



# *Wings of Eagles*

Hobbs Municipal Schools  
Mentorship Program

## A Guidebook for Mentors

by Jim Kavanaugh, Ph. D.

In Conjunction with the City of Hobbs  
& the Community Drug Coalition of Lea County

# **Wings of Eagles**

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A Revised & Updated Version of  
Everyday Heroes: A Guidebook For Mentors

*In partnership with the  
Community Drug Coalition of Lea County  
and the City of Hobbs*

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 Editing: Hilary Heyl, MSW, d.b.a. Upward Endeavors  
 Pauline E. Mares, Youth Violence Coordinator, Injury Prevention & Emergency  
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 Health  
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 organization; and Jim Kavanaugh, Ph.D., the author. For permission contact Kenneth J. Carson, Sr.,  
 Founder & Director, Wise Men & Women Mentorship Program, "Los Sabios", 1016 Juan Tabo Blvd  
 NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87112, 575-271-2066, or Barak Wolff, Chief, IPEMS Bureau, New Mexico  
 Department of Health, PO Box 26110, Santa Fe, NM 87502, 575-476-7000.

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**THIS BOOK IS NOT TO BE SOLD. DONATIONS GREATLY APPRECIATED.**

## **SPECIAL THANKS FROM THE AUTHOR**

To:

The volunteer mentors within the Hobbs Municipal School District, and other communities across the country.

The founder of the Wise Men & Women Program, Kenneth Carson, Sr., who pioneered our school-based program with inspiration, wisdom, and endless patience.

All children who allow kind strangers to befriend them – and who use their experience to help others.

My wife, Selena, and my daughter, Maria Alexa, who continue to let me sit at the computer whenever I have a chance.

And lastly, to Marisol Cardenas, Mentoring Coordinator of Hobbs Municipal Schools, the wind beneath this copy of “Wings,” who provided the vision, persistence, and hours of help to make this manual fly.

## **PREFACE**

The purpose of this guidebook is to help adults to become caring and effective mentors, particularly to children and youth who are at risk of violence, drug abuse and other social problems. It is based upon the values and understandings of the Wise Men & Women Mentorship Program, “Los Sabios.”

The Hobbs Municipal Schools Mentorship Program is focused on children in grades K through 12, or ages 6 to 17 years. We believe that we can make the most impact in the development of moral character and in the prevention of social violence during this formative period. However, this guidebook will also be useful for serving older adolescents.

We view this guidebook as an essential resource for training new mentors. Mentorship is an ongoing learning experience which can take many forms such as reading, experiential exercises, small group discussions, “getting your feet wet” and the real stuff of mentoring.

Feel free to use this guidebook to your own advantage. For some, there may be more information than you need. Others may want more. By all means, jot down your ideas wherever you wish. We hope you will work through this guidebook thoroughly, in your own manner, and wear it out over time.

After using this guidebook, you may decide that mentoring is not appropriate for you at this time. We understand. We appreciate people taking the time to seriously consider this decision. You can help us with our mission, however, by sharing this guidebook with someone you know who may be interested in becoming a mentor.

If you do go on to become a mentor of the Hobbs Municipal Schools Mentorship Program, remember that this text is just a beginning, a launching pad for your own self-powered efforts. As you will discover, the heart of mentoring lies in the relationship itself and the most valuable resources reside in your own experience as a person. The real journey will depend on you – on your willingness to befriend a child, to learn together as you go along and to hang in there through thick and thin. The best mentors are lifelong learners. In going out of their way to help a child, their goodness becomes heroic.

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# CHAPTER ONE



## The Heart of a Mentor

## "I KNOW HE'LL COME" A MENTEE'S STORY

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Miguel was having another bad day. Before the morning bell rang, he had gotten into two fights, one with a classroom friend in a shoving match over a soccer ball, the other with an older bully, both swinging fists. Miguel had woken up with a battlefield attitude, unwilling to take any teasing from anyone. Luckily, Coach Ted had noticed the scuffle and broken it up before any black eyes. In exchange for a truce, he didn't file a report.

The night before Miguel's father had come home drunk, as he often did, stumbling and shouting until he fell asleep, directing most of his anger at Miguel, the oldest of five kids, and at Mom, his defenseless ally. This time he screamed back at his alcoholic Papa, before running outside and hiding in the truck from consequences.

Miguel's Dad, an immigrant from Mexico, was a laborer for a large building contractor down in Albuquerque. At least, this is where he and his *compadres* had found work for the winter. He didn't mind the long hard days. In fact, they distracted him from all his worries about providing for his family and keeping up with the rent, about making it with his street English and little education in America. However after work was different. Both relieved and burdened, he and his buddies would frequently pick up a case of beer from the mini-mart for their long drive home to Santa Fe.

Like his Papa, Miguel was a survivor. Although teased by his peers as a "mohado" or "wetback," he was determined to master the language, dress, and pop music, to blend into the big melting pot, even to succeed in school. But it was hard paying attention in the classroom, particularly after one his Dad's binges. It was as if he was also hung-over, swimming in negative thoughts. It just didn't seem fair: his father's problem, the way his Mom was treated, their poverty, the teasing... At times like this, Miguel wanted to strike back at the world and to find an easier way.

And that's exactly what he did. He tried to steal a girl's lunch money from her sweater, but was caught, and sent to wait at the principal's office until one of his parents arrived. Which meant a long sit for Miguel, knowing that his Dad was building someone's house, and his Mom babysitting someone else's children. The school's only counselor, always extra busy, rarely had luck trying to track his folks down, and seldom had much time to spend with Miguel. Today however, she did manage to contact Miguel's mentor at work.

Juan, Miguel's mentor, was by far the best thing the boy had going for himself at school. He didn't even mind using his lunch hour to visit with his big "*amigo*," whom he looked up to in many ways. Juan was a hero to him, a Chicano from Los Angeles, who worked as a engineer for the state, and once played professional soccer. "*Eres como familia...* You're like family," Juan would tell the boy. "We need to take care of one other."

His mentor was also new to New Mexico, still getting used to the climate and challenges of the high desert. But unlike Miguel's father, Juan had found his way without falling to alcohol, and in spite of dropping out of school a few times, he learned to pick himself up, regain his confidence, and continue towards his goals. "Si, tu puedes...You can do it," he would reassure Miguel, who looked forward to hearing his friend's words of hope. "And your family can also, my friend. We must all keep trying."

Since the beginning of the school year, sun or snow, Juan had visited Miguel every week. Both fond of construction, they would build different things from popsicle sticks, leggos, and whatever Juan found lying around. The hour would pass like a short recess, doing "guy things," bridging their worlds of man and boy through trust, or "*confianza*" as Juan would call their bond. At the end of each meeting, Miguel returned to class with some arts and crafts reminder of their unique friendship and its power to make good things happen. "*Vez, mi amigo*, see my friend, what we can do."

Finally the lunch bell rang and Miguel watched the others run outside, or to the cafeteria, a place that he wanted to check out more, that got him into trouble. As the counselor brought him his bag lunch and tried to cheer his spirits, the boy prepared himself for a long boring day. Eating alone, he kept thinking, "I know he'll come. Juan will show up."

Lunchtime took forever. Lost in daydreams, trying to survive, he hardly noticed the students file back into their classrooms.

"*Que pasa hombre?*," Miguel heard someone say. It was Juan. He had gotten off work to come see him. "We need to get things moving here," he said to the boy, holding up a box of a model airplane. "Yes, " Miguel cheered, as he held up his hand for a "high five." "You've saved me *amigo*."

Juan knew, however, that he really couldn't rescue the boy from his alcoholic father and the family's poverty. He could, however, boost the boy's mood, remind him of his worth, and offer him his friendship. And while gluing together their jet airplane, he could tell Miguel a learning story about stealing. Even more, today before leaving, he would visit with the counselor, express his concern again for the boy's welfare, and asked if he may need some outside help.

Juan was worried about his little friend, and although he knew that his role was not one of therapist or counselor, he realized that he did make a big difference as a reliable mentor. "I have to keep coming," he thought to himself on his way out of school. "I'm one of the few people he can count on."

# Hobbs Municipal Schools Mentorship Program

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## *OUR MISSION STATEMENT*

The purpose of the Hobbs Municipal Schools Mentorship Program is to help children and youth to discover positive solutions in their everyday lives by establishing a caring relationship with a mentor. Just as important is to make adults aware of what they can contribute as mentors to the development of young people.

Our primary intentions are to help children to:

- feel good about themselves;
- recognize their unique potential;
- set reachable goals for their future; and
- become peaceful and responsible citizens.

Our secondary goals are to:

- provide support to teachers and counselors;
- make schools friendly places for volunteers; and
- involve communities in child raising.

## *HISTORY*

The Hobbs Municipal Schools Mentorship Program is a school-based program focused on children in grades k through 12, or 6-17 years of age. Based on the Wise Men & Women Model, it was established in 1997 and currently operates in ten elementary schools and one middle school within the school district.

The Wise Men & Women Mentorship Program, “Los Sabios,” was established in 1992 through the initiative of Kenneth J. Carson, Sr. a New Mexico retired postal manager who was motivated to give something back to the boys and girls of the community in which he grew up.

## *THINGS WE BELIEVE IN*

- Given the high rates of unemployment, drug use, violence, and family disintegration in our poorest neighborhoods, almost any child who lives there can be called “at risk.”
- As an African saying goes, “It takes a whole village to raise a child”—which includes kind and committed mentors.

- One caring relationship with an adult outside the family can make a big difference, leaving a positive imprint on a child for the rest of his/her life.
- People in all cultures have been mentoring since the beginning of humankind.
- A strategic time to intervene in a child's development is during the ages 6-14, when he/she is old enough to understand the values and still young enough to care.
- The most important aspect of mentoring is the relationship itself. It is the built-in benevolence, trust and sincere dialogue which helps to build "good character."

## *A SCHOOL-BASED MODEL*

One of the central features of the Hobbs Municipal Schools Mentorship Program is that mentors meet with children on school grounds. Given that available space is rare at schools, this may mean the counselor's office, the cafeteria, the parents' room or sometimes the playground.

The school was chosen as the service site for many reasons:

- It is a familiar community place for children and parents.
- Children associate school with learning and making friends.
- Children, who have an endless appetite for attention, learn to accept that mentors have a specific time and place in their lives. Busy volunteers don't have to worry, "Where do I take him next?"
- Teachers and counselors have their hands full. The individual time which a mentor spends with a child benefits everyone.
- At a time when the fear of child abuse is acute, a public setting makes good sense.

YES, YOU CAN DO IT!  
ORIENTATION + SKILLS TRAINING *should* = READY TO GO!

"Training" is kind of an awkward term, used in a variety of contexts, from teaching dogs to sit and stay, to instructing pilots how to fly. With regards to mentoring, training has more to do remembering than learning new tricks. That is, befriending a child is a natural process of social behavior, embedded in our history as a species, and if fortunate, found in own childhood experiences. In this sense, mentor training is "relearning" how to be a good friend, like a special person we once knew, the coach or teacher, uncle or grandma. As human beings, we are all gifted with an innate potential to offer our trust, caring, and emotional support to others, especially the young.

Many of us, however, forget this inheritance. Or it becomes a bit rusty from lack of use. We may not have children of our own, or may not "hang out" with other kids. As adults, or "grown-ups" in their eyes, we lose touch with the world of childhood, particularly in our 21st century of increasing complexity, with gangs, drugs, violence, abuse, depression, and on and on social problems among the young. Mentoring, from a new millennium perspective, may not look so easy, especially with a child at-risk of going astray.

So effective mentoring programs provide "*Skills Training*" in the old art of befriending a new generation child -- of approaching the journey with confidence, guiding principles, and behavioral tools. As normal as pilots learning to fly a plane, beginning mentors are full of anxieties and questions:

*Will the child like me?*

*What should we do together?*

*What do I say when he asks...?*

As with *Orientation*, one of the main goals of *Skills Training* is to build self-confidence, to strengthen the belief that "*I can do it*" and reinforce the feeling that "*I'm ready to go*." Such relationship preparation can take place in different ways. In fact, research studies inform us that learning methods, hours of initial training, and discussion topics tend to vary across programs. In general, however, there are some common principles:

- ✓ Provide a minimum of 6 hours of pre-match training.
- ✓ Review communication & relationship building skills.
- ✓ Share up-to-date info on child development issues.
- ✓ Practice behavior management methods.
- ✓ Mix open dialogue with hands-on exercises.

This training manual is based on the mission, goals, and philosophy of the school-based mentoring program, "Wise Men & Women." The contents this chapter and all sections to follow revolve around one central theme: *good friendship*. From "The First Meeting" to "Saying Goodbye," using various methods for different learning styles, the basic message is still the same: *caring trust relationship*. And as old as our innate people skills may be, training to be a mentor -- *learning to be a good friend* -- *never ends*.

MENTOR TRAINING is an ONGOING LEARNING PROCESS  
where ADULTS TAP and ENHANCE their INNATE ABILITIES  
to NURTURE SUPPORTIVE FRIENDSHIPS with CHILDREN.

## MATCHING or LINKING UP

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Whereas *Orientation* and *Training* are primary ingredients of effective mentoring programs, *Matching* specific volunteers with certain children is secondary in importance. That is, while *Linking Up* an adult-child pair is a necessary step, finding the "right match" is not. In fact, mentoring research indicates that the "perfect fit" is a subjective notion. Just like in a marriage, where individuals can appear as different as Venus and Mars, supportive trust relationship evolves over time. Look at our own friendships, how unique each combination, how involved each story.

There is no evidence that one strategy of linking a mentoring pair is better than all others. Some programs allow the children and mentors to choose themselves. Others try to form a match based on common interests and backgrounds. And many community programs, with a slow stream or small pool of volunteers, are happy just to provide an at-risk child with a safe, caring someone. This is perhaps the most critical element of a good match: the qualities of the mentor -- their interest, kindness, and reliability.

Maybe the matchmakers of old understood this relationship-forming principle, *linking up* distinct individuals, not so much according to their sizes, shapes or colors, but rather their personal qualities. The good ones were probably intuitive types, "people persons," not social engineers. Matchmaking was more of an art, less like science. There is something of the same magic with forming mentoring relationships. In fact, it is easier than it looks. Like magnets, the interest of a caring adult readily attracts the openness of a needy child. The quality of relationship that evolves depends on the strength of their bond.

Nonetheless, human magic aside, there are some practical matching principles:

- ☐ The most important considerations are the child's preferences.
- ☐ Difficult kids may need mentors with more behavioral skills.
- ☐ Depressed children can benefit from active, optimistic adults.
- ☐ Same-race matches can be supportive to children in need of a stronger cultural identity or sense of community belonging.
- ☐ Cross-gender matches can provide opportunities for acquiring tolerance, appreciation of differences, and broader world views.
- ☐ Some girls may find needed gender support from kind women.
- ☐ A positive adult male can ease the hurt for boys of absent fathers.
- ☐ Above all, do not seek a perfect match. Support each friendship.

You cannot really go wrong, if the mentor is a reliable person of kind character. In fact, in our small global world with increasing interaction between ethnic groups, in which tolerance is becoming an essential human skill, diversity in mentoring matches may be a learning asset. In truth, most kids served in our programs come from ethnic minority populations, while the majority of mentors are dominant-group, college-ed professionals.

*Effective mentoring programs make diversity a learning opportunity.*

# CHAPTER TWO



# RELATIONSHIP IS EVERYTHING



# MENTOR AS ARCHETYPE

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## As Old as Greek

Although the words "mentor" and "mentoring" sound new and awkward to many people, their roots are as ancient as Homer's Odyssey. "A mentor was an old friend of Odysseus," the tale goes, "to whom the king entrusted his household when he would sail." He was a good friend of great trust.

Human beings throughout history, whether they were hunters, gatherers, or factory workers, have always formed supportive relationships outside of their nuclear families. Therefore, we can assume that there have always been mentors. As aunts, uncles, godparents, good friends, neighbors, or just "the elders," people have naturally and informally assumed this special role with the young. In fact, within the Indian pueblos of northern New Mexico, it was not too long ago that all the children addressed all the adults as "aunts and uncles." The whole village was responsible for child raising. Elders had a shared duty as mentors: to give kids their attention, to offer unconditional support, and to maybe tell a good story. Most of us can hopefully remember, sometime during our childhood, such a caring person, other than parents, who took a special interest in our life.

## Universal Qualities

The psychologist, Carl Jung (1964) used the word "archetype" to refer to a shared concept or pattern of behavior inherited from our experience as a species, stored in the human mind. The role of the mentor, the friendly helper, is such an archetype. When asked in training workshops to describe the essential qualities of a mentor, volunteers consistently come up with similar responses:

- a good listener
- available
- dependable
- nonjudgmental
- honest
- kind
- supportive
- unconditional
- inspiring
- with humor

In sum, a mentor is a positive "role model" in the eyes of children -- one who models or "walks the talk" of being a good person. He or she embodies the best of human values, and the best of people friendship.

A mentor is not a teacher or counselor, priest or parent. Not one more grownup that tells children what they are supposed to do, ought to be, or should believe. In the big picture of a child's development, a mentor is a more neutral kind of caring guide, that opens up new directions to explore. He does not prescribe the "right path" for a child, but allows the young person to have a say on things, even to take the lead in their relationship, and to uncover learnings on one's own. A mentor provides safety for a child to feel happy.

## Giving Back

According to another important psychologist, Eric Erickson (1986), adults have an innate drive or tendency to pass on their gratitude for life to younger generations, and to improve the world for them. Many volunteers who become mentors report that they want to "give back" to their communities. In Erickson's view, this is what we should be doing as we grow older. Acting on our instinctive call to mentor children, and return to life some of its goodness, constitutes a hallmark of successful adult development.

## Where Did All the Mentors Go?

Why is it such a challenge to recruit volunteers? If mentoring is truly something innate in us humans, where did all the mentors go? Why is it that we have to fund and develop formal "mentorship programs" in our society and to train people for this role? As with any complex social question, there is no easy answer. However some historical trends may help us to understand our present situation:

- While people have always moved around in our country, the automobile increased our speed. With more frequent changes in jobs and residences, nuclear families often ended up far from their extended family members.
- Urban-based economies steered many people away from small town life.
- With a steady increase over the decades in the cost of living, most people have had to work more, resulting in homes without moms and dads for longer periods of time.
- Long lists of other factors, such as poverty, unemployment, drug use, teen pregnancy, marital tension and child abuse, have broken homes into smaller units, creating foster families and communities of single parents.
- Crime, gangs, drugs, random violence, and now national terrorism, have grown into another kind of list -- one of fear. Many people today do not feel safe on their own block.
- Neighbors are commonly strangers. Gang leaders are some youth's only mentors.
- Far from the old villages that collectively raised their children, today we call the child "fortunate" who has two loving parents and a safe, stable home. The boy or girl who has one positive relationship with an adult outside the family is "lucky."
- "Who has time to mentor?," recruiters hear. "It's enough taking care of our own kids."

## Everyday Heroes

"I finally realized that things weren't going to get better," explained a new mentor, "unless I did something myself." Most U.S. citizens work hard all day, return home to care for their own children, and watch the news on TV. The changes in our world, whether in Washington or New Mexico, seem to be shaped by others. It feels impossible to make a difference. "Why even bother?," many think. Mentoring, in its broadest context, can be defined as *a meaningful act of community renewal*. Our neighborhoods can only be sewn back together, one relationship at a time, by the good will of those who live there. Wherever we reside, the inner-city or rural town, we are all responsible for the life outside our door, up the road, and around the corners. Above all, this life includes the children. In conclusion, the true heroes of our time are not the Hollywood or NBA stars. They are the kind people who live nearby, who work and manage a home like everyone, but who also make time for others. In an age when children are truly starving for attention, when change requires inconvenience and extra miles, mentoring is a heroic act.

# CURATIVE RELATIONSHIP

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## Relationship Can Heal

Because there are so many children these days who could benefit from a caring mentor, and because there are so far less adults willing to volunteer, most of the children in mentoring problems are the most disadvantaged. They are the kids of minority groups, and of lower income, troubled, broken families. In most cases they have been hurt or disappointed by adults in some way. Relationship is not something to be trusted, and the world of grownups is not a safe place.

One of the fundamental principles of mentoring is that a healthy, adult-child relationship, characterized by dependability, trust, and caring -- is a healing process -- in and of itself. That is, when children experience with an older person the unconditional regard and support which we call "friendship," they naturally begin to see themselves and the world with more light. The positive presence of a mentor challenges negative views about grownups -- those big people in control who can do and say mean things -- who can make a little person question his or her self-worth and sense of belonging. In the kind and interested eyes of a mentor, shining week after week, it is hard for a child not to believe that "I am special -- at least to this adult -- from my own community." In the elder's unwavering belief in the child's potentials, countering each doubt with encouragement, it does seem more possible that "I can do it." This relational process of rediscovering one's sense of worth, belongingness, and efficacy, is curative. It mends the negative thoughts and feelings with more nurturing ones. And it opens up a world of possibilities.

## *A CURATIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP*

- involves regular and long term contact
- protects the rights and dignity of the child
- focuses on the child's needs and interests
- relies in large part on active listening
- uses communication at the child's level
- challenges doubt with encouragement
- exchanges warmth, caring, and openness
- explores themes important to a child's life
- builds upon a child's strengths and esteem

## *ON THE OTHER HAND, MENTORING IS NOT*

- a casual and short term undertaking
- a replacement for parents and family
- a form of tutoring or a teacher substitute
- a quick-fix solution or type of counseling

## *AND MENTORING IS NEVER A PLACE FOR:*

- emotional, physical, or sexual abuse
- religion teaching or conversion
- drug or alcohol experimentation

## SMALL ACT, BIG DIFFERENCE

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Although mentoring disadvantaged children is not a problem-focused or solution-oriented endeavor such as counseling or psychotherapy, it can help them to be happier, healthier, and wiser. In fact, scientific research indicates that a common ingredient in many forms of effective counseling is the unconditional positive regard expressed by one person for another. That is, just giving a child caring attention can make a difference.

