibility your mentee may be testing you to see if you are "*shockproof*."
- **Have realistic expectations.** Many mentors become discouraged when they feel their mentees are not "*turning their lives around*." Although you certainly will have an impact on your mentee, it is unlikely that he or she will be totally transformed by this relationship. Gains may seem small, such as showing up for meetings, expressing appreciation, missing fewer school days, but they are, nonetheless, signs of progress. Adjusting your expectations and understanding that your mentee may not always express gratitude directly will help prevent mentor "*burnout*" and frustration.
- **Try to relate to your mentee's personal experiences.** Although you may not have faced the same problems as your mentee, try to remember some of the difficulties you had growing up.
- **Attempt to understand your mentee's family, social class, and culture.**