How does such change happen? How exactly can a mentor help to improve a child's life? What specific outcomes can result from their time together? And what does science have to say about this "curative relationship"?

Unfortunately, empirical evidence from controlled scientific studies are scarce in the field of mentoring. However over the past 10 years, the Big Brothers / Big Sisters Program, with the assistance of an organization called Public / Private Ventures, has begun to fill in this knowledge gap. While many of their findings derive from more qualitative measures such as questionnaires and surveys, one controlled study led by Tierney and Grossman in 1995, using participants of BB / BS, offers the most conclusive evidence that one-to-one friendships can produce significant changes. In sum, children with reliable mentors may:

- be less likely to use drugs
- be less likely to hit others
- report more + peer relations
- feel more able to do well in school
- skip fewer days of school
- receive slightly better grades

How such individual change occurs, or why a child decides to steer away from drugs, is a part of a longstanding conversation in the human sciences. In truth, there may be many reasons why a boy with conflictive peer relationships may try harder to get along, or demonstrate more constructive behaviors, somehow influenced by his or her mentor. Provided below are some possible ideas about the dynamics of this curative relationship

- ☐ Mentors may make children feel unique and valuable as individuals: "*He likes me.*"
- ☐ Their consistent, unconditional support may help children to feel safer in their worlds.
- ☐ Such trusting attachment may increase the ability of a cautious child to form nurturing relationships with others: "*I can count on some adults -- and it does feel good.*"
- ☐ Negative memories of adult relationships may be replaced with more positive images.
- ☐ As mentors role model positive values, attitudes, and behaviors, they teach by example and encourage their mentees to do likewise: "*I want to be more like her.*"
- ☐ Mentors can help children to explore and discover other solutions to their problems, promoting critical thinking, creativity, and self-reliance: "*There are other ways.*"
- ☐ Negative thoughts about oneself may give way an increase in self-worth and hope.

All or some or more of these factors may set the stage for an individual change -- even make a child think twice when offered drugs. In sum, mentoring is considered to be more *prevention-oriented*, in contrast to treatment-focused. While it may not solve certain problems right away, it can provide *building blocks for healthy development*. In fact, many of its benefits may occur later in one's life, as the adult, once a child, remembers and utilizes the lessons from the positive experience.

# ATTACHMENT THEORY

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## We Were All Infants

One of the most critical variables in the healthy development of a child is the quality of early relationship with one's parents or adult caregivers. Bowlby, the British psychiatrist, studied and wrote extensively on this topic (1973, 1980, 1982). He proposed that safety and closeness with caregivers is not only essential for the physical survival of an infant, but that is also shapes how a baby's learning and growth will unfold.

The absence of secure, early relationships with adults appears to put children at-risk later on in life. Establishing a basic sense of trust is a central task during a child's first years (Erickson, 1963). The quality of attachment with adult caregivers determines whether a child will view the world as a place of security, where big people can be counted on, or an unreliable place, where grownups must be feared. Only with trust comes a sense of individual efficacy, a knowing that one can and will get a response from others: "When I cry -- Mommy will come and comfort me."

A secure and close attachment, however, is not some instant glue. It evolves over time, from a regular flow of positive interactions between infant and adults, repeated again and again, a nurturance cycle in which the child learns to trust the responses of the caregivers. As the infant becomes increasingly aware of her social world, she reaches a cognitive milestone called "object permanence" (Piaget, 1952). She understands that objects and people exist even when they are not in her view or presence. Attachment then becomes a more two-way process, a reciprocal giving relationship that continues to mature.

Although nearly all infants form attachments with caregivers, these relationships can vary significantly in quality. Bowlby broadly categorized attachments as either "anxious" or "secure." Whereas a secure attachment provides a child with a loving, consistent, and safe platform from which to explore his or her world, an anxious attachment fosters a troubled sense of insecurity. Never quite sure of the caregiver's availability, the child learns to worry. How and when to make contact is a kind of scary puzzle.

Why is all this so important to mentoring? Why is it beneficial for mentors to understand this "attachment theory."

First of all: Many at-risk children have anxious, early attachments.

Secondly: The safety of a mentor friendship can help restore trust.

Thirdly: Principles of attachment theory can help guide mentors.

## More Teachings of Attachment

- *Attachment shapes the child's brain.*

Neurobiological research indicates that positive interactions with caregivers stimulate the orbitofrontal region of the brain, key to emotions, empathy, and personal memory.

- *Early trust relationships form a life defense shield.*  
Secure attachments serve as protective mechanisms. Even in the face of trauma and hardship, such as child abuse, the early presence of a caring adult can help children to bounce back. (Garnezy, 1987, Werner, 1997, Blum & Rinehart, 1997).
- *Secure attachment (+) impacts social behavior and school achievement.*  
Trusting early attachments can positively shape the growing child's sense of self, expectations of others, sense of self-efficacy, and guidelines for social behavior. (e.g., Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985, Urban, Carlson, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1991)
- *Disruption of early attachment can cause harm.*  
Early disrupted attachment can result in protest, despair, and detachment with a child. Bowlby (1982) believed that violence and crime are disorders of disrupted attachment, characterized by a lack of concern for others.
- *There is a link between disrupted attachment and delinquency.*  
Longitudinal studies substantiate the existence of a "developmental pathway" between disruptive behaviors in childhood, and delinquency and substance abuse in adolescence. (McGee, Partridge, Williams, & Silva, 1991; Richman, Stevenson, & Graham, 1982)  
Insecurely attached children may develop internal models in which relationships are viewed with anger, mistrust, and insecurity. (Greenberg, Speltz, and DeKlyen, 1993)

### "Secure Mentoring"

*Other caring adults can function like attachment figures.* When a child is upset at school, for example, a kind teacher or mentor can serve as a secure base of comfort and support. Similar to a responsive caregiver, closely "attuned" to his or her infant's cues and signals, a mentor who actively listens to a child may activate similar feelings of reassurance. Provided below are some basic principles of securely attached interaction, useful in forming strong mentoring relationships.

(Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978, DoWolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997).

- Be consistent with your meeting attendance.
- Be resolute in your long term commitment to the relationship.
- Stay "attuned " -- or in sync with the child's nonverbal signals, where both people feel heard and understood.
- Engage in "reflective dialogue." Encourage the child to express his or her inner world of thoughts and feelings.
- Respond to a child's difficult moments with care and compassion.

*From each special moment together, out of every positive interaction, a new bond of trust is strengthened, and hopefully old ones repaired, making the mentor a trusting friend in the mentee's changing world.*

# RESILIENCE & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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## Risk Factors

Children may be referred to as "*at-risk*," when they seem more vulnerable than normal to difficult moods or negative behaviors. That is, when they seem more likely than other kids to become depressed, irritable, or oppositional. Or when they display a stronger tendency to engage in aggression, alcohol / drug abuse, or other social misconduct. Because of several possible factors such as their natural temperament, early childhood, family history, home environment, and cognitive / learning abilities, they may develop a predisposition for unhealthy or troubling development.

Provided below is a list of the more recognized and influential "*risk factors*," which touch several domains of the child's world: i.e., personal, family, community, school, and peers (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Catalano & Hawkins, 1995, Howell, 1995):

- ☐ irritable, oppositional, or depressive temperament
- ☐ learning difficulties and academic failure
- ☐ poverty or parent difficulty to adequately provide
- ☐ anxious or disrupted early attachments
- ☐ low self esteem or negative image of self
- ☐ child abuse or other traumatic experiences
- ☐ mental illness or discord in family system
- ☐ family isolation and lack of social support
- ☐ exposure to drug or alcohol abuse
- ☐ danger and fear in the community
- ☐ negative peer influence and relationships

One or more of the following factors, commonly interacting with one another, can make a big difference in the development of a child. In spite of such unfavorable conditions, however, they "are not predictors" of health or life success. In fact, some researchers believe that most children can effectively cope with low to moderate levels of risk (Smeroff, Sierfer, Barocas, Zax, & Greenspan, 1987). It appears that it is the number or accumulation of risk factors that jeopardize the young person's growth. In other words, poverty and a drug invested neighborhood may compromise a child's coping abilities, but if the parents also abuse drugs, or harm each other, or divorce, one's chances for success can dramatically decrease. And certainly, insecure early attachment or any form of child abuse can easily tip the scale -- towards trouble.

## Protective Factors

On the brighter side of things, more positive elements or "*protective factors*" can buffer children from the damaging impact of identified risks, allowing one to succeed where another might flounder (Resnick, 1971). Having a mentor is such a proven safeguard.

In other words, two brothers from the same divorced parents and low-income apartments may have different academic and conduct stories if one has a kind friend who visits each week. As with risk factors, the more recognized "protectors" come from many domains:

- positive and flexible temperament
- interest in learning and positive school attitude
- nurturing and dependable early attachments
- stable, open, and supportive family system
- peaceful resolution of family conflicts
- high self esteem and positive image of self
- community participation and sense of belonging
- minimum exposure to drug or alcohol abuse
- involvement in constructive recreation
- **supportive adult friend outside of family**
- positive peer influence and relationships

One other noteworthy factor, which results perhaps from some of the above, is **the ability and opportunity to build relationships with caring adults** -- or the confidence to seek and gain the support of others (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Mentoring also builds this social competence, as children learn to trust their new acquaintance and to initiate relationship activities: "Come on...let's you and I do this..."

### Resilience

Protectors serve as a kind of defense shield for a child, buffering him or her against the many things that can go wrong in one's world. With a developing self, vulnerable to the exposure of negative risk factors, the presence of a caring mentor and other protectors can help the young person to bounce back and rebalance. Researchers refer to this ability as "resilience." (Rak & Patterson, 1996). In fact, this coping skill with life's hard parts can keep one at-risk youth, with just as difficult a story as another, from alcohol abuse, school failure, and delinquency.

Two protective factors, in particular, are frequently cited as good predictors of a child's potential for resilience: (Rak and Patterson, 1996).

- ✓ A close bond with a caregiver during the first year of life, and
- ✓ personal temperament that elicits positive responses from both family members and strangers

Werner (1984, 1985) found that resilient children had at least one person, not necessarily a family member, that accepted them unconditionally. Other researchers have identified positive adult role models as potential buffers and resilience builders for at-risk children (Garmezy, 1985; Beardslee & Porderefsky, 1988, Dugan & Coles, 1989).

*In sum, one caring mentor can help a child withstand many (-) influences, from poverty and parental addiction, to family mental illness and discord.*



## LONG TERM FRIENDSHIP

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If the heart of mentoring consists of reliable caring relationship, and if trust is a quality which builds over time between human beings, then it makes good common sense that the longer the friendship, the more positive the impact on the child. A national survey conducted in 1998 by the Princeton Research Associates, using a representative sample of 1,504 mentors, validated this hypothesis. Mentoring relationships that lasted at least two years, led to greater overall success in solving or preventing problems in children. And the "**two years**" seemed to make a big difference. Longer term friendships did not result in any increases in effectiveness.

While there could be several uncontrolled factors in the design of a survey that influence the outcomes of longer term relationships, it is worth highlighting the obvious:

One year may not be enough.

Particularly for a disadvantaged child with a history of disrupted attachments, and a lack of unconditional support, and perhaps even trauma. In the nine months of a school year, for example, he or she may just be learning to trust in the consistency of the relationship. The presence of a compassionate mentor may be so new and unfamiliar that the child may not have a clear experiential map -- or a storage of memories with which to navigate the unusual friendship.

If scare in early childhood, trust takes time to grow.

In fact, the same Commonwealth Fund Survey indicates that mentors who initially focus their efforts on building trust, on becoming a reliable friend, tend to be more effective than those who try to change or reform their mentees. Not uncommon among grownups, concerned with their adult agendas, mentors can nudge or push too hard, wanting a child to talk more, too soon, even about problems. Pressing is an unfortunate mistake. It can delay and divert the trust building process. Being inconsistent in attendance, or worse, terminating the friendship early -- can do harm -- reopening wounds of disappointment. Reinforcing the child's belief in an unreliable world, it can "break" the fragile bond.

- ☐ Don't be in a big hurry. Mentoring is not some kind of race.
- ☐ Show up on time for scheduled meetings. If you cannot come, give at least a day's notice in advance. Send an "I'm sorry" note.
- ☐ Don't push an agenda. Be guided by their needs, not your own.
- ☐ Silence is okay. Play a game. "Hang out." Let the child lead.
- ☐ Building trust is your first, second, and perpetual assignment.
- ☐ Remember how you were once a small person with grownups.
- ☐ Be gentle in your communication, consistent with your caring.
- ☐ Continue to reaffirm your long term commitment to mentoring.
- ☐ Stretch and make adjustments to maintain a two year friendship.

*The longer and more reliable the trust, the more secure and confident a child.*

## EARLY TERMINATION

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Leaving a mentoring relationship prematurely deserves special attention, for unfortunate reasons. If longer term friendship is a major contributor to positive outcomes among mentored children, than early termination would seem the opposite. In truth, mentors should strive for the former, and make every possible effort to avoid the other.

What is considered "premature" or leaving too early? When is a good time to end things? "What about the summer?," a volunteer may ask. "It seems more natural with the closing of school. Besides, don't we all have to learn to say good-bye?" Such questions have no easy answers. Perhaps the only fair response is "it all depends." When to terminate a mentoring relationship should take a number of factors into consideration:

- ☐ What are the child's time expectations of the friendship?
- ☐ Does he or she have a history of disrupted relationships?
- ☐ Would my mentee benefit from one more year together?
- ☐ Could I commit for longer? Does it have to end now?

One mentoring survey indicates that "two years" of friendship is a magic kind of number, providing children the most positive outcomes (Princeton Research Associates, 1998). According to another study, the average mentor and mentee need at least "six months" before their friendship takes hold (Styles & Morrow, 1992). When a new relationship terminates within three months, harm can actually be done to the child.

- ✓ Old wounds can be reopened, as the child re-experiences loss (especially among children of divorced and / or single parents).
- ✓ Suspicions about grownups are reinforced: "Can't trust them."
- ✓ A child's confidence in himself can drop: "I'm not worth much."
- ✓ Some will interpret the loss as rejection: "She didn't like me."
- ✓ Others may even blame themselves: "It's all my fault he left."

*School age is a time when kids, trying hard to fit in,  
are sensitive to anything that appears like rejection.*

In summary, if early termination can be avoided, it should. Granted, all matches have some probability of breaking up. A troubled child may be placed in a treatment center, or a child of divorce may move to another school. Some mentors may need to leave town for a new job or other reasons. Things happen which change lives -- but such situations are more like exceptions, rather than norms. For the most part, the average volunteer has control over one's mentoring commitment. And even in our busy world, most mentors can make adjustments in their schedules, especially for people who really matter to them, like their own children for example -- or a mentee who looks forward to their friendship.

*Be very clear about your commitment  
and clear the way to go the extra mile.*

*And if for some understandable reason  
the relationship has to end early, then...*

- If possible, give yourself adequate time to say goodbye, not just in one session -- but over the course of several.
- Two months before is a bit early to share the news, and a week is too late. 4 - 6 weeks allows time to honor feelings.
- There is no expert way to tell a child that you have to end a mentoring relationship sooner than expected... but be honest and straightforward in a gentle way.
- Give him or her a specific reason that will make sense, a simple explanation that the child can understand.
- Your mentee may have a history of disrupted attachments, perhaps with a parent. Let him know *"It's not your fault."*
- Let her know that this is a very hard thing for you to do, because of how much you value your friendship.
- Give a specific date when you won't be coming anymore.

*"You know, my friend, today I have to share with you some difficult news. I have been offered a better job -- so I need to move to another town. I feel very sad, but come November 1st, I won't be able to visit anymore. I wanted you to know now, to give us plenty of time to say good-bye."*

- Make sure that the school staff is alerted to your situation, as they may need to monitor the child closely and provide extra support.
- If it is the child's situation that precipitates the early good-bye, be understanding and caring. He may likely feel overwhelmed and distracted by a mix of feelings, including anger and sadness.
- The loss of the relationship may trigger old thoughts of distrust in adults or inadequacy in oneself. He may need counseling help.
- Explain that it's no one's fault, that sudden change is a part of life.

*"Can I tell you one of my life lessons. Things can happen, unexpectedly, that we don't like and can't control. We will learn together to be okay."*

- ✓ Above all, listen to your mentee, help her sort through the feelings.
- ✓ If you really can, stay in touch with her through letters or e-mail, but remember, this is also a very serious commitment.
- ✓ But do not make promises you won't or cannot keep -- though you want to ease the pain. At-risk kids are products of broken promises.
- ✓ Advocate for your mentee. Ask the staff to find a suitable mentor to replace you. If time allows, introduce him or her to the child.

# CHAPTER THREE



**TRUST  
NEEDS CONSISTENCY**

# CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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All of our relationships with children, whether as parents, teachers, or mentors, can be more fully understood with a few simple truths. One such principle is that:

*Children are constantly learning and changing.*

We observe this living process everyday, both in subtle and overt forms. In many ways, for example, an infant is not a toddler -- but is becoming one. A preschooler, in turn, is a quantum leap from a child in elementary school -- but is quickly growing into one. Similarly, the 13 year old, although well on his or her way, is still not a full fledged teen.

"My child is going through some kind a stage," parents say all the time. How children change as they grow up is the focus of a very important topic called "child development." By definition, child development is a learning and maturation process by which a young person's abilities, genetically stored like seeds, unfold over the course of his or her life. Each new **developmental stage** brings new steps or challenges. Every new step means an enhanced ability to think, talk, move one's body, do things by oneself, or get along with others. These **areas of growth** are commonly referred to as cognition, speech, fine and gross motor, self-help and socio-emotional development.

Although child professionals may define, categorize, or give different names to the various developmental stages, for general understanding we use the following five areas:

Infancy: 0 - 2 years

Toddlerhood: 18 mos - 3 years

Early Childhood: 3 - 6 years

School Age: 6: - 12 years

Adolescence: 13 - 18 years

The above stages or growth periods pertain to so-called "normally developing children," that is, to the majority of young people. Given that elementary and middle school kids are commonly the main subjects of mentoring programs, it is crucial that new volunteers understand these developmental periods. What we think and understand about children tends to shape how we communicate and build rapport with them.

The next page shows a **map of child development**. It is a sectional map, "blown up" in a sense, highlighting three developmental periods: i.e., Early Childhood, School Age, and Adolescence. As you look it over, think about your own boy or girl, or a child whom you know well, and compare the map's contents with your knowledge of his or her abilities. Locate the child in the cognitive, physical and socio-emotional stage that best matches his/her growth. This exercise is referred to as "developmental thinking" -- or viewing children through a set of standard perspectives.

## CHILD SAFETY

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Along with the different behaviors we observe in children at each developmental stage, there are also age-appropriate times when safety topics can be best introduced to them. Provided below is a **safety chart** to make mentors more aware of the salient issues during each developmental period.

<i><b>AGE</b></i>	<i><b>SAFETY TOPIC</b></i>
EARLY SCHOOL AGE	Fire and fires escapes. Tricycles, bicycles, helmets. Car seat belts. Water safety, swimming lessons. Crossing streets. Awareness of strangers. Respecting animals. Guns and rifles. Poisons & harmful chemicals.
PRETEEN	Car seat belts. Traffic and bike safety. Swimming and water safety. Education on "safety attitudes." Drug, alcohol and smoking abuse. Infant care and baby sitting. Guns and rifles. Use of power tools. Sex education. Sexual behavior and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).
TEEN	Driver's education. Driver and passenger seat belts. Drinking and driving. First Aid and CPR. Sports hazards. Drug, alcohol and smoking abuse. Sex education and contraceptives. Sexual behavior and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases). Teen rape. Self defense training. Depression and suicide. Teen - adult transition issues.

The following information pertaining to younger age children may help in understanding the developmental growth of safety awareness.

<i><b>AGE</b></i>	<i><b>SAFETY TOPIC</b></i>
PRENATAL/NEWBORN	<p>Infant car seats.</p> <p>The crib environment: slats, bumpers, and pillow objects.</p> <p>Infant crib syndrome.</p> <p>Sleeping on stomach.</p> <p>Falls and bumps.</p> <p>Faucet water temperature and 120 degrees Fahrenheit.</p> <p>Baths and drowning.</p> <p>Burns and First Aid.</p> <p>Teething and sticking things in mouth.</p>
TODDLER TO PRESCHOOL	<p>Playing in yards &amp; streets.</p> <p>Pools and water danger.</p> <p>Tricycles and helmets.</p> <p>Play equipment: materials, setup, and supervision</p> <p>Caution: burns and bumps.</p> <p>Running with objects in mouth.</p> <p>Toys: strong, no sharp edges, no small parts, non-toxic.</p>

# MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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An important objective of relationship-oriented mentoring programs, such as the Wise Men & Women, is "*character building*." A trusting friendship with an adult role model can contribute to the development of moral conscience and positive values in children. More specifically, both through actions and words mentors can emphasize and reinforce principles of good character:

*Honesty & trustworthiness*

*Respect for others & self*

*Fairness & justice*

*Caring & altruism*

*Nonviolence*

*Social responsibility*

Such life guiding values can be found in all cultures and religions. They represent the best of our humanity, and like markers on a confusing forest trail, they steer us in the right direction. Very simply, they help children to become good people. A fancier term for character building is **moral development**, which is a close kin of *child development*. According to Jean Piaget (1970) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1976), the grandfathers of moral development theory, moral growth occurs in a sequential or stage-by-stage process, similar to the unfolding course of child development, that largely depends on how much a young person understands about his or her world. In other words:

*How a child thinks influences his or her moral growth.*

Compared to a toddler or preschooler, for example, a 9 or 10 year old has greater cognitive powers and therefore more ability to understand abstract values such as "respect," "honesty," and "fairness." In turn, s/he is more able to grasp the complexity of a moral dilemma, to see its various sides or pathways, and to make a thoughtful decision about "right" and "wrong." In the same way, we expect more from adolescents and adults (or at least we should), with regards to this figuring-out process called **moral judgment**.

Kohlberg organized the sequential process of moral development in six levels:

Level 1: Doing good to avoid punishment.

Level 2: Doing good to satisfy one's desires.

Level 3: Doing good to please others.

Level 4: Doing good to obey the law.

Level 5: Doing good for the sake of others.

Level 6: Doing good for a greater cause.

Both Piaget and Kohlberg also emphasized, however, that people do not progress through these levels only because of their cognitive abilities. Each of us can probably think of a few adults who have never matured beyond the first two levels. In fact, some experts sadly believe that the majority of humankind has not evolved beyond levels three or four. Why is this? How do most people get stuck at a particular stage of moral development?



Why don't we all become active, responsible citizens for a higher purpose? While there may exist many possible answers to this question, one of the most certain is very simple:

*Personal experiences strongly influence our moral character.*

Even though a 10 year old child may have acquired the cognitive ability to understand a concept like "justice," s/he still needs some **positive learning experiences** to give the term real meaning -- to make a connection with one's daily life. That is, a child learns what is "just" or "fair" by facing moral dilemmas in daily situations, such as whether or not to cheat in a game or steal from a peer, along with being acknowledged for thinking things through and making good decisions. Moral growth, in this sense, depends on constructive interactions with one's family, peers, and community members. This is the logic behind the principle of positive role modeling -- behind mentoring.

*Moral people guide others to become fair and caring people.*

Whereas positive relationships with adults promote child development and moral growth, helping the young to advance from one stage to the next, negative experiences can delay and stunt their progress. Emotionally hurt children, for example, who have been exposed to trauma, whether it be severe poverty, divorce, community violence, or some form of abuse, run the risk of getting stuck in a developmental stage. Such young people are less likely to develop a sense of safety and trust in their world. Thus, their moral judgment is more likely to be driven by a desire to avoid punishment or to satisfy one's own desires. Without some type of healing experience or supportive relationship -- like mentoring -- children may remain at lower stages through adolescence and well into adulthood.

*Mentors are moral role models who facilitate positive learning experiences.*

Kohlberg suggests that our first step as mentors should be to create a **moral atmosphere**, or to build relationships with children based on respect for their rights, on open sincere dialogue, and on humane approaches to learning. More specifically, as life value guides we can help to build moral character in a number of ways:

- Model honesty, fairness, and respect for others.
- Be consistent with your attendance and caring.
- Allow children to participate in decision making.
- Engage children in conversations that explore moral dilemmas which they face everyday: e.g., bullies, drugs, gangs, and sex.
- Help them think through possible consequences of their actions.
- Create opportunities for children to show altruism and caring.
- Read and tell stories of people who do things for higher causes.
- Use positive approaches to managing children's behaviors and encourage children to resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways.

*As caring friends we can help children to mature into honest, responsible, and peaceful citizens. This is the societal mission of a relationship-oriented, mentoring program.*

## AT-RISK CHILDREN

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Children are commonly referred to as "*at-risk*," when they seem more vulnerable than normal to difficult moods or negative behaviors. That is, when they seem more likely than other kids to become depressed, irritable, or oppositional. Or when they display a stronger tendency to engage in aggression, alcohol / drug abuse, or other social misconduct. Among helping professionals, at-risk has become kind of a catch-all term to refer to children who send the world signals that warrant serious concern.

From a "prevention" point of view, a child who is at-risk is at the threshold of a problem. S/he is not quite there, in the midst of a trouble, not fully engaged in a high risk behavior. An elementary school boy, for example, may not have started to abuse drugs, or to harm other people out of anger, or to hurt himself from sadness. In spite of the many possible factors which may have contributed to his vulnerability to such dangers, the child may still have a good chance to steer his life in a healthier direction -- to avoid the risk. Positive learning experiences, such as mentoring, can help children to turn away.

*Mentoring is a prevention-oriented relationship that can guide children, heading into dangerous or unhealthy behaviors, towards safer lifestyles.*

In other words, an at-risk child with a caring supportive mentor may not need a counselor in the future, or a treatment program, or worse, an emergency hospitalization. This is why mentoring is so important to our society: It can truly help save lives -- in a simple and cost-effective way. The befriending of a young person, before s/he enters a vicious cycle of harm and negative consequences, offers him/her a kind of life raft, a chance to experience some goodness in the world -- and to save oneself from trouble.

In general, at-risk children are the target population of mentoring programs. In fact, potential mentees are commonly screened and selected according to the type and number of **risk factors** in their lives, or of the different circumstances that have set the stage for their vulnerability to problem behavior. A mentor may ask, "What is wrong with him?" "Did something happen to him?" "How did he get this way?" It is natural for mentors to want to make sense of a child's risk condition.

However it is not necessary to know all the risk factors in a child's life to be a supportive mentor. It is enough to know that s/he is vulnerable.

It is possible that your mentee may have a history of disrupted attachments, or come from impoverished conditions, perhaps with drugs or alcohol in the family. And it is likely that you will hear of some things from the counselor, or even the child. However even without any background information, you may notice irritability in his/her mood, or restlessness in his/her behavior, or anxiousness in his/her voice. An unpredictable stream of verbal and nonverbal signals will catch your attention, raise a red flag, and remind you that this child, heading towards trouble, is needing your unconditional friendship.

*Mentoring is not about analyzing at-risk children, but showing caring and consistency -- positive signals -- that point their lives in better directions.*

## SCHOOL AS A VILLAGE

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One of the unique features of school-based mentoring programs is the public and familiar setting in which volunteers befriend their mentees: somewhere in town, down the block, on school grounds. In fact, a junior high or elementary school is kind of village within the community, a small culture with its own values, rules, customs, and language. Particularly for an older mentor with grown-up children, or a young adult with no kids, one can feel like a stranger in a foreign land, a Gulliver in a world of little people.

As soon as you pass through the gates, into their territory, the curious eyes of countless small creatures greet you, "checking you out." Some may watch every move you make. All actions from there on are public -- village communications. How you dress and with whom you talk have special meanings. In sum, you are an outsider entering a complex social system. As an ambassador of a mentoring program, **be alert and diplomatic:**

- Dress appropriately -- not too informal -- but not overly formal.
- Greet all children whom you pass in a friendly manner.
- Keep an open mind and do not appear judgmental.
- Stay calm if one of the kids says something disrespectful. Ignore it and continue.
- Go directly to the appropriate office. Your school contact will likely be the counselor.
- Take time to get to know the school liaison. S/he will become an important resource.
- Ask the counselor basic questions of relevance e.g., name and grade of your mentee, school schedule, holidays, emergency procedures.
- Do not probe for more personal information: e.g., child's family or early history.
- Do what you can to eventually meet the school principal. S/he should be informed that you are a volunteer mentor from a community program.
- Don't be too surprised about the room you are given. Be grateful. Available space is a precious item in overcrowded schools.
- If the counselor forgets to offer, ask him or her to introduce you to your mentee.
- Familiarize yourself with the layout of the school. Avoid staring at the children.

Good mentorship depends on the quality of one's presence.  
From the moment you walk onto school grounds, model respect,  
openness, and caring. You are a big visitor in a small world.

# CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

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Not only is school a distinct subculture, but every child lives in a world of his/her own, each with a unique personal history and ethnic background. "Culture," defined in its broadest sense, is the underlying fabric which holds together a person's world -- or just about everything that binds one to a particular group and place in time. This includes our language, values, beliefs, rhythms, customs, rituals, oral/written history, art, music, dance, food and a whole lot more. It is the sea we swim in.

In the context of mentoring, **cultural sensitivity** refers to a special awareness, attitude, and set of behaviors with which a mentor approaches a relationship with a child from a different ethnic background. It is an important way of being with a mentee that includes:

- √ An awareness of the importance and unique characteristics of a child's cultural world.
- √ An attitude of tolerance, curiosity, and openness to learn.
- √ And actions which communicate respect and interest.

Cultural sensitivity is the opposite of prejudice and racism. Such a nonbiased approach is essential for making good contact with a child, particularly one whose skin color, native language, or homeland is different from one's own. All truly supportive relationships are built on a sense of trust and safety, which comes from a feeling of being appreciated for just the way one is. Therefore, our primary job as mentors is to honor the inherent worth that each child brings into the world and to respect the special cultural backgrounds which they have inherited. Provided below are some reminders.

- Examine your own mind, openly and honestly, for biased thoughts and "stereotypes," or generalized images, of other ethnic groups. Almost all of us have learned some.
- Review your own history. Where might your biases and prejudices have come from? Very importantly, try to see these thoughts and images as "learned misinformation."
- Make a personal commitment to be culturally sensitive as a mentor, that is, to unlearn your biases and to approach your mentee with an open, respectful attitude.
- View your child, first and foremost -- as a unique and valuable -- developing person.
- Approach your cultural differences as an opportunity for learning.
- If you know little about your mentee's culture, talk to a friend of the same ethnic group. Do some reading. And do invite the child to teach you about his background.
- When appropriate, tell your mentee about your own family's roots and traditions.
- In some cases, a child may at first reject a mentor from the same minority background. Do not take this personally. This is an unfortunate but common phenomena referred to as "internalized oppression." Hang in there. In time the child will value your close ties.

# THE FIRST MEETING

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Your orientation and initial training activities will lead with growing anticipation to the first meeting between you and your mentee. Don't worry if you feel a little nervous. This is quite natural. It is an exciting time -- the moment you've waited for, and your mind will try to prepare itself for the encounter. Thoughts like "How should I greet him?" and "Will s/he like me?" are common. Just remember this affirmation:

All I need to do is be my kind, genuine self.

Young children, for the most part, are curious and friendly creatures. If they are shy or cautious, it only takes a little trust to warm them up. In most mentoring programs, children are not forced to participate. It is their choice. Thus, your soon-to-be friend will likely be just as interested in meeting you, as you are in getting to know him/her.

Just like you, s/he may be full of wondering and anticipation: "Who is this grownup?" "Why has s/he come to school?" "Why does s/he want to spend time with me?" Although the counselor will have given the child some explanations, nothing may seem too real until you truly become a genuine person, at the school, smiling and shaking hands.

As you wait for your new acquaintance to enter the room, take some deep breaths. RELAX. Once the counselor introduces you and departs, TRUST. Everything will find its course. It is human relationship, a dance you know very well -- both as an adult and as a child. You too were once a small person. You know this other world like play.

It is the simplest of things to show interest and caring to a child.

Remember all the important reasons for this one-to-one encounter. Individual attention is what gives mentoring its staying power. The elder's undivided concentration on the younger is, in and of itself, an affirmation. The child will think: "I must be special."

The best gift that you can offer your mentee is your full presence.

Let us now take a look at the first meeting in detail. Step by step, provided below are five guiding principles, or helpful reminders to navigate the encounter, as well as some examples of how to express each one.

## THE COUNSELOR INTRODUCES YOU TO THE CHILD & LEAVES.

1. *Extend your hand. Do what you normally do when meeting someone.*

Examples:

"Hi, it's nice to finally meet you."

"I'm glad we've both joined the mentoring program."

"You know, I always feel a bit nervous when I meet someone new."

"Come, why don't we sit down and hang out a little."

"This is my first time in this school. I kind of feel like a stranger."

## YOU AND YOUR MENTEE SIT DOWN TO CHAT.

### *2. Assume that the child doesn't know why you are there. Explain why.*

Examples:

"You might be wondering who I am or why I'm here. I'm called a 'mentor' -- that's a person who volunteers at school -- to become a friend to a child -- to someone like you."

"Our program is called \_\_\_\_\_, and people like myself spend time with kids, kind of hanging out together time, to help them feel good about themselves."

"I live in this neighborhood and I've always wanted to do something more for the young people who live around here. So I became a mentor."

"I'm concerned about all the things that children face these days, like drugs and gangs.

I want to help kids grow up to be good people with safe lives.

"I was once a kid myself -- and know how tough growing up can be. I think good things can happen when children and adults become friends."

## THE ICE IS BREAKING UP.

### *3. Simply and concretely, explain what you and the child will be doing.*

Examples:

"I'll be bringing some games and crayons so we can play."

"I hope you'll tell me what kinds of things you would like to do together."

"I also like to discuss important things like gangs and drugs." "I hope you and I can talk more as we get to know each other."

### *4. Establish expectations and rules for your time together.*

Examples:

"I'll be visiting you one hour a week, here at school, up until summer vacation."

"I'm sure there will be times when I can't make it, and I will always try to let you know."

"While I wish we could get together more, I have other responsibilities. So the mentors in our program only meet at school during the week."

"This is a volunteer program and no one has to be here. Children come because they want to have a mentor, and they can choose not to participate at any time."

"I'll meet you here each week, unless the counselor changes our room."

### *5. Explain the limits of your confidentiality.*

Examples:

"Almost everything we talk about will be kept 'confidential,' which means just between me and you. But there may be a time when I will have to speak to someone like the counselor, the principal, the teacher, or my Program Coordinator:

One, is if you hurt yourself or if someone is hurting you.

Two, is if you yourself are thinking about hurting someone.

Three, is when I need to ask my Coordinator or your counselor for guidance."

*At the beginning of a relationship, what you say or do may feel awkward.  
As friendship warms and the ice melts, being together is as easy as play.*

# BEING CONSISTENT

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In many ways, the repetition of positive experiences with children, or doing the same good things over and over again, in a dependable pattern the young person can count on, is the basis of trust development. "It will happen," the child learns to believe. "S/he is always there, responsive to me." Beginning in infancy, secure attachment with adults and trust in a benevolent world evolves over time, in a repeated flow of interactions between caregivers and baby. "Mama always comes when I cry. She and papa always feed me. They always make me clean and comfortable when I soil myself."

Child development is founded on consistency. Being there, "attuned" to the little person's needs, responding in a predictable way. Even as the infant grows into a toddler, and up into a preschooler, correcting unsafe or unhealthy behaviors is a largely matter of doing the same thing -- ignoring, redirecting, setting limits, paying more attention -- when the child acts in the same concerning way. In terms of "*behavior management*," or the field of study that encompasses parenting, discipline, and our many "What do I do?" questions with difficult conduct, an adult's response to a child's misbehavior is referred to as a "*reinforcement*." That is, what we do as the big people in authority, "reinforces" and strengthens a young person's tendency to act and think in certain ways.

The development of trust in a child evolves from consistent,  
positive reinforcers such as availability, nurturance, caring, and love.

The most fundamental objective of mentoring, at the onset of this new and different kind of relationship, is the establishment of trust between the strange grown-up and the child, commonly cautious and lacking self-confidence, in harm's way of unhealthy behaviors. In sum, the majority of children whom we mentor, because of the various risk factors in their lives, do not entirely trust that things will go well. They may of course be hopeful, but they have their doubts -- a sense of uncertainty that has perhaps been reinforced by disrupted attachments, inconsistent caregiving, unavailability, or lack of responsiveness. They have learned from experience that you cannot always count on the big people. They are not consistent. Therefore, our primary job as mentors is to challenge this belief, to do the same trust-building things over and over again -- to be consistent.

- Always come to see your mentee when you say you will.
- Always let him/her know beforehand if you cannot come.
- Always greet him/her with enthusiasm as a special friend.
- Always give him/her your full presence, attentively listening.
- Always respond with caring to his/her feelings and concerns.
- Always be open, allowing him/her to lead your time together.
- Always responds to misbehavior in a wise, consistent manner.
- Always take time to say good-bye and discuss the next visit.

*Always reinforce the message: "You can count on me, my friend."*

# BUILDING RAPPORT

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## NONVERBAL RAPPORT

We have all observed two people from a distance, deeply engaged in conversation, sitting in the same posture with identical expressions, making similar gestures with their hands. Although we may not hear them, they look "in sync" -- mirror images in a kind of communication dance. Some people refer to this as **nonverbal rapport**. And believe it or not, our postures, expressions, gestures, and body distances make up the largest part of our communications with others -- in fact, some claim as much as 75 to 90 percent.

As if to say "give me some wiggle room," our bodies tend to maintain a little distance from each other. All of us have a **personal space**, or an invisible circle from one to three feet around ourselves. Paying attention to this boundary conveys respect to others and creates feelings of safety. In contrast, moving across another's personal space, without permission or invitation, is an unspoken violation that can provoke unease and confusion. This is particularly so between adults and children, or the big people who tower five to eight feet tall, and the little humans far below. How we approach these smaller creatures, whether we respectfully observe an arm's length or we plow through their space, whether we tower above or bend down to their size, makes all the difference in "their world."

- Never violate a child's personal space. Maintain a respectful distance. Though smaller in size, their bodies have the same rights as ours.
- Bend, crouch, kneel, or sit -- to drop down to a child's level when speaking or listening.
- Use sound judgment with regards to touching. (Many at-risk children have experienced some form of abuse or negative touch.)
- Greet with a hand shake -- and don't pat children on the head. Let time and experience determine if and when a hug is appropriate. Allow the child to be the boss.
- Make good eye contact and offer the child your undivided attention. But don't stare! Break eye contact when the other seems anxious.
- When conversing with a child, point your body a little to his/her side. This stance is more supportive and less threatening.
- When playing with a child, assume a similar position as his/hers.

Now we are ready to replay your first meeting with your mentee -- without using words.

### **THE COUNSELOR INTRODUCES YOU TO YOUR MENTEE AND LEAVES**

*Make warm and respectful contact.*

Example:

Upon introduction you slowly approach the child and stop at an arm's length. While you smile and make eye contact, bend down to the child's level and offer a handshake.

### **YOU AND YOUR MENTEE SIT DOWN TO CHAT**

*Establish rapport. Get in sync.*

Example:

Always respecting the child's personal space, you point your chair and body off to an angle, with a little distance between you and the child. Your gestures shadow his/hers.



# ACTIVE LISTENING

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If you were not able to speak to a child, but you could listen, you could give him/her your full attention, this would still be doing a good job as a mentor. You would be **modeling**, or teaching by example, the most fundamental way of showing respect to another person. You would be communicating to the child that s/he is important. In fact, most children whom we mentor need our eyes and ears more than our words. The old saying that "children should be seen and not heard" is only partly true. Children need to be seen, heard, and understood.

*The most basic act of mentoring is to give a child your full attention.*

Some people think of listening as a passive activity. Like a catcher waiting for a pitcher to throw the ball, the responsibility for being understood seems to rest with the speaker. In a real baseball game, however, a good catcher concentrates on the pitcher's wind-up, tracks the path of the ball and jumps, stretches, or dives if necessary. In other words, s/he shares responsibility for making the transaction work. Similarly, an effective listener "actively" tries to understand the person talking. S/he makes eye contact, watches the other's gestures and facial expressions, pays attention to the meaning of what is said, and reads between lines for feelings. When the other has finished, s/he asks non-threatening questions and **paraphrases**, or restates the person's message in a supportive manner.

*Active listening is the single most important skill of a good mentor.*

It's like the super glue of relationships, or cement between the blocks, which builds trust, attachment, and self-esteem in children. Therefore, try to remember the following tips:

- **DO** clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts and distractions before visiting a mentee. Try to give him or her your undivided attention.
- **DO** put yourself in the child's shoes. Try to see the world from his or her perspective.
- **DO** put aside your preconceived ideas. Open up and refrain from making judgments.
- **DO** nod your head, say "mmm hmmm." Affirm with gestures that you are listening.
- **DO** ask questions when you don't understand. Good questions are open-ended, with plenty of room to answer. In a non-threatening way, they confirm your interest in the child and encourage him/her to continue sharing.
- **DO** paraphrase -- restate in your own words what you think your mentee said. When paraphrasing is close to the child's intent, s/he feels understood. And even if off base, it invites the child to clarify his/her feelings and reminds you to tune in more closely.
- **AVOID** thinking of home or work while the child is talking.
- **AVOID** preparing your own reply while he or she is talking.
- **AVOID** interrupting -- or trying to finish the child's sentences.
- **AVOID** questions that put the child on the spot, that demand a "yes" or "no," or that cut off dialogue.

***ABOVE ALL**, give a child the same respect that you yourself deserve. Listening is a gentle act. You don't need to say much except "Oh" or "I see."*

# TALKING AS REAL PEOPLE

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*Sincerity is the best policy.*

Effective communication is based on **trust** and **mutual respect**. It occurs when two people can openly express to each other their beliefs and feelings without fear of blame, criticism, or rejection. Such a climate of openness also requires a good deal of courage. When we speak **congruently**, or sincerely, we risk our genuine self with the other person. Children by nature are simple honest creatures. Their spontaneity and candor continually surprise us "grown-ups." In fact, they make us wonder, "How and when did we change?" Ironically, we probably learned to hide our truths somewhere during childhood itself.

Many things can inhibit a child's natural ability to speak congruently as s/he is maturing. One big factor is if parents and other significant adults speak with blame and criticism to a young person. Far worse are forms of verbal abuse such as name-calling, swearing, and "put-downs." These negative communications damage self-esteem and inhibit children. They start to think, "It's my fault. I'm a bad person. And if I tell them how I really feel, I'll get hurt even more." In short, being honest seems dangerous.

Another key factor that makes it difficult for children to express what they think and feel is the general lack of sincerity and clarity among adults. Us big people regularly use confusing or "double messages," like saying "I'm okay" to the question "How are you?," when our facial expressions and insides are really saying "lousy." Usually out of fear of what others may think, or how they will respond, we twist the truth. Unfortunately, this teaches children to do the same. They learn our "forked tongue."

*The most effective communication is the most simple and genuine.*

When you speak straightforwardly to children they know where you stand. As a result, they learn to speak for themselves and to stand on their own. Although communication can truly be tricky at times, there are some "do's," "don'ts," and "never ever's."

- **DO** share your accurate feelings with children, whether happy, sad, upset, embarrassed, nervous, or disappointed.
- **DO** be consistent with what you say -- and how you say it.
- **DO** "soften" your responses to children to sound less threatening, e.g., "Could you be saying that...," "Correct me if I'm wrong....." "Another way to look at this is..."
- **DON'T** use big fancy words or sound like a scientist.
- **DON'T** sound like a know-it-all. Be honest when you have no answer.
- **DON'T** criticize or blame when you wish to express disappointment.
- **DON'T** sound like a moralist with "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts." Make your opinions simple and non-threatening: "This is my own belief...just one way of seeing things."
- **NEVER** swear, name call, or use put-downs.

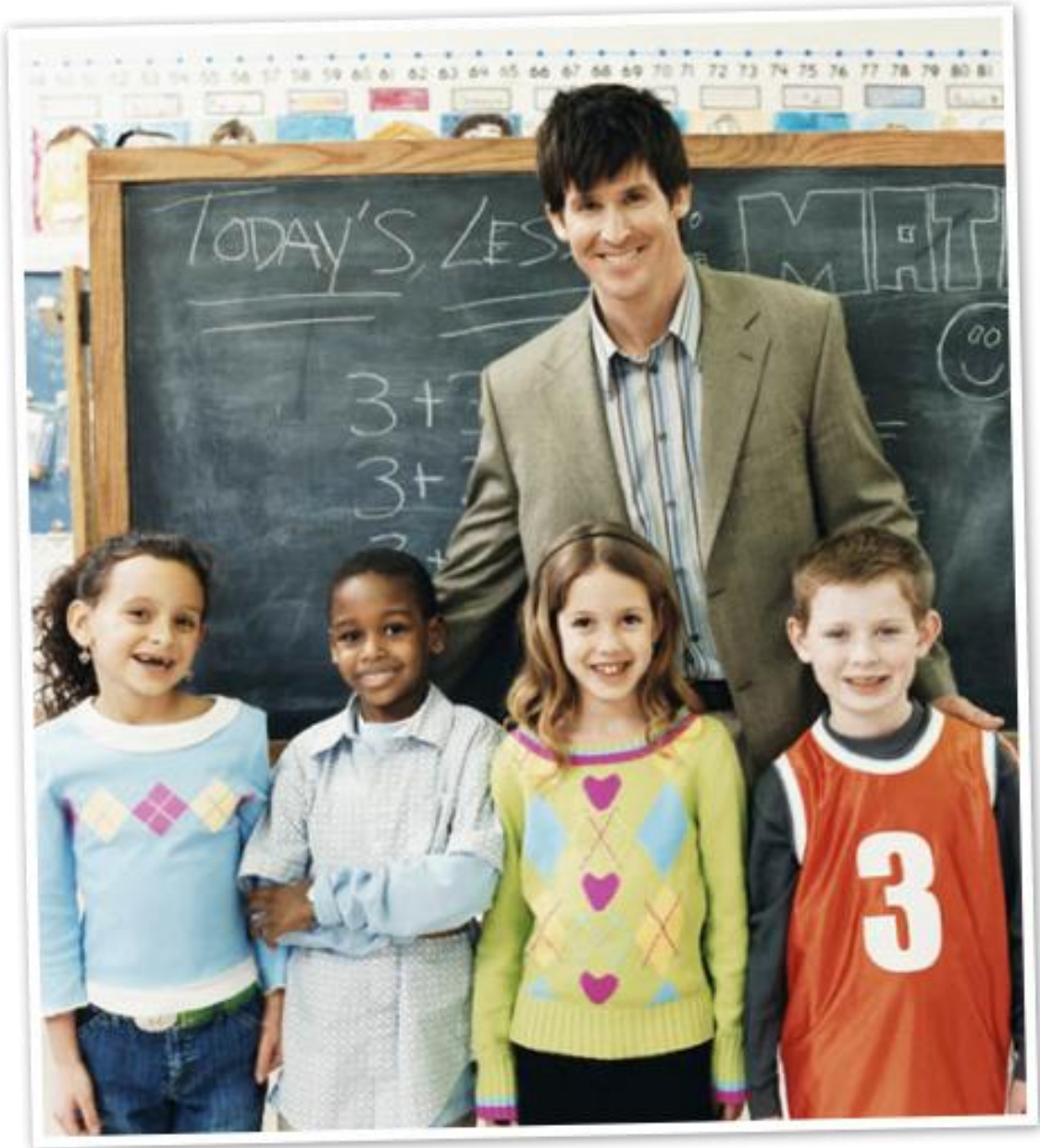
*ALWAYS affirm and praise a child wherever and whenever you can.  
Note his/her specific acts, rather than use terms like "good" or "terrific."*

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

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1. How children change as they grow up is the focus of **child development** -- a learning and maturation process by which a young person's abilities, genetically stored like seeds, unfold over the course of his or her life.
2. Each new **developmental stage** brings new steps, or enhanced abilities to think, talk, move one's body, do things by oneself, or get along with others. These **areas of growth** are referred to as cognition, speech, fine and gross motor, self-help, and socio-emotional.
3. Practice "**developmental thinking**". Locate a child you know in an appropriate stage of cognitive, physical, and social development. Compare him/her with kids the same age.
4. **Elementary school children are no longer preschoolers, but they're not yet teens.** While more involved with peers, they seek and respect their parents' sphere of influence.
5. Relationship-oriented mentoring promotes **character-building**. Through kind words and good actions, mentors can reinforce positive values such as honesty, trustworthiness, respect for others and self, caring, altruism, fairness, justice, and social responsibility.
6. Mentors can also facilitate **moral development** by encouraging children to discuss their dilemmas, to think things through, to use wise judgment, and to practice altruism.
7. At-risk kids are the main population of mentoring programs. While more vulnerable than normal to difficult moods or negative behaviors, with a stronger tendency to engage in aggression, alcohol / drug abuse, or other social misconduct, they still have a good chance to steer their lives in a healthier direction. Positive learning experiences such as mentoring can help such children to turn away and avoid the risk.
8. **Enter each school like a foreign diplomat.** Greet the smaller natives with big smiles. Offer your friendship, trust and reliability.
9. Strive to **overcome your cultural biases** and to approach ethnic differences as learning opportunities. **Cultural sensitivity** is comprised of a worldly awareness, an open flexible attitude, and respectful behaviors.
10. Try to **relax and enjoy your first meeting**. Just be yourself, give your full attention, ask open-ended questions, explain your role as a mentor, and establish clear expectations.
11. **Be aware of your body.** Use your expressions, gestures, and posture to **get in sync**.
12. Lastly, if you are a soldier or a police officer, remember that the child may perceive you in stereotypical ways. You have the added task of clearing up a child's distortions and becoming a real person. **Don't always wear your uniform.**

# CHAPTER FOUR



## MOMENTS OF LEARNING

## **"SHE'S THE BOSS"**

### **A MENTOR'S TALE**

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A group of new mentors, during a monthly round table meeting, were sharing stories of their first month's experiences with their children.

"I don't feel like I'm doing much," reported Susan. "You know, just an hour a week... with a child starving for attention. It seems so little. Does it really make a difference?"

"I know what you mean," responded Hector. "My new buddy seems pretty unhappy with himself...failing in school...flirting with a local gang...the whole mess...except drugs and alcohol...at least for now, thank God. But what can I do?"

"It's the truth," tossed in Julia, a graduate student. "My girl needs professional counseling. Her whole family does. I feel like a band-aid on her wound, that doesn't stick very long."

"Hold up," intervened Nicole, the Program Coordinator. "Aren't we headed down kind of a negative path today? It's okay and normal to have high expectations...and at times to feel discouraged, but our job is to be friends. To stay positive. And to remember that a small good deed...like mentoring an hour a week...can make a big difference in a child."

"Yah, you're probably right," acknowledged Julia. "Even the research says it can work. I guess it just takes time."

"Change does take time," Nicole continued. "It's a mysterious thing...often very subtle, hardly noticeable week to week...like the growth of a house plant on your window sill. And big changes in the children often do not come till years later, when they are older, more mature. It's as if the positive experiences need to age...before they can germinate."

"It's as if we're sowing seeds," Hector added, "or preparing the spring soil."

"Exactly," Nicole agreed, "and we call this 'prevention.' Doing good things with them today -- to prevent them from making negative choices in the future. Children have their own pace...their own internal clocks. Each is unique. And each is his or her own boss."

Susan, who had been quietly tracking the conversation, finally perked up, as if the lights had clicked on inside her. "She is the boss. Really, my friend Meredith always knows what she wants to do...and when she wants to do things. I'm kind of just following her."

"Yes, and that's the right path," affirmed Nicole. "They lead...and we follow. They should be the bosses of our learning time together. A good mentor suspends judgment, puts aside expectations, and allows the relationship to take its own course."

Hector laughed. "Maybe that's why the kids ask us to 'hang out' with them."

## **"WINNING BY LOSING"**

### **A GOOD OLD STORY**

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Lenny, one of the boys with whom his mentor, Mr. Ken, would visit each week, liked to play games, especially checkers. Lenny always wanted the red pieces on the board, and he always wanted to win -- at any cost.

Week after week, Lenny would change the rules of the game in order to capture his mentor's checkers and to claim another victory. Mr. Ken began to get concerned about the boy's cheating and didn't quite know what to do. At the beginning of their friendship, he had not given much thought to the other's shortcuts. Wanting to be liked and to gain the boy's trust, he had simply looked the other way.

"It's no big deal," he rationalized, "all children are sneaky once in a while. Even my own grandson. Even some adults. And maybe it's his low self-esteem. Maybe if I allow him to win a few games...he'll feel better about himself."

But the mentor remained a little doubtful, especially after he began to lose over and over again, 15, 20, 30 times, in a game he used to hold his own in.

"Maybe I've got this all wrong," he questioned. "Could I possibly be teaching the boy that it's okay to cheat? Am I saying to Lenny that rules can be changed in life without consequences?" "Oh no...maybe I'm helping to raise a crook."

Then something fortuitous happened. It was during their thirty-some game of checkers, just when the mentor had decided to take a stand and lay down the good old rules. "Enough is enough," he said to himself, as the boy began to maneuver once more, proposing another revision of his own twisted checker laws in order to better his position. "I'll give him this one," the mentor resolved, "but this is it."

There was no need, however, to take out the game book. The mentor had begun to capture Lenny's checkers, jump after jump, according to the boy's own rules. As his little competitor sensed the possibility of defeat, he tried to negotiate for yet another revision. "Nope," his mentor stated. "We have to stick by these rules. You yourself have made them up for us and we must honor them."

Lenny frowned and the mentor swept away his final pieces. When the two shook hands as they did after each game, the elder smiled at the child with affection. "We are both winners today, partner," he said, "because we have both followed the rules."

After that day, the boy never cheated again and the mentor didn't mention it again. They just went on playing all kinds of games, both of them winning and losing. Lenny stopped keeping score. It was no big deal anymore. He had won a true friend he could count on.

## CHILD-DIRECTED RELATIONSHIP

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In most child relationships with an adult, whether it involves a parent, coach, or teacher, it is the big person who is usually in charge, who determines what the smaller one can do, as well as where, when, and why. (That is, not including those bold and mighty princes and princesses of some permissive parents.) Generally speaking, it is the grownup -- with the knowledge, money, and car keys -- that is the boss.

And it should be so. Adults should be in charge of home, family, and community life. We need to guide children through the multiple choice situations of our complex world. It is our responsibility as elders to keep them safe and healthy. Thus, “most of the time,” we should be directing the course of relationships. And ideally, the young are following.

But it can’t always be so. If children never have a chance to speak, and make decisions, and tell us big people what to do, they cannot assert their own influence as individuals. They may not discover their own voices. And perhaps they will not learn to lead others, or sadly, we will not learn from them. In other words, keeping the young healthy, and certainly happy, often means honoring and giving way to their evolving will and wishes. “Let them be kids,” we say. Let them explore, choose what to play, get their hands dirty.

Every good parent knows this, and any smart teacher. In fact, quite often the best thing we can do to assert our authority with a child is to share decision making power and welcome his/her influence. In the act of letting go for awhile, allowing the young person to be the boss, to choose what to do together, the adult earns the other’s trust and respect. This is particularly true with play, the territory of children, where they know best how to jump, tumble, and lead. Anyone who has ever been the “horsie,” for example, prancing around the floor with a little rider on one’s back, knows that bottom is the same as top, that their joy is our happiness. Adults should be authorities of sharing and friendship.

Some at-risk children rarely have this experience of guiding a relationship with an adult. The grownup world may look down at them, with a frown, angry voice, or pointed finger. Instead of safety and sharing, they commonly experience broken promises and criticism. Being a child can mean being in harm’s way – with no voice and very few choices.

Mentoring is about empowering children -- allowing them to influence adult relationship. We do not need to exercise the authority of a parent or teacher. Our job is to be a friend. Aside from our duty to establish and oversee some basic rules for hanging out together, it is their time, in their play world, with their choices. The child is the mentor’s guide.

- Hold in check your plans and desires of what should happen together.
- Encourage the child to choose an activity – and support the decision.
- Present a range of choices, rather than a few things you would like.
- Get on the floor or get your hands dirty, learn to play his/her way.
- Use open-ended questions, as opposed to asking for a “yes” or “no.”
- Acknowledge the child for his/her decision making and leadership.

*When a child directs our time together, we become authorities on friendship.*

# A MAP TO FACILITATE LEARNING

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*Mentors are supportive role models who facilitate positive learning experiences.*

All the terms in this statement have special meaning: "supportive role model," "facilitate" and "positive learning experiences." Facilitate here means to guide or to point the way, as opposed to teach or to instruct. The job of a mentor is to help children to explore and learn for themselves. In truth, no one can make another person learn. We can only serve as a guide on the other's journey, offering a choice of trails and vistas.

One way in which we help children to learn is through modeling. Just by our reliable, caring, and attentive presence, we demonstrate to children the meaning of mutual respect, trust, and self-worth. There is nothing fancy or complicated about this method. It has no written curriculum. We simply set a good example by who we are -- by the way in which we build rapport, actively listen, and show concern. Children can be touched by the mere presence of a kind mentor. In fact, they may follow the same good path on their own.

Another basic way in which mentors facilitate learning is by creating opportunities for children to explore and uncover life's lessons. In other words, since we cannot make any of our mentees learn, but can only help them to learn for themselves, then our main duty is to clear the trail. Provided below is a map to help us guide the journey.

## THE MENTORS MAP

### CHOICE

Allow the child to select a pleasurable activity

### CHANGE

Affirm the child when s/he acts in ways to better him/herself.

### PLAY

Get involved. Let go and have fun.

### OPTIONS

Explore different ways and likely outcomes of behaving and problem solving.

### DIALOGUE

Talk and reflect with the child about his/her experience.

### INSIGHT

Let the child continually guide you to special areas of his/her interest.

*No map is ever the territory, but only a tool, like a compass, for direction.  
Each child will know best what, when, and where s/he wants to explore.*



## CHOICE & PLAY

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Mentoring is a child-centered process. It revolves around the child's needs and interests. In this sense, a good mentor does not assume that s/he knows which kind of activity is best for a child. How you spend your time together should be guided by his/her wishes. In short, we always begin with *choice*: "What would you like to do today?"

School culture is a bit different in this respect. Its educational mission requires a structured curriculum of learning activities, designed by academic specialists, to ensure the achievement of uniformed goals. In contrast, mentoring has no standard curriculum. Because our mission is to build supportive friendships, every adult and child pair is its own design team, shaping its own learning process – based on each mentee's preferences. Just as school has a logic behind its formal methods, mentoring has good reasons to be fun, informal, and tailor made.

*Inviting a mentee to design your time together conveys respect for his/her individuality, informs one about the child's interests, and encourages his/her involvement in activities.*

In fact, allowing children to be decision-makers is one of the most effective things we can do to engage them in an activity with us. Equally important, their menu of options should be fun. In other words, LET CHILDREN PLAY! There is no hurry for serious dialogue. Play is the primary vehicle which children use to explore themselves and their world. Even teenagers prefer to do something enjoyable with an adult, rather than sitting down, face to face, and oh no, "just talking." SO YOU NEED TO PLAY ALSO -- to set the child inside you free. Get into the board game. Pick up the crayons, scissors, glue...

*The power of mentoring always lies in the relationship.  
Play is the best way for an adult to join a child's world.*

In conclusion, getting started on your shared journey of positive learning experiences is supposed to be easy -- like child's play. Here are a few reminders:

- Start each session by asking the child "What would you like to do today?"
- Bring along a "tool kit" of things to do: e.g., board games, paper, crayons, clay, arts & crafts supplies, newspaper, storybooks, maybe even the laptop.
- Perhaps the mentee would be interested in sharing one of your hobbies.
- Invite him/her to suggest other materials for you to bring to the sessions.
- Encourage the child to teach you a new game if s/he wishes.
- Let yourself become a child again. "Get into it." Play and have fun!
- Sit down on the floor if the child prefers and get your hands dirty.
- Let the child lead activities. Don't try to steer him your preferred way.
- Just enjoy yourself – and s/he will enjoy you.
- "What to do next" will become clear as you go along.

*When the mentee is leading, we can't help but head in a good direction.*

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

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Mentoring is a journey with many possible paths. Although there is a right way to go about things -- that is, with respect, honesty and patience -- there is never only one thing to do together. Checkers can be as useful as reading a story. This week's activity might be coloring, the next it could be cards or "Shoots and Ladders." The journey should feel wide open. Moving between the child's interests, your own special talents, and a tool kit of options, you will find your way. The mentee will teach you how to follow.

In the school-based tradition of the Wise Men & Women Mentorship Program, the most common denominator for effective mentoring activities is play. Like a big grassy park with swing sets, play provides the mentee with familiar contexts, rhythms, and language, inviting the child to explore his/her world. Slides, monkey bars, and teeter-totters make up a "field of play," an array of choices that engage and focus a young person's attention. Most playthings, whether crayons, board games, dolls, or computers, become symbolic in the imaginative world of children. That is, they can represent something else to them. A lump of clay, for example, in the hands of a boy, can quickly become a coiled snake. The drawing by a timid girl might serve as a voice for her to express a feeling. For some children, a simple game of tic-tac-toe can turn into a battle ground for asserting oneself. A collage of magazine photos may reveal the values of a mentee's peer group. In sum, children can communicate to us indirectly through play. By the choices which they make and by the manner in which they interact, they can tell us many things about themselves. The shy can speak without talking and feeling in the spotlight. In fact, when a child feels safe in his/her familiar world of play, dialogue can just happen -- like bird song in a tree.

*The wise mentor always brings a "tool kit" with a variety of choices.*

When we allow children to select activities which appropriately fit their interests and developmental needs, we invite them to speak to us through their language of play. Provided below is a list of activities and materials which you can present to your mentee for possible exploration. They are ideas to trigger your imagination and get things going. The best fits will emerge from your child's special interests and your own unique talents.

### **OLDIES BUT GOODIES**

Some games and activities have been around for many years. In fact, they are stored in our own childhood memories. Although they may look simple in an age of CD-players and computer games, their "hand-me-down status" across generations preserves their appeal and uniqueness. For countless numbers of kids, they have passed the test of time.

*Tic-tac-toe*

*Hangman*

*Candyland*

*Shoots & Ladders*

*Shooting "hoops"*

*Hopscotch*

*Jacks*

*Pickup sticks*

*Marbles*

*Checkers and chess*

*Card games*

*Charades*

**We're just getting started. What oldies to you remember as goodies?**

## NEW AND GOOD

There are new "therapeutic games" on the market designed to promote protective factors such as self-esteem, cooperation, and social skills building. Although some can seem a little complex and serious for an average child, many have proven to work quite well.

*Ungame*

*The Mad Sad Glad Game*

## ARTS & CRAFTS

Children love to make things, to bring thoughts and feelings to life with clay, paper, glue, and Lego. Not only is construction a fundamental process by which they learn, bridging internal images with their motor skills, it is also a good way for mentors to build friendships. A drawing or block tower serves as a memento of our time together.

*Drawing:* crayons, markers, pencil, chalk, paper, Etch-a-sketch

*Painting:* washable paints, brush, paper, "fingers"

*Collage:* magazines, glue, scissors, paper, glitter

*Claywork:* clay, cookie cutters, rolling pin, molds

*Construction:* puzzles, wood scraps & glue, Lego, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs, pipe cleaners, corks, cloth...*anything you can find and imagine*

## DRAMATIC PLAY

Young children, in particular, like to explore feelings, ideas, and situations through the imaginative world of dramatic play. For example, a couple of masks or puppets can give a boy or girl a new face and special voice to express oneself, especially for the timid.

*Puppets*

*"Playmobile" sets (e.g., classroom, ambulance)*

*Dolls*

*Miniature animals (e.g., farm, jungle, dinosaurs)*

*Hats*

*Miniature cars (of all kinds)*

*Masks & costumes*

*Musical instruments*

When asked, just about any school age child will tell you about his/her favorite "group" and song. If you have talent in this area, "Go for it!" Some mentors even learn to "rap."

## STORIES

Storytelling is perhaps the most traditional or "classic" activity of the mentor. From the great oral traditions of the past when tales and legends were orally transmitted, to the children's literature of the present, with its own big section in every library and bookshop, the story has been used as a vehicle to entertain and to teach. A good story speaks to a child's daily world. It explores developmental challenges and choices of young people in gentle, symbolic ways, that can be easily heard and understood. Its fun twists and turns lead the child's imagination to a valuable message. *So read together – and share stories.*

## FOR KIDS OF A NEW MILLENNIUM

The knowledge and technology of our information age opens new possibilities for mentoring activities, unimaginable to our predecessors in small villages. For example, although we would not want to rely on electronic devices with a child, there is no need to avoid them altogether. A camera, tape recorder, or computer can become a useful means of communication between a mentor and a child.

*The golden rule is "Let the child be your guide. S/he knows the best fits.*

*What counts is not the activity per se, but how it helps to build relationship.*

## DRAWING OUT THE LESSON

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If the time, place, and person are just not right, no adult can force a child talk to him/her. You may get a “yes” “no,” or head nod, but not a genuine dialogue. As with grown-ups, children have their own pace and preferences. They open up when the spirit moves them, and this only happens when they feel secure. Thus,

*A wise mentor takes time to build a good foundation*

With undivided attention, once open, some children never want to stop talking. However even with the friendliest chatterbox, mentors should not hurry to bring up serious issues. Just “**hang out**,” as the kids advise us, and allow things to get rolling at their own pace. Chitchat is more than fine. Small talk to an adult may be big talk for a child. Remember that our mission is to establish a supportive friendship – not to teach, preach, or persuade.

Although wise mentors do not force conversation topics upon their mentees, like alcohol, drugs, gangs, or self-esteem, they do respond in creative and respectful ways when such themes naturally emerge from their interaction. That is, they wait and see, with patience, for “what pops up” in the mentee, either indirectly in the child’s play, or more overtly in his/her dialogue. Wise mentor trust, that one way or another,

*Children will let one us know what they need to learn.*

The boy who “has to” win every game of checkers may be pushing for self recognition. The girl who just wants you to listen to her story, to give her your undivided attention, may be asking, very simply, for love. The contents of a child's story might suggest a problem with his/her peers, while a stick figure drawing may be trying to share a feeling.

*The wise mentor gently draws out the lesson and lets it speak for itself.*

*Mentoring is about listening and learning, not moralizing or giving advice.*

- Do allow your mentee to share feelings, but don’t reply with “shoulds” or “shouldn’ts.”
- Help the child to explore and discover his/her own solutions to problems & dilemmas.
- Do not probe the child for “yes or no” answers. Mentors are friends -- not evaluators.
- Use open-ended questions, roomy ones that allow the child to respond in many ways.
- Never impose your own agenda. Change happens from our caring -- not preaching.
- Build on themes that come from the child, and find creative ways to explore them.
- Think of a story which contains an appropriate message. A good story can speak to a child's predicament, and its lessons can point to positive solutions.
- Allow your own beliefs and values to speak for themselves, that is, by role modeling. A child can learn honesty, patience, and cooperation by the way you play together.
- Above all, remember that your relationship is a lesson in and of itself -- a message of mutual respect, unconditional regard, and self-worth.
- When in doubt about how to respond, just listen.

*The big life lessons that a child needs can be learned through friendship.*

## GROWING THEMES

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We should not impose our personal agendas on children, but rather allow each mentee to raise whatever issue s/he wants. Good mentors keep their eyes and ears open for special learning themes which "pop up" in the child's play or talk. Once trust has been firmly established in the relationship, a mentor can nudge the conversation, with tact and active listening, in the direction of one of the child's themes. If the time is right, the mentee may wish to explore the topic. The key principles here are "trust" and "gentle guidance."

*Trust opens the door of a relationship to meaningful dialogue.*

A growing theme is an issue of special importance to a mentee that reflects his/her developmental challenges and unique social situation. One's friends or peer group, for example, is high on the list for most children in elementary school. Alcohol, drugs, and gangs take on more significance in communities where they are more prevalent (which nowadays, seems like just about everywhere). Based on situations of real daily life, growing themes pose questions and moral dilemmas to a child: "Should I fight back against the bully?" "Should I smoke marijuana with my friends?" "Should I kiss her?" Below is a short list of growing themes facing school age children in today's world.

*Self-esteem*

*Drugs & alcohol*

*Tests and grades*

*Demands at home*

*Winning & losing*

*Boredom & fun*

*Making friends & fitting in*

*Peer pressure*

*Dealing with gangs*

*Weapons at school*

*Sex*

*AIDS*

**The mentor's job is to help children to sort through their choices.**

Although it is not effective to tell our mentees what to do, we can help them to identify and examine the pitfalls and possibilities of the different paths around a growing theme. But do not rush or worry. When the relationship is seeded with trust, caring, and rapport, more serious discussions will grow on their own. Your task is to nurture the friendship.

- If a child candidly raises an issue, begin by paraphrasing his/her statement. For example, "It sounds like you're being pressured by your friends."
- If a child is pointing to a theme more indirectly, such as through play or nonverbal communication, try putting what you are observing into words: "You seem upset about something today."
- Help the child identify his/her choices and review possible consequences.
- Affirm the mentee when s/he chooses to act in ways to better him/herself.
- Whenever in doubt about a child's situation, **consult with the counselor.**
- Remember that solving a problem is far less important than just listening!

*In fact, some of our toughest problems are solved by good simple listening.*

# THE ALTRUISTIC APPROACH

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Whether we play cards or draw pictures, read stories or talk about drugs, our goals or desired outcomes as mentors are similar:

- √ We want to help our mentees to feel better about themselves.
- √ And we want to help them be more successful in their lives.

Mentors work towards these goals in two complementary ways: by providing friendship, and by encouraging "moral character." In fact, one of the most effective means to help a child develop good character is by being a role model of honesty, kindness, and altruism. Another important way is by providing opportunities for the mentee to express caring. For example, a mentor and child can engage in altruistic projects -- in doing good deeds.

Using an altruistic approach to mentoring, all kinds of activities have the potential to demonstrate thoughtfulness and to express concern for the welfare of others. A drawing can become a get well card for a sick friend, or a clay figure can be a gift for Grandma. With a little creativity we can weave positive values into our relationship in simple ways.

Mentors can also promote caring and altruism by encouraging children to think and act in the best interests of other people. Whether the other person is a family member, a friend, or even yourself, the objective is similar: to practice empathy -- to place one's self in the shoes of another, seeing and feeling the world from his/her standpoint.

Empathy is the building block of altruism. It is a perennial lesson of life which benefits children to learn over and over again, at each developmental stage, in order to become just and moral people. A toddler, for example, asserting his/her autonomy with "me, me" and "no, no, no," needs to learn to share as a preschooler. The elementary school child, who has mastered the task of putting feelings into words, must next learn to ask others how they feel, and how s/he can be of help. In such ways, kids develop as caring people.

Here are some ideas for altruistic projects. With positive thinking, you'll find your own:

- ☐ Read a story or watch a video together which has an altruistic message.
- ☐ Carry out a good deed with the child at school, e.g., in the playground or classroom.
- ☐ Encourage your mentee to choose a special community cause or altruistic project.  
Provide the child with resources and support for him/her to follow through.
- ☐ Read the newspaper together and discuss current events with the child.
- ☐ Encourage your mentee to write a letter to a local leader expressing a concern about the needs of others.
- ☐ Encourage your mentee to use his/her art work and craft projects as gifts for people who are having difficulty in their lives.
- ☐ Help the child to remember birthdays and to express gratitude for others' generosity.
- ☐ Role play and discuss different scenarios and solutions to conflicts.
- ☐ Explore other options than vengeance for to cope with experiences in which the child or his/her loved ones have been hurt.
- ☐ Encourage your mentee to serve as a good example, a "wise person," among peers.

*Good kids don't just happen. They grow from random acts of kindness.*

## PRACTICING OUR LEARNINGS

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Positive change in human beings can happen suddenly, but for most of us, it takes time. It takes times because any new thought, attitude, or behavior needs a kind of pilot test or trial run, to make sure it's a better fit than the old one. And once tested, when we realize that we can move through life easier or healthier, then we have to rehearse the new skill. That is, the real work begins: PRACTICE. Only through repetition, thinking or behaving in the same way, over and over, day and night, does it become "second nature" as we say, does it truly become a part of us. In short, change requires work.

The learning of a more positive social skill, or image of one's self, or outlook on life, follows a similar formula:

- √ First we are exposed to a new way of thinking, feeling or behaving, often from contact with another person -- like a mentor.
- √ Second, we have to consider whether this is a better fit for us. And sometimes this is confusing. So we wrestle with the idea of change.
- √ Lastly, once we have made a decision, and tested the desired skill, then change is a matter of practice -- of integrating it into our self.

In a sense, from this cyclical view of change, mentoring is one long process of repetition, of practicing a different kind of relationship between a strange adult and a child in need. Session after session, both mentor and mentee rehearse a whole set of friendship skills: e.g., listening, caring, open dialogue, critical thinking, and collaborative problem solving. An at-risk child learns to view his/her self in a new light by seeing the eyes of the adult, consistently expressing respect and unconditional positive regard for the younger person. Over the course of time, the experience of receiving care and support becomes a belief: "This is a real thing. S/he is my friend. And I am important."

If our shared goals as mentors are to help children to feel better about themselves, and to be more successful in their lives -- as just moral people -- then one of our central tasks is to help them to practice their new chosen thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In repetition the skills are reinforced and "anchored" down as useful parts of self.

- Encourage your mentee to express caring and empathy for others – and affirm him/her whenever s/he does so.
- Encourage your mentee to perform numerous acts of kindness – and affirm him/her after each special one.
- After the child discovers other options to a personal problem, such as how to get along better with one's peers, to be more successful in school, or to stay a healthier person, assist him/her in making and carrying out a plan of action.
- Validate the child each time s/he repeats and demonstrates a positive course of action to his/her problems.
- Engage in positive rituals, activities which both of you can repeat during each session, as simple as the way you greet and say good-bye.

*Practice may not make people perfect, but it can make change a part of us.*

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

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1. The job of a mentor is not to “teach or preach,” but rather to help children to learn and discover for themselves.
2. One way in which mentors help children to learn is by role modeling. By our attentive and caring presence, we promote respect, trust and self-esteem.
3. Another fundamental way in which mentors facilitate learning is through **CHOICE**, or by providing activities and opportunities for children to explore life's lessons.
4. Mentoring is a child-centered process. Inviting mentees to select our shared activities conveys respect, informs us of their special interests, and ensures their participation.
5. In the model of the Wise Men & Women Mentoring Program, play is a key ingredient for effective mentoring activities. It provides familiar contexts, rhythms, and language which invite a child to explore his/her world.
6. The wise mentor always brings along a tool kit with a variety of choices for activities. "Good fits" emerge from each child's special interests and the mentor's unique talents.
7. Although an effective mentor does not force his/her own agenda upon a mentee, s/he does respond to the growing themes which surface within the child, and which point to the developmental challenges and social concerns of the young person.
8. The lessons which children need to learn are always close at hand. You do not need to moralize or give advice. Just gently draw out the lesson and let it speak for itself.
9. An essential part of facilitating a child's learning to care and to act justly in the world, is to help children to empathize -- to step into the shoes of others and experience what they see, hear, and feel.
10. In summary, the power of mentoring always lies in the relationship. It is not about a particular strategy, a certain activity, or a universal topic. It is about each child as a unique individual, about you as a role model, and about the shared experiences which give meaning to your lives.

*No map is ever the territory, but only a tool, like a compass, for direction.  
Each child will know best what, when, and where s/he wants to explore.*

*Mentoring is about empowering children -- allowing them to influence adult relationship. We do not need to exercise the authority of a parent or teacher.  
Our job is to be a friend.*

*In fact, quite often the best thing we can do to assert our authority with a child is to share our decision making power and welcome his/her influence. In the act of letting go for awhile, allowing the young person to be the boss, to choose what to do together, the adult earns the other's trust and respect.*

**When you don't know what to do – just ask the child.**



# **CHAPTER FIVE**



## **GUIDING THE RELATIONSHIP**

## **"WILL YOU COME BACK?" A MENTEE'S STORY**

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Everyone had just come back from Easter break, which meant only a few more months of school, which for most children, translated to ALRIGHT SUMMERTIME! But Pete felt different this year. For the first time in his life, he did not want June to come.

"What is wrong with me?," he wondered. "I usually can't wait to get out of this place. My friends are gonna think I've lost it or something."

As Pete was eating supper that night, staring blankly at the television, even his mother noticed the silence from the other room. She usually cleaned up the kitchen at this time, collecting her thoughts as a single, working mom. It struck her as unusual not to hear laughter from her boy, her only child and housemate, as he watched his favorite show.

"You okay in there?," she called out into living room. When Pete did not answer, the mother dropped her broom and went out to check on him.

"Hey you, Mister," she tried again, "you doing alright?"

"Yah," the boy said flatly, going back into his TV trance.

"That doesn't sound like a good yah," she replied, sitting down beside him on the couch. "What's up fella? You don't seem happy to me."

"School's almost over," Pete replied.

"What?," the mother questioned, startled by her son's remark. "What about summer? That's your favorite time."

"Yah," the boy repeated, another "yah" with little affect.

"What's going on?," his mother began, but stopped abruptly. It finally occurred to her that summer would mean a loss for Pete – a dreaded goodbye with his mentor Angelo. Since the boy had lost his father last year from cancer, Angelo was the only adult male to whom he would get close.

"Oh, it's Angelo, isn't it?," she inquired, checking out her mother's intuition. She herself had doubts about the whole mentoring thing for her grieving boy. She worried that these community volunteers, busy with their own lives, often had soft commitments.

The boy nodded in silence, affirming his fear of another good-bye.

“So how do you know that he’s not coming back?,” the mother challenged. “Has he said anything? Have you even asked him?”

“Nope,” the son replied, again short on words.

“Nope, he hasn’t said anything,” continued the mom, “or nope you haven’t asked?”

“Both,” Pete muttered – but then suddenly perked up. “Yah, that’s it. I’ll just ask him, yah...straight out...if he’ll come back next year. I won’t give him an option.”

“Well, that’s a good idea,” agreed the mother, “but I wouldn’t back him into a corner.”

“Yah,” the boy nodded, his mind already made up, misinterpreting his mother’s words. “I’ll back him right into the corner. Thanks Mom.”

And that’s kind of what happen. The next week when Angelo arrived at school for their mentoring session, he asked his young friend, as customary, what he would like to do. Expecting Pete to propose some kind of board game, the boy surprised him.

“I want to talk,” stated the assertive mentee.

“What? Oh okay,” replied Angelo, catching his balance. “Okay...yah...let’s go for it. What’s up? What do you want to talk about?”

“Bout you and me,” the boy went on. “Bout our friendship...and it being important... you know, us hanging together. You know, not busting up and stuff, just because of summer or somethin. I mean, you and me are tight now...like best friends...and I guess what I’m trying to say...well...I want you to be here next year. Will you come back?”

Angelo listened, holding back his tears. He couldn’t believe all the changes that he had witnessed in the child. When they had gotten started in August, he wondered if the boy would ever take to him and feel at ease. And when they finally got into board games, and began to enjoy their time together, he doubted whether Pete would open up to him about anything. But little by little, they had both learned to trust their friendship.

“Well, will you?,” the boy tried again.

“Well yah...yah,” stuttered the mentor, feeling a bit embarrassed that he himself had not raised the possibility of coming back. “You’ve got it buddy. I’m there.”

“Yes,” Pete shouted, raising his hand for a “high five.” “You’re the best of best Angelo. I knew it. I knew that maybe you’d say yes.”

The mentor was as happy as his mentee. In one of those awkward, intimate moments between two males, old and young with watery eyes, they had affirmed their friendship. Each had validated the other, by stating aloud, their commitment to “hang together.”

## PHASES OF THE RELATIONSHIP

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Week by week, without having to push things along, the mentoring relationship grows in openness and intimacy. As **new acquaintances**, unsure about what to say and how to spend time together, the adult and child learn to relax in the process of "just hanging out." Mentors gradually become people that children can count on and trust, like **good friends**. Because of this safe and familiar bond, the child's genuine self comes out of hiding while the mentor becomes more confident with his/her giving.

At its best, a mentoring relationship reinforces a special sense of belonging, **like family**. Its treasured qualities, like dependability, unconditional acceptance, trust, mutual respect, openness, shared enjoyment, rituals, and affection, are the same people ingredients that make for healthy families. The positive feelings of this supportive community friendship become a significant force within the child. Like a caring, secure attachment with mom, dad, aunt, or uncle, they make a silent but lasting impact on his/her moral development. As one boy stated to his mentor: "You really do believe in me." The child discovered that someone besides his single mother considered him very special. He had realized that just because of who he was, because of his own gift of life, he was worthy of affection from another adult. The landmarks of this mentoring journey are outlined below:

### ***NEW ACQUAINTANCES***

- Some nervousness and shyness are normal as strangers come together.
- Mentor asks open questions and listens to learn about the child's world.
- Child-directed play takes the edge off of talking and helps both to relax.
- Child is still unsure about the mentor's role and his/her commitment.
- Mentor may need to set ground rules and limits on appropriate behavior.

### ***GOOD FRIENDS***

- Mentor and child feel more relaxed and familiar with one another.
- Mentor knows the child's likes, dislikes, and nonverbal communications.
- Child talks more about friends, school, sports and other personal interests.
- "Learning themes" gradually emerge from their respectful dialogue.
- Child may still want to be reassured of his/her mentor's commitment.

### ***LIKE FAMILY***

- Child "believes" in the caring, acceptance, and respect of his/her mentor.
- Mentor feels an increasing sense of commitment to child's development.
- More problem solving about life situations occurs between the partners.
- The close friends create their own rituals, and look forward to each visit.
- Trust is freely given and openly received -- with reciprocal appreciation.

*The mentoring relationship evolves over time, nurtured by regular interactions of trust and caring, into a close and secure attachment.*

## LONG TERM COMMITMENT

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If a close and secure mentoring relationship evolves over time, then clearing a space in one's schedule – and making a firm commitment -- are perhaps the most important steps in becoming a good mentor. The national survey by the Princeton Research Associates, using a sample of over a thousand volunteers, reminds us that the optimal length of a mentoring relationship is "**two years.**" That translates to a span of at least 24 months or 724 days, perhaps 72 visits in a school-based program. It seems a lot in our busy world, but it really isn't -- in children's time.

*(72 hours) is less than (two weeks of life) over the course of (two years)*

In the development of effective mentors, a program, trainer, or guidebook cannot speak enough to the critical importance of commitment. And in general, problems seldom arise from a lack of understanding of why longer term friendships have a more beneficial and lasting impact on children. Mentors tend to easily grasp this at a common sense level.

The bigger concerns come from difficulties in following through with one's commitment. Volunteers have good intentions. They apply to programs because they want to help kids. They want to give back to their communities or make a positive difference in the world. Because they enjoy children, and they understand that an adult friendship can truly serve as a protective factor in a young person's life, it seems like a good fit, a right thing to do.

Then comes the real deal, getting to the school week after week, showing up on time as if going to work, not letting the mentee down. This is where the rub comes. Something or other pops up, as often happens in life, trying to get in our way. Whether it is another responsibility, or change in our situation, or even our attitude, **we have to hang in there.**

*Sadly, no relationship for a child may be better than an unreliable one.*

In sum, this is a very big serious thing to a child, you becoming a mentor in his/her life. And because it is a volunteer job, something you do not have to do, your clarity, integrity, and resolve are paramount.

- Give everything a whole lot of thought before you apply, and especially before you are linked up with a child.
- You don't have to do this now in your life. Maybe it's not the right time.
- But if you do go through the training, and do get matched, then following through is as important as going to work – at least in the eyes of a child.
- When we do commit to a friendship, we become part of a child's history, of his/her memory of promises and expectations with the adult world.
- Committing to mentor is a decision to hang in there – to be disciplined with a particular duty and to safeguard a special time like a treasure.

*Unexpected things do happen that change our life circumstances.  
But for the most part, we each decide what to do in our extra time.*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUALS

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Weeks go by very quickly in a school year. The topics of classroom conversation switch day to day. One boy enters a new circle of friends, while an old buddy drifts away. Spelling grades go up and math falls down. Feelings of anger turn into hurt and sadness, then worry, and back to happiness. For an elementary school child, change is constant.

A trusting relationship with an adult mentor can serve as an emotional anchor for a child. Just like a good teacher, who makes the school day a safe experience, a long term mentor can add a sense of stability to the entire school year. S/he is there, week after week, sun or rain, to listen and support, no matter what else happens in other areas of a child's life.

**Rituals** have these same qualities of constancy and reliability. Defined here as a repetitive or ceremonial act to which we assign special meaning, rituals provide us with a sense of stability in our world of change. For a child, eating dinner with one's family around the same table at the same hour is no small event. It stops time for a short while, fostering feelings of safety and nurturance. Because the world outside the home is not as predictable for children, they grow to rely on such familiar moments of coming together and communion. In a family ritual, shared meanings of love and unity are reenacted.

Rituals add meaning to a child's life. As simple as celebrating an "A" in reading or math, rituals reinforce learning and growth by placing an experience in brackets and giving it special attention. In short, they mark time for children when an event deserves to be highlighted. For example, a mentor should celebrate a mentee's birthday. This is easy to remember. But one can also acknowledge and "ritualize" all kinds of landmarks, big and small, in the development of the child and of the relationship itself. In the act of ritual, the friendship is reaffirmed, and its positive memories stored forever.

They are many other reasons why rituals can enhance the mentoring experience:

- The warm and lasting memories reinforced by rituals are available to children in the mentor's absence, similar to a favorite song or photograph.
- Rituals change the ordinariness of our everyday interactions into something special.
- For example, a familiar handshake is more than a greeting. It says "hello, my friend."
- The ability to create and remember rituals is an essential part of moral development. Writing thank you cards, or a letter to a sick friend, both simple rituals of kindness, encourage a child to express his/her sense of altruism in a creative way.
- For children who lack sufficient caring, attention, and safety in the home, rituals in a mentoring relationship can help to fill emotional gaps.
- Rituals promote a child's feelings of self-worth: "My mentor brought me cookies, just for learning to multiply. I must be special."
- Even a special hand shake, or the same greeting "Hello, my friend," or a familiar goodbye, "Take care buddy," are all rituals that honor relationship.

*In the reenactment of ritual, we remember the goodness of relationship.*

## STAYING IN TOUCH

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Sometimes things pop up in our lives, unforeseen and unavoidable, that prevent us from attending one or more of our mentoring sessions. Such events or situations have nothing to do with our level of commitment to the relationship, however they may insert some doubt into the mind of our friend, an at-risk young person. At these times, commitment means more than our practice of being on time and showing up every week. It becomes a larger principle -- one of maintaining contact and staying in touch -- keeping our presence alive in a child's heart and mind. In short, keep a thread through the friendship.

Making a phone call or sending a letter are both easy ways to reconnect with a mentee. This may be particularly true within school-based mentoring programs, which commonly have policies against home visits and afterschool contacts. With the consent of parents, and their guidance as to when best to phone, checking in from wherever you have gone, can make a child feel remembered and important: "Mom, it's my mentee. S/he calling me all the way from New York. It's three hours later there."

Imagine a postcard of the Statue of Liberty, or a letter with a Golden Gate Bridge stamp. Writing is one of those oldie but goody connections, even with modern electronic kids. And of course, for those with computer and Internet access, e-mail may be the way to go. In fact, perhaps what we've learned as a species over all these years of communication between mentors and mentees, is that the message is more important than the medium. The point is to stay in touch -- to remind the child of the value of your relationship.

So be creative -- manual or digital:

- Leave a drawing or small memento with your mentee if you need to go out of town. Take one of his/her drawings with you.
- Photos are great. Seems like everyone has a camera these days, or can afford one of those throwaway Kodaks. Take a picture of the two of you together.
- Guatemalan and African "friendship bracelets" are a cool thing for kids these days.
- In a long absence of several weeks, it may be a good idea for the Mentor Coordinator to pay a visit to your mentee, not only to check in with the child, but to let him or her know, from the "program boss," how much you value their friendship.

Even after we do eventually say goodbye to our young friends, that is, at the end of our formal relationship as school-based mentors -- there is no rule against staying in touch, for as long as we remain on earth. With the permission of the child and his/her parents, it may well be a wonderful thing to drop a note or check in over the years. In fact, much of the positive force from a mentor relationship may not fully activate until later in life, when one more clearly discerns the meaning and importance of the supportive friendship. This is true with many of our childhood experiences. With more emotional maturity, cognitive ability, and more life itself, our past can become present wisdom.

*Isn't it a good policy to keep a thread through all our friendships,  
and doesn't this include the special ties with our growing mentees?*

## SAYING GOODBYE

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Mentoring is a journey of friendship. As with any human relationship, it has a beginning and an end. A school year is not very long at all, not even two or three years. By the time school starts up again each fall, the kids are already thinking of their Christmas trees. And when they return from New Year's celebrations, spring fever has begun to spread. "I can't believe it's summer," remarked one mentor. "I feel like we're just getting going."

Sometimes June means a short vacation for mentors committed to two or more years. However, it can also mean a goodbye. At some point or another, if not after the first year then perhaps the second or third, the mentoring relationship will come to a formal end. How we eventually say goodbye is equally important as how we first say hello.

Endings are also beginnings of something else, of new life situations or directions. For a child letting go of a mentoring relationship, it means moving on in the world without a special supportive friend. Although some children may be linked up with new mentors, many will not. Most will find themselves in the circumstance of carrying the memories of the relationship inside them. Although young children do not necessarily leave a friendship with the intention of applying its learnings and positive feelings in their lives, in a sense, without them thinking, this is what happens. The friendship remains a force within their developing self, a kind of guardian angel, just like when someone very close to us dies. Their presence tends to linger inside us, in beneficial and unpredictable ways.

Because children are more concrete and present oriented, unlikely to spend much time in contemplating the future benefits of their mentoring relationships, goodbyes can be sad. This is normal. We all understand this experience. In truth, any termination of a significant relationship is a symbolic form of dying, of letting go. An effective mentor who wishes the friendship's ending to serve as another important learning, does not shirk or hide from difficult emotions. Very simply, it is okay for both of you to be sad, and to share your feelings with one another. This grieving together honors the value of your relationship, while allowing other emotions to settle back in and play their role in healing. With a thorough goodbye, you can both move on, grateful for all that you have received.

So it's also normal to have mixed feelings, to feel happy in your closeness as well as sad. Rituals can be very useful at this time. Making something together during the goodbye stage can give the child a concrete memento to hold and keep, a kind of anchor for the hard special feelings. Rituals give us strength to let go and move forward, equipping us with positive memories for the road ahead.

But remember, you can stay in touch. Your week to week visits may be coming to end, but you don't have to disappear all together. There is no mentoring rule that forbids one from dropping by once in awhile, or making a phone call, or writing a letter, just like an old teacher or coach from grammar school. In fact, such **friendship renewal** over time can be a significant life learning for a child about human relationships.

*Thoughtful, sensitive goodbyes can give a child strength and confidence, helping him or her to trust and attach again to other caring people.*



There is no one way to say goodbye to a mentee, just as there is no single way to mentor. As with everything else on our journey, we can carry a map, but never the real territory. And as with all of our other mentoring challenges, the most reliable trail tip is:

*Just be yourself -- whether happy or sad -- short of words or full of feelings.*

It is very rare to find a human being that thinks s/he is very good at saying goodbyes. Because of the emotions involved in ending a close relationship, or changing its nature, there is a sense of awkwardness, an uncertainty that we're not doing it right. But in truth, letting go is a messy kind of experience. Therefore mentors should try to be honest, gentle, and sensitive, always keeping the child's feelings in mind.

- Above all, again a reminder, if you can make a commitment for one more year, go for it – but follow through!
- Even though it looks like an easy out, do not say you “might come back,” just to avoid the difficult feelings of saying goodbye.
- Ritualize the passage of seasons and changes in the school year. That is, from the start you can weave the theme of “life changes” in your dialogue.
- Ask the child about other experiences of having to say goodbye, and share with him/her some of your own hard endings as a child.
- Give the child plenty of notice of your last school day as his/her mentor. Six weeks in advance, and no less than a month, allows you both time to find your way through this challenging period.
- Have your mentee suggest some rituals for honoring your time together.
- Create a visual or tangible memento which will remind the child of your friendship: e.g., sculpture, drawing, photograph.
- Don't make assumptions. A child may not feel as sad as you think or feel. Or s/he may have a slower, more cautious approach to difficult feelings.
- Accept your mentee's feelings and reactions at the pace and in the manner in which they come.
- **Actively listen**, reflect back to the child his/her feelings. Do not confront or challenge him/her. Anger and feelings of betrayal are quite common.
- Stay tuned to his/her nonverbal communications. To check your intuition, you might say, "It doesn't seem like you're very happy today. I wonder if it has something to do with us only having a few more weeks together."
- Give the child a nurturing gift as a transitional object, a goodbye anchor.
- Be open to stay involved in the child's life in some meaningful way. Tell him/her what you realistically can do: e.g., occasional letter or phone call.
- When the process gets tough, remember that separation is a big part of life's learnings.

*A caring ending is an important gift and lifelong memory for a child.*

# KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES

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Many of us grownups have a hard time saying goodbye and letting go in our own lives. For example, when two people reach a mutual agreement to end a close relationship, one or both may eventually violate its terms and trespass across the other's boundaries. Believe it or not, after the termination stage some mentors may need to beware of "staying in touch too much" -- particularly with children of guarded parents who prefer you had little or no contact. Their boundary says, "Thanks, but now it's over. Move on."

In the helping professions, it is quite common to hear the term "boundary." Although we can see and touch a wire fence which divides a piece of property, in the fuzzier territory of human relations our dividers are not as tangible. They are, however, just as important. "People boundaries" of concern to mentors tend to fall within three categories:

1. The rights of children as individuals.
2. The limits of our involvement as friends.
3. The limits of our roles as volunteer mentors.

## Children's Rights – and the Lines Between Grownups

Most of us have experienced the surprise and uneasiness when someone suddenly crosses into our "personal space" and gets too close to us without our permission -- a kind of invasion of our individual boundaries. A different form of trespassing can occur with inappropriate verbal communication. Shouting and swearing, for example, are invasive to both children and adults. They break a kind of interpersonal sound barrier. Put-downs are equally wrong, negating our worth and uniqueness as individuals. In other words, they violate our "human rights."

### *OUR MENTEES HAVE THE RIGHT TO:*

- Be spoken to in a proper tone with respectful language.
- Be listened to with courtesy and attentiveness.
- Be told in advance if a mentor cannot make a session.
- Have their mentor come on time.
- Not have grownups violating their personal space.
- Be asked whether or not they would like a hug.
- Complain, question, and express disappointment.
- Be in charge of choosing mentoring activities.
- And never be physically, sexually or emotionally harmed.

## Our Limits as Friends

In a school-based mentoring program, such as The Wise Men & Women or "Los Sabios," there are general rules which set basic limits regarding what, when, and where activities can take place in the adult-child relationship. Such practical and prudent guidelines, necessary for managing a safe program, define the boundaries of the special friendship.

*Without clear boundaries, we get into territories that should be avoided.*

- Do not get together with your mentee on your own, outside of school, without the consent of the Program Coordinator. (Many mentoring programs discourage afterschool contact for liability reasons.)
- You do not need to be anything more than a committed, reliable, and supportive mentor to a child. Although you may wish to become more involved in your mentee's life, trying to fill a gap in his/her social network, this is not necessary. In your role as a school-based friend, you are meeting the child's basic needs for trust, hope, and attention. Without you, no one might fill your shoes.
- Stick to the program rules. They have evolved over time for good reasons.

### WHAT ABOUT GIFT GIVING?

Whether or not to give gifts to a child can also be viewed as a boundary question. Do I buy the winter coat that s/he doesn't have? Should I bring something special for a good report card? These are not easy questions to answer. So instead, we provide guidelines:

1. Do not try to buy a child's affection. Remember that your time and undivided attention, in and of itself, is a "positive reinforcer" to a child.
2. Give your gifts at special events (e.g., birthday, report card), as part of a ritual.
3. But keep all gifts simple and inexpensive, with no strings attached. A birthday card is enough to convey the message, "You are special."
4. When a child is in need of a winter coat or gloves, give them to the principal or counselor. Let the school make the donation in a discreet manner. What matters is that the child feels warm on cold days.

### Others in the Helping System

The role of a mentor can be frustrating at times due to the limited scope of our job. Although a child may have discipline problems, we cannot perform the duty of his/her parent(s) or caretakers. If a boy or girl is emotionally troubled, we cannot replace the need for a counselor or psychologist. If our mentee is failing in math, reading, or writing, we cannot make up the lost ground like an after school tutor.

### **We are mentor friends -- not parents, teachers, counselors, or tutors.**

Although our roles may feel and appear similar at times, it is essential that we recognize our differences, because we need to know when and who to call for help.

- ☐ Though mentors do promote the development of positive values and moral character in children, parents are their primary teachers and spiritual guides, no matter how we might disagree. Allow them to instruct their kids regarding their beliefs and religion.
- ☐ While we may read stories with our mentees, leave the academics up to the teacher.
- ☐ If you wish to tutor, check in out with the school and Coordinator. Get extra training.
- ☐ Just be a supportive person, like a "big fan" in the child's life.
- ☐ When s/he displays emotional or behavioral problems, consult the school counselor.
- ☐ And if your mentee shows possible signs of neglect or abuse, immediately inform the counselor, your Program Coordinator, and/or Protective Services.

*You are an invaluable link to the rest of the helping system!*

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

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1. Mentoring relationships evolve over time, with consistent contact and caring, towards higher phases of trust relationship: i.e., **new acquaintances, good friends, like family.**
2. The treasured qualities of a mentoring relationship, like dependability, unconditional acceptance, trust, mutual respect, openness, shared enjoyment, rituals, and affection, are the same people ingredients that make for healthy families.
3. If a secure attachment evolves over time, then clearing a space in one's schedule – and **making a firm commitment** -- are the most important steps in becoming a good mentor.
4. Because life outside the home, and maybe inside, is unpredictable, mentoring **rituals** can provide children with a sense of stability. They can also highlight and reinforce a child's growth, like celebrating an "A" in reading or math.
5. **A trusting commitment** means more than being on time and showing up every week. It involves a larger principle of staying in touch over time, keeping our presence alive in a child's heart and mind, perhaps by a making a phone call or sending a letter.
6. At some point or another, if not after the first year then perhaps the second or third, the mentoring relationship will reach a formal end. **How we say goodbye is important**, as life shaping as how we initially made contact.
7. Any termination of a significant relationship is a symbolic form of dying, of letting go. An effective mentor, who wishes the friendship's ending to serve as a positive learning, allows for open and honest talk. **Sharing the sad feelings honors the relationship.**
8. Rituals are helpful during the goodbye stage. Drawing or making something together, for example, can give a child a concrete memento to hold and keep – a symbolic anchor in the midst of change.
9. A thoughtful and sensitive goodbye can give a child strength, hope, and confidence, helping him/her to trust and attach again to other caring people.
10. **People boundaries** of concern to mentors fall within three categories: (a) the rights of children as individuals, (b) the limits of our involvement as friends, and (c) the limits of our roles as volunteer mentors.

*OUR MENTEES DESERVE OUR RESPECT, COURTESY, ATTENTION,  
CONSISTENCY, PUNCTUALITY, FLEXIBILITY, AND UNDERSTANDING.*

**We are mentor friends -- not parents, teachers, counselors, or tutors.**

*Although roles may look and feel similar at times,  
it is essential for mentors to recognize their limits,  
in order to know when and who to call for help.*

# CHAPTER SIX



## SOCIAL SKILLS LEARNING

## **"IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO STOP BULLYING" AN UPDATED STORY**

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They had known each other for months and considered each other to be best buddies. Manuel felt that he could tell "Mr. C.," as he called his mentor, just about anything, about the guys, his basketball team, even girls and his report cards. Well, just about anything. Manuel still had not told Mr. C. about the older boys who teased him on his way home from school. This was a hard-to-tell secret, hiding embarrassment. How could he tell his mentor that he felt like a "wimp."

The wise mentor, however, always sensed when something was not right. He could tell Manuel's good days from his bad ones, just by the boy's expressions and tone of voice. Although Mr. C. paid extra attention to this particular child, he never pushed Manuel to share more information than what his friend was ready to share. Mr. C. believed that when the time was right, when enough trust and openness had grown in their relationship, his young friend would provide more details.

But then one day the issue spoke for itself. Manuel showed up to their weekly session with a telling black eye. Seeing sadness and shame in the boy's face, the wise mentor decided not to comment on the shiner. Instead, he extended his hand with his usual greeting and smile.

"Hey buddy, how we doing today?" asked Mr. C. "It's good to see you."

"Okay," the boy quickly replied. Manuel always gave the same response, but this "okay" was a muffled one, trying to hide the secret.

"You know, Manuel," the mentor continued, "You and I are good friends now. We talk about sports and music and all kinds of stuff. This kind of openness makes me feel good. I know we trust each other. So I want you to know, that whenever things don't feel okay, we can talk about that too. I'm on your team, big guy. So how 'bout we go outside and shoot some baskets?"

The rusty orange hoop of the playground, home turf for Manuel, was just what the boy needed to open up, along with a game of H-0-R-S-E. "Mr. C., can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, buddy," replied the mentor as he tried his favorite hook shot. "Fire away."

"Mr. C., what would you do if some older guys called your mom a whore... or said you were a 'wimp'...and pushed you around? And what if they did it all the time?"

"That's a tough one," acknowledged the mentor. "Let's see. I'd feel very bad -- like hurt inside -- and probably pretty mad."

"Would you fight 'em...or try to hurt 'em...or get back or something?," inquired the boy.

"I sure might want to," the elder said candidly. "The angry part in me would be thinking how to beat the heck out of him. But then I'd also worry that I might get hurt, or even make things worse."

"Yah really," responded Manuel, looking up at his mentor with his confirming black eye. "Especially when you're outnumbered...and they're bigger than you."

"Especially," agreed Mr. C. "Then you really need to be extra smart. This is bully stuff. And at times like this, it's a good thing to have plenty of help -- some grownup help. Cause you know, my friend, without bigger people involved...these bullies...who think they can boss everyone around...well, some of them just don't stop."

"Yah, I know," replied the boy, all too familiar with how things work in the playground. "It really sucks."

As the mentor nodded, Manuel decided to take a risk and allow his friend to support him: "Mr. C...do you think you can help me? I'm in a tough spot."

"You bet buddy," stated the older friend. "I'm with you...but you know, I'm also gonna need some assistance on this one. It takes a village to stop bullying."

"You mean my parents got to know?," Manuel asked.

"For sure your parents," continued the mentor. "They already know something's up." The elder pointed to the boy's eye. "And for sure your teacher...and even the principal. And we could probably use the coach...and the playground guards...the more the better. A community, my friend, is more effective than karate."

Manuel sighed with relief. And from that moment on, his world became a safer place. Not only had he learned to trust a dark secret with his friend, but his story had disclosed the difficult situation of other children. His plea for help became a village response.

The principal began to hold meetings with the entire staff, parents, mentors, and other concerned citizens to change the culture of the school, and "bullyproof" their community. Little by little, with open dialogue, skills training, and neighborhood unity, both the children and adults learned how to intervene in bully behavior.

"Things are cool now," Manuel commented to Mr. C. one day. "Before, we couldn't say anything about the bullies. You had to keep quiet -- or else. Now the teachers want us to bust anyone who is hurting others. And the bullies, they have to take extra classes on being a good person."

"That is totally cool," agreed the mentor.

# PROSOCIAL SKILLS LEARNING

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The primary goal of a mentor is to establish a caring, supportive friendship with a child. This is our priority. We believe that nurturing a positive, intergenerational relationship, in and of itself, can lead to significant changes in a young person's life. So we advise, "just hang out." Just give them your full, undivided presence. Listen well. Show interest and compassion. Play and laugh. Being a friend is plenty.

Because one of the differences that can happen with a child, from the relationship itself, is the learning of new social skills. One way this occurs is through "**modeling**." That is, week after week our mentee observes how we pay attention, closely listen, show caring, and openly express ourselves. S/he is experiencing our kind presence, seeing, feeling, and learning how an adult befriends a child. In a sense, this "kindness experience" offers them a cognitive map of positive social behavior, and because we are the bigger people, grownups who have been around longer, this conceptual model has a special legitimacy, and hopefully may be worth following. This is the essence of "role modeling." We offer the child our positive role, our caring mentor way of being in the world, a real life picture of how an older human being can care for a younger. As active participants in this drama, some kids may decide to play our part as a "good guy."

And such social learning can also happen in another way. Think of all the time we spend together over the course of a year or more, all of our back and forth people interactions, the countless loops of our communications, weaving a pattern of relationship that we call "friendship." This steady process of friendship building, and the weekly repetition of the gentle moves of our dance, can be very powerful. Another basic way in which children learn about social behavior is through **practice**. They experience our respectful listening, and then might try the skill, hopefully over and over, until paying attention to others becomes part of their own repertoire. And if we point out and highlight this social skill, discussing the importance of listening to building strong friendship, the chance of such learning taking place increases. And even more so if we validate or "reinforce" the child when sh/e is demonstrating good listening: e.g., "Thanks for listening to me my friend." Here's how it can work, perhaps not so step by step, but more a weaving back and forth:

*The child observes us modeling  
a positive social skill*

*S/he practices it more.*

*We give it special attention  
and discuss its importance.*

*We affirm the child for  
demonstrating the skill.*

*We encourage him/her to try.*

*S/he tests out the skill.*



While it is helpful to have steps to follow as a guide, social learning in our human world is not a very linear process. In fact, when engaged in a conversation or interaction with a friend, most people kind of do their own thing, talking and listening, maybe interrupting, not very “mindfully.” In order to be an effective mentor in this area, or a facilitator of social learning, perhaps the best advice is to **remember the map** -- to be mindful of the territories that you need to visit and revisit, again and again, in order to weave together a new behavioral pattern which makes sense and become useful to the child. Above all, don’t worry about getting all the steps right. If you feel lost, always return to your self, your “role model” place of caring and kindness. This is base camp. All methods aside, this is truly where it’s at: **teaching friendship by doing it.**

Nowadays one can find a long list of curriculums for social learning, and a longer list of words to refer to the many skills. There are instructional manuals for “nonviolence,” “tolerance,” “conflict resolution,” “peacemaking,” “anti-bullying,” “anger management,” and “cooperation” -- all very important, interrelated subjects. A common catch-all term to describe this growing area of study is “prosocial,” which literally means, “for the social good.” Whether one hears of prosocial learning or development or competence, they all point to the same simple phenomena: **being a good person.** All prosocial skills are truly just decent human abilities that would make common sense to our grandparents. For a volunteer mentor, hoping to make a positive difference in the life of an at-risk child, the most fundamental of these skills, within our reach as role models, are listed below:

- ❑ making good contact, greeting in a friendly and affirming way
- ❑ paying attention and listening to another without interrupting
- ❑ acknowledging that you understand what the other has said
- ❑ sharing one’s point of view, or communicating disagreement, without sounding self-righteous, like “I’m right, you’re wrong”
- ❑ allowing another to inform you about a very different opinion, and acknowledging the truth in his/her position
- ❑ expressing dissatisfaction with another’s behavior in an honest, respectful, and noncritical manner
- ❑ managing one’s anger – expressing this emotion in a controlled, nonaggressive, and nonhurtful manner
- ❑ not overreacting, “keeping one’s cool,” in face of another’s anger
- ❑ displaying respect for people of different colors, cultures, genders, sexual natures, and cognitive or physical abilities.
- ❑ demonstrating empathy, stepping into the shoes of someone else, and seeing / feeling the world from their position
- ❑ giving compassion – comforting another in his or her suffering

This is a short list of the many social skills that we associate with being a good person, that we would want our own children to learn at home, in kindergarten, or with a mentor.

*In the final analysis, the best tool for social learning is our own goodness.*

# POSITIVE WAYS TO MANAGE BEHAVIOR

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No matter how hard you try as a mentor, regardless of how much attention, caring, and support you give to some children, they do not always respond in kind. However their “misbehavior” may have little to do with your competence as a mentor. It is often a “behavioral pattern” which occurs in other contexts. **So do not take it personally.** Difficult or inappropriate conduct for a child is a means to obtain a goal, a way to satisfy a certain need. It is learned, and therefore can be unlearned.

According to the late psychologist Alfred Adler and the educator Rudolf Dreikurs, whose humanistic thinking continue to shape the field of child psychology, the ultimate aim of children's behavior is to belong -- to feel a sense of importance in the social systems in which they participate, namely their family and peer group. In other words, although many behaviors may appear inappropriate and "bad" in our grown-up eyes, we can find something "good" if we look deep enough, usually a need for affiliation and a sense of self-worth. Dreikurs believed that, in general, children misbehave to satisfy one of four goals, all of which are actually misguided efforts to belong and to feel important:

<i>Attention</i>	<i>Revenge</i>
<i>Power</i>	<i>Avoidance of failure</i>

In other words, children tend to:

- √ Seek center stage or individual attention;
- √ Want to be the "boss," in control of others;
- √ Try to get even for real or imagined hurts; or
- √ Simply give up, feel down, and withdraw.

Based on this goal-directed thinking, **behavior management** can be defined as a positive learning process which helps children to meet their needs for self-worth and a sense of belonging in more constructive ways. In fact, when children do feel that they can connect with others and contribute to their communities, they have less need to misbehave.

An **intervention** is anything we do which tries to change a child's behavior for the better. Of course, adults attempt all kinds of things to accomplish this mission, many of which have little success. Some even make matters worse. One common error is to overlook the goal of a child's misbehavior and to use an inappropriate method – to mismatch. Therefore, the best way to guarantee a good fit is to first identify the child's goal.

You can easily recognize a child's goal for **attention** by one of the many acrobatics children perform to gain center stage. Temper tantrums or quiet noncompliance generally point to struggle for **power**. More aggressive behaviors such as physical attacks, stealing, damaging property, threats and insults suggest a child may be on a mission of **revenge**. By contrast, **avoidance of failure** is much more subtle. For example, it may be disguised as procrastination or a tendency to not complete tasks.

*In sum, the better we become at seeing the goal of a misbehavior,  
the more effective we will be as behavior managers.*

Some useful rules of thumb are offered below. Remember: first identify the right goal!

*WHEN THE GOAL IS ATTENTION:*

- ☐ Ignore the behavior.
- ☐ Try to make a lesson out of the situation.
- ☐ Distract the child (e.g., ask a favor, provide an alternative activity).
- ☐ Notice and affirm more appropriate behaviors.
- ☐ And above all, when appropriate give them the attention they desire.

*WHEN THE GOAL IS EITHER POWER OR REVENGE:*

- ☐ Stay calm. Pay attention to your body language.
- ☐ Acknowledge the child's importance and legitimate power as a person.
- ☐ Find an activity that allows for positive expression of the child's power.
- ☐ Table the matter. Set up another time to talk.
- ☐ Arrange a time-out or cool down period.
- ☐ Impose a reasonable or related consequence (e.g., delay or loss of activity, replacement or repair of objects).

*WHEN THE GOAL IS AVOIDANCE OF FAILURE:*

- ☐ Teach positive self talk or affirmations (e.g., "I can" versus "I can't").
- ☐ Post signs and draw pictures with positive statements.
- ☐ Minimize mistakes for the child. Make them a part of life and learning.
- ☐ Build self-confidence. Recognize past successes and accomplishments.
- ☐ Encourage and assist the child to form other positive relationships.

Provided below are some general guidelines, good for all situations:

- Be preventive. Start with a positive climate and set appropriate limits.
- Remove unnecessary distractions from the environment.
- Intervene swiftly, i.e., at the moment of misbehavior.
- Be consistent. Intervene each time a child misbehaves.
- Always try to avoid and to diffuse direct confrontation.
- Grant children appropriate power and respect as individuals.
- Problem solve with them as partners.
- Use lots of encouragement. (Interventions are only stopgap measures to end current misbehavior. Encouragement prevents future misbehavior.)
- Offer the child choices. For example, "You're having trouble following our rules today. Maybe you'd prefer to return to class."
- Talk about patience. Help the child practice self-discipline.
- Teach the child to express hurt and anger in more constructive ways.
- **Remember there is a positive goal somewhere in a child's misbehavior.**

*Most importantly, continue to build a caring relationship which will nurture the child's self-worth and need to belong.*

# ANGER MANAGEMENT

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Among helping circles, the term “anger management” has become part of everyday talk. Its popular usage may stem from several factors:

- √ Adults seem more aware of the noticeable numbers of angry children, and how this complex emotion underlies many of their disruptive behaviors.
- √ Many grownups appear angrier with “road rage” and domestic conflict.
- √ Anger is a basic human emotion. We all experience it to some degree. It is not a feeling that we eliminate, but one we learn to better “manage.”
- √ Anger becomes a problem when we allow it to get out of our self control, when it turns into aggressive behavior, and when those around us get hurt.

Because we all have personal experience in coping with anger, as mentors we can all help children to better manage its emotional energy -- even if we ourselves have struggled in this area. In fact, the more we understand how we feel and express anger as individuals, as well as how it impacts our relationships and our daily lives, the more awareness we have to share with our mentees. Healthy anger management is a matter of knowing, monitoring, and regulating our own bodies and minds.

So how can we as mentors help our friends to acquire more emotional intelligence and behavioral skill with controlling anger? What do we say? How we do facilitate learning?

- √ First of all, we need to assess whether anger is a problem for our mentee. While all kids feel the emotion, some children have less control than others.
- √ Secondly, going back to our primary job, we need to develop plenty of trust within the relationship – a climate of safety – to encourage open dialogue.
- √ Thirdly, we only need to cover the basics: i.e., what is anger, when does it become a problem, how can better manage it’s energy. We are not experts or counselors, but good friends, exploring our human nature.

## The Angry Child

Because children with anger problems commonly do poorly in school, and usually have mixed reputations with their peers, they comprise a big portion of our mentee population. They are the ones referred to our program due to classroom misconduct, bad temper, playground fighting, and being mean to others. Whatever the many possible reasons, whether because of an irritable temperament, disruptive family life, or a history of hurts, these young people seem more easily frustrated when the world does not go their way. All the body reactions of anger appear to rise more quickly and intensely within them, with less self control over their impulses. What for most kids is an unsettling experience within their developmental mastery, for these children anger is a major emotional event, resulting in outburst or aggression. Unable to manage the restless feelings and thoughts, they end up in trouble, on a chair in the principal’s office. However not all angry kids outwardly express the emotion. Some suppress the energy and keep it “bottled up.” Still an active force, unable to be released or calmed, anger causes trouble on the inside, like a fire in the body, becoming self-criticism, bitterness, irritability, or depression.

## Fire in the Body

Anger is kind of a fire in the body, with distinct physiological and biological reactions. For all human beings, our heart rate increases and blood pressure rises, accompanied by changes in neural chemistry of our brain, and in our energy hormones such as adrenaline. In sum, the body dramatically alters. The emotion becomes the center of our attention, and unfortunately, our reason tends to fade. And the more this force heats up our insides, the more visible its outward signs become: e.g., red face, flared nostrils, sweaty hands, stiffening of shoulders, watery eyes. And if vented with little self-control, as flames from a burning house, things can get messy as we all know, with shouting, grabbing, striking...

Although quick and often furious, anger is a delayed body response, a secondary reaction to a perception, to a frustrating thought that something is unacceptable in our world view. "This is not okay." "What a big mess." "How can this be?" "Why in the heck did I..." The list of negative cognitions that push our buttons and trigger the chain of body events is as long as the line of humans with high expectations – or perhaps faulty assumptions. Anger can also be set in motion by assigning a hurtful intention to another's behavior: "How could he do this?" "What a no good so and so." "She can't treat me like that." Whether upset with ourselves or others, the mind is usually as unsettled as the body.

## Healthy Channels

Given that anger comes along with being homosapiens, we really only have a few options with regards to managing its heart racing, adrenaline force:

- √ One, we can express the emotion in respectful and non-hurtful ways;
- √ Two, we can try to suppress the energy, the soda bottle method, or
- √ Three, we can learn to calm ourselves down and "self soothe."

While the second method is a proven formula for indigestion, the other two can keep us out of trouble. The expression of anger in a controlled and non-aggressive manner can be a very useful and effective communication in many situations, however for most people, young and old alike, it is not an easy action to carry out. On the contrary, when we feel "really super angry," we tend to resort to voice tones, speech volumes, facial expressions, hand gestures, and of course, those four-letter words, that are not considered very "cool." Anger tends to overpower self-control. In fact, some research suggests that even with communication training, our well-practiced skills are difficult to access in the heat of a relationship conflict (Gottman, 2002). The highly charged emotion temporarily disables our reasoning function -- that is, for most people. Some individuals can master this skill, using "I messages" or other non-critical statements. But perhaps a more realistic goal is to be civil, avoid doing harm to others – and concentrate on our third option: calm down. In fact, when we regain composure, our chemistry rebalances and we can reason again. We can talk without flames in our mouths. This is a better time for conscious dialogue. "Boy, I was sure angry." "Can I tell you why I got so hurt." "I think I can listen now." Not only can we more clearly express ourselves in the wake of an intense anger event, but we are more likely to put aside our own point of view, and truly listen to the other. In such truth-seeking dialogue, we might find some faulty thinking behind our emotion.

*Anger is more clearly expressed when we are not so angry.*

Healthy anger management is a lifelong practice. The emotion tends to humanize us all. Therefore, as a mentor you are not expected to have it all together on this complex topic. What you can offer a child with an anger problem is your personal knowledge, perhaps hard earned, and some guidance regarding the pitfalls and safer paths of the territory.

- ❑ Be on the lookout for signs in the child which suggest an anger problem.
- ❑ Anger is a common theme in the stories of at-risk children.
- ❑ Before approaching the subject, build your foundation of trust and safety.
- ❑ A good place to start is by allowing a mentee to express his/her feelings about something that made him/her mad.
- ❑ Normalize the emotion: “Just like sadness, all people feel angry at times.”
- ❑ How does s/he know when anger is being triggered? How do you know? Share with each other the different things which happen in your bodies: e.g., stomach tensing, heart pounding. Refer to these as “anger signals.”
- ❑ Since anger is a changing emotion with a wide range of intensity and body reactions, discuss how you know when you’re “getting madder.”
- ❑ Highlight the fact that we do have options with “managing our anger.” Make a list of the ways anger can hurt people, along with safer ways to cope with the emotion. Help the child identify his/her angry mistakes.
- ❑ Explain how it is physiologically difficult to think straight when angry.
- ❑ Discuss the downside of keeping angry feelings “bottled up inside.”
- ❑ Also challenge the myth of venting, of getting it all out to feel better. The validation of temper tantrums can contribute to similar outbursts.
- ❑ But be gentle with your feedback. Do not criticize the child’s copings.
- ❑ Affirm what your mentee is doing right. Appreciate his/her efforts.
- ❑ Review different ways in which the child can calm himself/herself.
- ❑ Taking deep breathes from one’s belly is an old proven method.
- ❑ Some children like to count when mad: e.g., 1 to 5, or backwards from 3.
- ❑ Learning to leave an angry situation is perhaps the most reliable option. Away from the trigger, in fresh air, it is easier to “chill” as the kids say.
- ❑ Although visualizing positive images may be hard, it is well worth a try.
- ❑ Acknowledge your mentee when s/he displays a positive state of mind, as opposed to an irritable or crabby one.
- ❑ After the child expresses anger, or shares a story of an angry experience, help him/her to think things through, to allow reason to shine on emotion.
- ❑ Encourage him/her to look for some good in frustrating situations, and to develop a sense of gratitude for what s/he has.
- ❑ And lastly, use humor. Laughing at ourselves is the opposite of anger.

*While mentors can assist children with managing anger, we are not experts. The roots of an emotional problem may run deep, needing professional help.*

## PEER RELATIONS

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In the social development of a child, a gradual process of peer attachment begins during the preschool years, and continues to evolve through school age, peaking in adolescence. In fact, adults commonly feel a reduction or loss in their parental sphere of influence with their teenagers, who tend to reallocate much of their energy and attention to their friends. “No thanks,” they say, to our noble efforts for “family time.”

With the elementary school child, however, there is still some hope for us old “fogeys.” Their primary attachments, or the center of their social worlds, are mom, dad, and family. Unsurprisingly, this is the best time to invest in mentoring. Some experts firmly believe that school age is the last chance to help some at-risk kids. In a few years, hanging out with a grownup will no longer seem “cool.”

But for most children, even by first grade, the force of the peer group is real, everywhere, and influential. Kids want to be liked by their classmates, and therefore strive to “fit in.” And because this is not a simple developmental task, especially in a world of gangs and turf and bullies, they naturally form peer groups or “cliques,” places of social refuge where they experience a sense of belonging and self-worth. All their words for “friend,” from “buddy” to “bro,” begin to acquire special meaning.

A good mentor, just like an effective parent, teacher, or coach, recognizes and honors the importance of peer relations in a child’s life. As positive and supportive adults we should want young people to be successful in navigating their social worlds – and we should do what we can to help them. For a teacher with a classroom of students, this can mean intervening in a peer process as a relationship facilitator, maybe stepping between them, stopping a conflict, and helping kids to dialogue. For a mentor, whose social setting and contribution is “one-to-one,” our role is more like a sideline coach or good friend.

With trust and openness, peer relations can easily become “the central theme” in some mentoring dialogues. Whether a mentee introduces the subject, or we welcome the topic for conversation, or it just pops up, the child’s social world will weave its way into our time together, that is, if our friendship is big and safe enough for inclusion. School age children enjoy teaching us grownups about the ways and preferences of “kid’s culture.”

- ☐ Ask your mentee about the names of his/her friends. Even the more isolated children usually have some peer with who they feel more comfortable.
- ☐ With your mentee’s permission, introduce yourself to his/her peers on the playground.
- ☐ Invite the child to tell you stories about how his/her friends spend time together.
- ☐ **Keep building trust.** The safer a child feels, the more s/he will open his/her world.
- ☐ It is not your job to solve your mentee’s social problems. Listen with compassion.
- ☐ If appropriate, explore possible outcomes with a child regarding peer dilemmas.
- ☐ And if s/he does ask for advice, point to the high road of positive social behaviors.

*Your close attachment is the best way to help a child with peer relations.*

## BULLIES AND OUR VILLAGE

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All grownups were once children, and almost all kids in grade school have either been a witness, victim, or perpetrator of bully behavior. In other words, bullying is a very old people problem across cultures. Whatever term a community uses to refer to its existence, the pattern of social aggression is similar: verbally or physically, one child or more hurts another young person. Professor Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen in Norway, considered a “founding father” of the research on bully/victim problems, explains that “a student is bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 9, 1993). The key words are “negative,” “repeatedly,” and “over time.”

A school playground during lunch hour is a likely place to observe such hurtful actions:

<i>teasing</i>	<i>demeaning gestures</i>	<i>pushing</i>
<i>threatening</i>	<i>stealing</i>	<i>kicking</i>
<i>ridiculing</i>	<i>damaging another's</i>	<i>hair pulling</i>
<i>name calling</i>	<i>property</i>	<i>fighting</i>

The list is long and unfortunate.

According to Professor Olweus, our list of erroneous views or myths about bullying is also long and worth attention. Below are a few such assumptions which need updating:

- Myth: Only boys bully.  
(*While bullying is more common among boys, it is also found among girls.*)
- Myth: Most bullying takes place to and from school.  
(*Bullying occurs just as frequently, and often more at school these days.*)
- Myth: Bullying is a big city problem within overcrowded classrooms.  
(*Bullying can be also found in rural towns and smaller size classes.*)
- Myth: Bullies have low self esteem and a negative identity.  
(*On the contrary, bullies have a relatively positive view of themselves and a good deal of self confidence.*)
- Myth: Victims always have an undesirable physical feature: e.g. overweight, glasses.  
(*Victims may not have any unusual features. Their most common characteristics are their anxiousness, insecurity, social isolation, and low self esteem.*)
- Myth: Bullying is a result of poor grades and school failure.  
(*There is no scientific evidence to support this hypothesis. More likely, bullying may result from a number of factors: e.g., temperament, parenting style, little supervision.*)
- Myth: If we teach our children social skills and provide them self-defense training, the problem will go away.  
(*While more social competence and physical coordination can help anxious victims, lasting solutions require a systems approach: i.e. the involvement of the village.*)
- Myth: Bullies should be placed in detention centers and removed from communities.  
(*With proper supervision, immediate adult intervention, appropriate consequences, and reinforcement of nonaggressive behavior, bullies can make positive changes.*)

**There is a power imbalance between bullies and victims, requiring “village help.”**



As community members, advocates for children, and trusted helpers in schools systems, mentors can play an important role in addressing the complex social problem of bullying. Based on the research of Dan Olweus, here are some guidelines:

- ❑ Be on the lookout for victimization signs in your mentee: e.g., bruises, scratches, torn clothes, no friends, fear of class, loss of interest in school.
- ❑ Call immediate attention to bullying. This should not be kept a secret. Inform the teacher, counselor, and principal if necessary to get results.
- ❑ If your mentee is a victim, explain that you and the school staff need to protect him/her against further harassment.
- ❑ Encourage the school staff to speak with the parents, who are commonly unaware of the problem. They may need guidance with parenting skills.
- ❑ Because victims are usually physically weaker with more “body anxiety,” encourage the child to engage in some form of physical training or sport, which can result in more physical coordination and self-confidence.
- ❑ If your mentee is a bully, have a serious talk, together with the counselor and perhaps your Program Coordinator, about the negative consequences of such aggressive behavior. With their help, establish some sanctions.
- ❑ In discussing bullying with a mentee, always remember to separate the unacceptable behavior from your positive regard for the child as a person. Praise him/her when s/he displays nonaggressive, “prosocial” behaviors.
- ❑ Be aware that your mentee may not fit the typical description of a strong, aggressive bully. S/he may be a “passive follower” -- part of the problem.
- ❑ Help your mentee to develop empathy and compassion for all children. Encourage your program to hold seasonal group events with all mentees, which can team up bullies and victims in cooperative learning activities.
- ❑ Participate in other anti-bullying activities if you can. Talk at the PTA. Volunteer in the school yard, as adult supervision during break periods makes a big difference. Watch high risk areas in your neighborhood.
- ❑ As a concerned citizen, promote a community attitude of zero tolerance: “We adults do not accept bullying among our children.”

*Only a village can stop bullying -- only when grownups show concern for all the children, becoming actively involved in public supervision, and setting firm limits to unacceptable, aggressive behavior.*

# TEACHERS OF PEACE

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We are mentors in a new millennium, and while human history has its perennial stories of tragic violence, our time of Columbine killings and September 11 bombings does feel particularly uncertain, especially to children. Violence by people against people seems to be a ubiquitous theme in our news, movies, music, big cities, small towns, and even our classrooms. More countries have weapons of mass destruction, and more citizens have concealed handguns. Every international conflict raises fear in our global community, and each act of nonviolence appears limited, but essential, to rebuilding trust.

*"Almost anything we do may seem insignificant, but it is very important that we do it."*

-- Mahatma Gandhi

Mentors are trust builders, kind friends of at-risk children, and therefore good teachers of nonviolence. Mentoring is a volunteer act of caring, with a chance to prevent aggression in our schools, and therefore a contribution to peace. In our anxious time of terrorism and counterterrorism, when violent conflict disturbs the balance of our local communities and global village, mentoring makes urgent sense. In fact, unsurprisingly, the mission of many programs is to decrease social violence. A good mentor spreads peace by nurturing respectful and supportive relationship. When an insecure child learns to trust our risky grownup world, s/he is more likely to act responsibly as one of its global citizens.

Viewing mentors as teachers of nonviolence is not a matter of choosing "us versus them," of supporting our troops or protesting a war, not about voting Democratic, Republican, or Green, in sum, not a question of taking sides. It is a very simple issue of right mentoring. That is, effective mentoring is teaching peace – is helping children to learn about open, trusting, respectful, empathic, mutual affirming, culturally sensitive, and problem solving COOPERATIVE RELATIONS. As many wise people have said, peace is not merely the absence of violence, but also the presence of human good. Mentoring is full of goodness.

So do we just do our thing, visiting each week, listening, caring, and lending our support? Or what else? Can we more intentionally help with the mission of decreasing violence? Of course we can -- and should. Gandhi and Martin Luther King might say "We must." The next page offers suggestions. Some may fit you and your mentee better than others. Perhaps the most important point is to sow seeds in the relationship that generate peace, seeds of open dialogue, critical thinking, and mutual understanding. In different words, our aim is to facilitate learning of the following attitude and skills of nonviolence:

- √ The awareness that there can be many sides to bigger truths.
- √ The value that dialogue is better for the world than fighting.
- √ The openness to hear other views, and own one's blindspots.
- √ The ability to calm anger and empathize with another's hurt.
- √ The ability to forgive another person and seek reconciliation.
- √ The ability to share decision-making power -- to collaborate.

*Sharing compassion, mentors can help a child feel at peace with oneself.*

- At the beginning of your relationship, explain to your mentee that one of your highest values as a mentor is – **RESPECT**. Respect for each other’s culture, age, life story, and world views – is the basis of your friendship.

*“So let’s make an agreement: that we will always listen to each other’s ideas, that we will try to understand things as the other sees them, and that we will talk through our differences without putting the other down.”*

- Respect in your relationship sets a good example for dealing with peers. Explain that differences and conflicts are unavoidable between people, but that how we manage them, just like coping with anger, is our choice.
- Encourage “relationship thinking,” or looking at situations in terms of what is best for the friendship: “How can you guys work through this as buddies -- without having to fight?”
- Challenge the idea that fighting or acting tough is “cool,” particularly with boys. If you are a soldier or police person, talk about your role as a community peacemaker: “We use violence only in self defense, and only as a last resort.”
- Violence is often sensationalized in our news media, movies, and music. Explain the harmful consequences of real violence. “People get hurt.”
- If your mentee presents a conflict situation involving his or her peers, explore alternative ways of resolving things without fighting.
- If s/he has gotten hurt by a peer conflict, first and foremost show caring, then help the child to find a positive intention behind the other’s actions. **ENCOURAGE COMPASSION AND FORGIVENESS**. Compassion helps us to accept human mistakes. Forgiveness allows for reconciliation.
- Teach anger management, calming oneself down, and “self-soothing.”
- There are a several “cooperation games” on the market which facilitate learning of conflict resolution skills. Give them a try with your mentee. Tell him/her stories of peace heroes: e.g. Martin Luther, Jimmy Carter. And if the school is fortunate to have a conflict management program, encourage your mentee to become a peer mediator.
- And lastly, very importantly, quickly report child abuse and bullying.

*Always return to the value of your own open and respectful dialogue. Your talks together as understanding friends is the practice of peace.*

## **TOLERANCE & COMPASSION: Village Skills**

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Most adults who volunteer as mentors have an altruistic calling to give back to their communities -- by helping children in need of extra support. They tend to think from a village or “systems perspective.” “What can I do as a fellow citizen to better our world?” There is an understanding of one’s connection with a bigger whole, and such awareness generates concern for the welfare of others and a sense of social responsibility.

In our world of increasing diversity and interdependence, one of the highest contributions that we can make as mentors is to facilitate the learning of “village skills” with children. Two such system abilities, which might be considered “parents of the prosocial skills,” working together to foster responsible global citizens, are *tolerance* and *compassion*. Both require an appreciation for our diversity, interdependence, and human limitations as a species. Both recognize that we are one family, on a small planet, with other life forms.

It is impossible to have one without the other. In a sense, *compassion* and *tolerance* are prerequisites for each other. Their common ground gives them legitimacy and nobility as humanistic principles. Both are ways of viewing our world, as well as daily life practices. And the mentors who live by them are true “everyday heroes.”

*Tolerance* is:

- √ an awareness of the diversity of our humanity: e.g.,  
cultures, genders, religions, world views, life styles...  
“All our differences make up a much bigger picture.”
- √ an attitude of openness, respect, and even curiosity  
in relation to the diverse life forms of our world
- √ and an ability to honor, welcome, trust, befriend,  
cooperate with – people of different walks of life.

In other words, tolerance, in its broadest definition, means more than cultural sensitivity, or the opposite of prejudice and racism. It stretches out beyond our boundaries of color, beliefs, traditions, and preferences -- towards *compassion*.

*Compassion* is

- √ an awareness of our interdependence as a species: e.g.,  
“We belong to one family that is part of mother earth.”
- √ a “We” attitude based on village thinking -- a concern for  
all people and a recognition of our human imperfections
- √ and an ability to empathize with, forgive, treat as family,  
and wish the best for –people of different walks of life.

***Tolerance and compassion are world family skills, that cast  
a broad light on our difficult challenges as human beings.***

Because mentors tend to approach their volunteer experience with a spirit of giving, many welcome the possibility of befriending a child from a different ethnic background. That is, they enter the mentoring relationship with an attitude of *tolerance*. Similarly, because they wish the best for all the children of their community, and because they feel responsible to help ease their hurts and difficulties, they bring *compassion* with them. In sum, with their extra concern and generosity, they model village thinking and practice. They exemplify the message “We are family. All kids belong to our big circle of caring.” In addition to this extension or stretching of self, inherent in the commitment to mentor, volunteers can encourage the learning of *tolerance* and *compassion* in other ways:

- In every mentor-mentee match, regardless of the ethnicity of each person, there are always human differences: e.g. certainly age, maybe gender, possibly social class. Point out, discuss, and honor these differences.
- While celebrating your uniqueness as individuals, also highlight your commonalities as human beings, part of a community and global family.
- If your mentee is from another ethnic background, this is a wonderful opportunity to develop **cross-cultural attachment**. In the security of your trust and caring bond, both you and the child will learn to respect, enjoy, and feel proud of, the multicolored weavings of your friendship.
- With the stories that your mentee shares about getting along with peers, gently challenge his/her stereotypical thinking -- without preaching or sounding self-righteous: “You know, I have a good friend who is from... He’s a great guy...who has taught me a lot about his part of the world.”
- Help your young friend to see the imperfections in all people, including his/her peers – who also struggle with challenges and who also feel pain. “You know that girl you don’t like, I get a sense that she’s not too happy.”
- Empathy is always a good practice. “How do you think s/he might feel?” “Imagine what it must be like to be a newcomer, from another homeland, not knowing many people...or even speaking English well. How hard.”
- Read the newspaper together. Bring books about children from other ethnic groups or countries. Again practice putting your feet in their shoes. “What must it like to be in a child in New York...China...Iraq?”
- An appreciation of interdependence also comes from recognizing our ties with the rest of mother earth. Practicing respect and care for animals and nature teaches a child compassion for all of life.

*Every session with your mentee is a chance to rediscover and practice the principles of tolerance and compassion.*

## **SAYING “NO”: A Skill for Staying Positive**

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Learning to manage anger, cooperate, peacefully resolve conflicts, practice tolerance, and offer compassion are all important, honorable skills in the social development of a child. In truth, they are key ingredients for the making of good citizens. They affirm, say “yes,” to the positive potential within each person. Unfortunately however, given the dark side of our human nature, or our more troubling life paths marked by temptations and pitfalls, saying “no” at times is necessary for staying positive.

Being a child in our 21<sup>st</sup> century is no easy deal. Even within rural New Mexico, far from the multiplied youth problems of a Los Angeles or New York City, entering a school yard is a complex challenge of moral dilemmas. Should I smoke marijuana? Join the gang? Whether in our big city of Albuquerque, or a small town like Las Vegas, childhood seems more abnormal, with more peer pressure situations, once associated to the teenage years. Perhaps because of an increasing access to drugs, gangs, weapons, and sexual relations, the developmental predicaments of adolescence are being pushed down a generation. While appalling to some parental ears, is not uncommon to hear elementary school kids wondering whether to use condoms or cocaine. Our grownup ills, regretfully, seem to have contaminated the innocence of our classrooms.

It is truly troublesome, particularly when you consider that school age children are in the midst of their cognitive development, learning to think abstractly, to grasp the meaning of constructs like “justice” and “tolerance,” sorting through healthier paths from the wrong. Just as concerning, they are also developing socially, under tremendous pressure to fit in and be liked, which can translate to leaving values at home and going along with a clique. “Just saying no,” while it may seem like a smart and easy thing to do for a young person, commonly poses an existential conflict -- between the need for peer belonging -- and the advice of the village elders. Mentors can help children to strengthen their “refusal skills.”

- ❑ While honoring the importance of your mentee’s need to be accepted by his/her peers, make a good, “I was also once a child” case for leadership and moral heroism: standing up to the crowd for what one thinks is right.
- ❑ Role play the complex dilemmas which the child faces at school. Assist him/her with finding age-acceptable ways to say “no.”
- ❑ Congratulate your mentee when s/he does make a good moral decision among peers. Affirm him/her when demonstrating positive leadership.
- ❑ Explore what gives people courage and wisdom to choose healthy paths.
- ❑ And discuss the real life dangers of not saying “no” to drugs and gangs.

*Quite frankly, for many children living in high risk communities,  
the choice between “yes” and “no” can be a life or death matter.*

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

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1. A fundamental way in which a child can learn new social skills is through “modeling.” Week after week, as a mentee observes how we pay attention, closely listen, show caring, and openly express ourselves, s/he acquires a road map to positive social behavior.
2. Another basic way in which children learn about social behavior is through **practice**. For example, as they experience our careful listening, they may try the skill themselves, hopefully over and over, until paying attention becomes part of their social repertoire.
3. While it is helpful to have steps to follow, helping kids acquire social skills is not a linear process. In order to be an effective, remember to revisit the learning territories: model positive skills, discuss their value, allow him/her to try, praise learned behavior.
5. In general, **children misbehave to satisfy one of four goals**: i.e., attention, power, revenge, or avoidance of failure.
6. **Behavior management** is a positive learning process which can assist children to meet their needs for a sense of belonging and self-worth in more constructive ways. Before choosing a method of intervention, **identify the goal of the misbehavior**.
7. Remember to intervene swiftly, to be consistent, to provide positive alternatives, and most importantly, to offer a lot of encouragement. (All interventions are stopgap measures, but **encouragement prevents future misbehavior**.)
8. Healthy anger management is a matter of knowing, monitoring, and regulating our own bodies and minds. Children with anger problems are easily frustrated when things don’t go their way. The body reactions of anger rise quickly and intensely within them.
9. Anger is a delayed body response, a secondary reaction to a frustrating thought that something is unacceptable in our world. Anger can also be set in motion by assigning a hurtful intention to another’s behavior.
10. Anger tends to overpower self-control, as the highly charged emotion temporarily disables our reasoning functions. Learning to leave angry situations, calm down, and regain perspective is a good practical skill for children and adults.
11. Become familiar with your mentee’s social world. If appropriate, explore possible outcomes regarding his/her peer dilemmas. Use your own mentor friendship as a guide.
13. Get to know the many myths and false assumptions surrounding bullying. Educate your community about the facts of the **power imbalance between bullies and victims**. Call immediate attention to bully behavior and advocate for village solutions

*Remember that the best tool for prosocial learning is your own goodness.*

14. Mentors are trust builders, kind friends of at-risk children, and thus good teachers of nonviolence. In fact, effective mentoring is peace learning -- educating children on trusting, empathic, mutual affirming, and culturally sensitive, **cooperative relationship**.

15. Our aim as peace mentors is to facilitate the learning of the set of nonviolent skills and attitudes: an awareness that truth has many sides, the value that dialogue is better for the world than fighting, an openness to hear other views and own one's blindspots, an ability to calm anger and empathize with another's hurt, the abilities to forgive and seek reconciliation, and the willingness to share decision-making power.

*Always emphasize to the value of your own open and respectful dialogue.  
Your talks together as understanding friends is the practice of peace.*

16. In our small world of increasing diversity and interdependence, one of the highest contributions that we can make as mentors is to facilitate the learning of "village skills" such as *tolerance* and *compassion*. As role models genuinely concerned for the welfare of our communities, children learn from us that "we are all family."

17. If your mentee is from another ethnic background, this is a wonderful opportunity to develop **cross-cultural attachment**. In the security of your trust and caring bond, you can both learn to respect, enjoy, and feel proud of your multicolored friendship.

18. Whether in big cities or small towns, childhood seems more abnormal these days, with more peer pressure situations, once found only in adolescence. Perhaps because of the easy access to drugs, gangs, weapons, and sexual relations, even in our schools, the developmental predicaments of the teenager are being pushed down a generation.

19. "Just saying no," while it seems like a smart and easy thing to do for a young person, commonly poses a existential conflict -- between the need for peer belonging -- and the advice of village elders. Mentors can help children to strengthen their "refusal skills."

20. In the final analysis, the learning of prosocial skills within a mentoring relationship always boils down to the quality of the friendship itself. That is, good children develop through good village ties.

*Blessed are the volunteer mentors,  
the good citizens -- soldiers of peace,  
who help balance our unsettled world  
by sharing trust, hope and compassion  
with the restless children of our village.*



# CHAPTER SEVEN



## SPECIAL TOPICS

## **"THE OTHER STUFF"**

### **A ROUND TABLE STORY**

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"What about the other stuff?," asked Harold, a freshman and psychology major at UNM.

"What do you mean?," responded Frank, the Program Coordinator, facilitating the third monthly Round Table for the new group of mentors. "What stuff is that?"

"You know," continued Harold. "All the sticky things that happen with kids at school these days. You know the drugs...and gangs...and sex. What about these real deals?"

"Oh Lord, maybe we're too old for this," Mrs. Sandoval whispered to her friend Eleanor, both recruits from the Senior Citizens Center.

"No you're not," commented Miguel, one of the National Guard volunteers, overhearing the elder's remark. "You can do this."

"What's that Miguel?," asked the facilitator, noticing the side conversation, and wanting to bring it into the group dialogue.

"Oh I'm just trying to encourage our elders here," the Guardsman replied. "They're also a bit worried about the sticky stuff."

"Well, you know, it's not that different," added Bob, a real estate salesman in his fifties. "I mean from my generation. Things also went on at school in those days. It seems like a matter of degree...or maybe just different types of trouble."

"You have a point," affirmed Marion, a local artist. "There has always been stuff for young people to deal with. But it does seem to be getting more and more complicated. I've heard about guns and cocaine in some elementary schools."

"That's what I mean," remarked Harold. "It's a bad scene."

Mrs. Sandoval and Mrs. Johnson looked at each other, shaking their heads in dismay, or maybe disbelief.

"Let's not create extra worry here," advised the Program Coordinator, hoping to redirect the group in a positive direction. "Everyone does have a point...but always remember, our main job is to mentor...to be a good friend to a child...not to solve all the problems in our schools...or even try to be counselors. Our way is actually very simple."

"Absolutely," confirmed Miguel. "If we just keep to the basics, like listening and caring, good things can happen with the kids. And if you do get into white waters...if they do bring up 'the stuff' as Harold says...again hold to the basics."

“That’s very good advice,” agreed Frank, the Coordinator. “Mentoring has more to do with lending a kind ear, than with telling a child how to deal with gangs. In fact, some of us believe that if there were more supportive people, like yourselves, in our communities, there’d be a lot less problems among our kids.”

“I do understand this Frank,” acknowledged Harold, “and that’s why I became a mentor. “But...there are still all the what abouts...like what about if they do bring up sex...or marijuana...or their homeys.”

“Yes dear, what about that?,” said Mrs. Sandoval, perking up, while her friend Eleanor whispered into her ear, “What’s a homey?”

“Stay with those basics,” reiterated the smiling National Guardsman.

“How’d I know you were going to say that,” kidded Harold. “But come on...I for one am needing more specifics. What if my mentee wants to discuss drugs?”

“Fair enough,” responded the Program Coordinator. “But before we review each of these special topics, it does make sense to review some useful basics...like remembering to listen and show caring...rather than preach or criticize.”

“And like helping a child think through a problem,” added Bob, “rather than telling him what you think he should do.”

“And consulting a teacher or school counselor,” contributed Marion, “when we truly are worried that our mentee may have a problem.”

“Exactly,” affirmed Frank, who had gone to the blackboard to jot down the group’s ideas. “What other fundamentals can guide us...as mentors...through these murky waters?”

The group continued to share ideas, each mentor taking a turn, as was the custom in the Round Tables, until they came to Mrs. Johnson, who had been unusually silent.

“How bout you Eleanor?,” inquired Frank. “Would you like to contribute?”

“Well, quite honestly,” voiced the elder woman, “I’m still pondering about what on earth I would say if my mentee wanted to talk about sex.”

The others broke into laughter, while Harold added: “Just say that time’s up for today.”

“That’s not so far off,” concurred the Program Coordinator. “Sex is one of those topics best left for a child’s parents or teacher.”

“I absolutely agree,” responded Mrs. Johnson, looking relieved. “Thank God some ways don’t change.”

# SIGNS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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The most difficult question a mentor may have to face in his/her relationship with a child is the possibility of abuse and neglect. Although its sad occurrence is a special case, it is a hard reality of our community lives, much too common, and anyone who works with children long enough is likely to come across its signs. In fact, because most abuse and neglect occurs in the home, any citizen in a helping role has a duty to become more aware of the forms in which it can appear. Good mentors know what to look for to protect kids. Definitions of the various types of abuse and neglect are offered below, along with a checklist of more common behavioral and physical signs.

## ***PHYSICAL ABUSE***

“The infliction of physical injury to a child, including excessive punishment.”

Signs:

- Regression (behaviors inappropriate for age)
- Bruises & lacerations
- Aggression
- Withdrawal from activities
- Agitation, temper tantrums
- Constant seeking of affection
- Burns
- Dislocations & fractures
- Multiple unexplained injuries
- Delay in seeking medical help
- Easily startled
- Sadness & restricted affect

## ***PHYSICAL NEGLECT***

“Inattention to basic needs of a child for food, shelter, medical care, and supervision.”

Signs:

- Abandonment
- Lack of supervision
- Lack of clothing
- Hunger
- Not attending school
- Poor hygiene
- Unattended medical problems
- Stealing or begging for food

## ***EMOTIONAL MALTREATMENT***

“Blaming, belittling, rejecting a child, forced isolation, withholding of affection.”  
(Not necessarily manifested in physical signs.)

Signs:

- Speech problems in young children
- Withdrawal
- Explosive or impulsive behavior
- Conduct problems
- Self destructive habits, e.g., nail biting, hair pulling
- Depression
- Excessive compliance

## ***SEXUAL ABUSE***

“Any adult-child contact which is sexually stimulated or used for sexual stimulation, e.g., fondling, exhibitionism, forcible rape, or sexual exploitation.”

Signs:

- Displays unusual or sophisticated sexual knowledge or behavior in play or talk.
- Inappropriate displays of affection: "comes on" sexually to children or adults.
- Complains of pain or irritation in genital areas.
- States s/he was sexually assaulted.
- Won't participate in gym activities.
- Difficulty with walking or sitting.
- In girls, regular urinary infections.

# REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

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Perhaps the worst experience for mentors is when we do detect signs of abuse or neglect. Not only does it throw us into a state of worry, but it can also stir up anger as well: "Something bad is happening to my young friend." Our gut feelings at this time are often our best signals that we need to act -- wisely and quickly. This is a social emergency.

## ***THE "SEEK CONSULTATION" PRINCIPLE***

Whenever you suspect any form of child abuse or neglect with a child, consult with the Mentor Coordinator and the school counselor. No doubt or suspicion is ever too small. As mentors and paraprofessionals we have a legal, ethical, and social responsibility to protect our children. So speak up! Share your concern with the school and program staff. If you believe a child is being harmed, you need to break confidentiality. Consultation is a good first step towards protection.

## ***THE PRINCIPLE of "MAKE THE CALL YOURSELF"***

In a rare case that your support system does not take appropriate action, and you still have a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect, you yourself must pick up a phone and make a report to Children's Protective Services. According to our state laws, you only need a reasonable suspicion that something wrong might be taking place. In other words, you do not need to feel 100% sure before reporting. All it takes is a good rational hunch. And it does not matter how much time has passed since an incident of abuse or neglect. As long as a victim is a minor, you need to phone.

If and when you do have to make a report to Protective Services, remember that you have the right to remain anonymous to the parties involved in the case. The state worker who conducts the interview should offer you this option. If not, request it. It is quite common for mentors and other helpers to prefer this privacy option.

## ***THE WORST CASE SCENARIO***

Unfortunately, it may not feel easy to make a report, and sometimes, things can backfire. For example, even though your anonymity has been protected, a family member might suspect that you or another program representative has made the report. To further complicate matters, the case investigation may not uncover sufficient evidence to justify assertive action. Not uncommonly, a family may choose to pull a child from a program. In the event of such a hard loss, remember that this is not the worse possible scenario. The worse case is when a child is being abused – and no one is speaking up.

In the big picture of a child's life, protecting him/her is far more important than the mentoring relationship. However, if you do lose your friendship after making a report of suspected abuse or neglect, share your feelings and concerns with the program staff. Sudden terminations can negatively impact children – and sadden you. Some kids may feel responsible for the relationship's ending. Ask if you can have some form of closure with the child, even by letter. It is well worth a try. S/he deserves a kind goodbye.

# FEARS AND WORRIES

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All children have fears and worries, just like us adults, and probably very much like the first human beings who walked the earth, without flashlights, protective gear, or guns. Fear and anxiety are part of our evolutionary makeup, that once served a daily purpose of keeping people safe. And it still makes good sense to fear bears, lightning -- and gangs. For a young child, who has not fully developed the ability of abstract thinking, where what s/he sees is what is real, it is quite natural to worry about one's parents when absent. Any disruption or irregularity in a primary relationship can stir up anxiety. Human life is constructed upon social bonds -- which provide us a sense of security and optimism.

In some parts of the world, much too familiar with violence, poverty, or natural disaster, fear is an everyday condition. Loved ones can suddenly disappear, be cruelly harmed, or become deathly sick. Here in our society, with all our public health and security systems, many take our basic life safety for granted. Or at least they did so before September 11. The horizon has unarguably changed. More citizens do seem aware of the darker sides of human nature, and our vulnerability as a superpower nation -- in the face of terrorism. More kids are experiencing a floating sense of anxiety, a burden common to our children in gang-invested neighborhoods with drive-bys and drug traffic. Fear has real scary odds. Young victims of abuse also know this well. Their traumas have shaped their perception. The world clearly is not a safe place. They got hurt -- and believe it could happen again. Tragically, many are probably right.

Fear and anxiety have become such a pervasive condition of our small unstable planet, with school killings and downtown bombings, that anyone working with children may recognize some drifting unease -- and may want to offer comfort. Mentors, for example. Because of the special attachment with our mentees, constructed of trust, hope and safety, our reassuring presence and secure relationship serves as a calming force in a child's life. Friendship provides human beings a sense of security and optimism to weather the storms of our uncertain world: "We'll make it through this -- together. It too will pass."

- ☐ So it's fair to assume that your friend has worries, just like you, in varying degrees.
- ☐ And the safer your relationship feels, the more anxieties s/he may share with you.
- ☐ Do not minimize or discount a child's fears or worries. They are real to him/her.
- ☐ And a "gotta be tough" or "shake it off" attitude will not make their fears vanish.
- ☐ As with all their feelings, listen attentively. Hold their worries with compassion.
- ☐ Acknowledge your shared humanity: "Every person I know feels afraid at times."
- ☐ Do not try to be a counselor. Your job is not to open up or heal their traumas.
- ☐ If appropriate, share a short personal story of overcoming one of your fears, but don't take the attention away from your friend.
- ☐ Above all, be consistent and reliable -- a steady anchor in an uncertain world.
- ☐ Routine and rituals can grounding, as well as your calm, pleasurable activities.
- ☐ And lastly, breathing deeply from the stomach can help calm the butterflies.

*A mentor is a hopeful, weekly reminder that good returns again and again.*

## OPPOSITIONAL ATTITUDE

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If you mentor long enough, you are likely to come across a child with a difficult attitude, particularly one who takes the position: “I’m the boss here -- and it’s my way or none.” Such a tough stance towards adults is quite common these days, particularly where parenting styles tend towards an extreme, like severely autocratic or overly permissive. While genetics and temperament can also play major roles, as well as life experiences, parents and caretakers can shape and reinforce a negative attitude, often unknowingly.

For example, a stern or autocratic approach, that demands obedience and threatens with physical punishment, can eventually backfire. A “good spanking” does instill fear of parental authority in a child, and may temporarily stop misbehavior, but it can also result in feelings of unfairness and an attitude of resentment, not to mention a possible visit from Protective Services. This “top heavy” style takes a hard line position with children, and actually models rigid thinking: “We judge. So follow our rules – or you’ll be sorry.” Very few young people, however, feel more cooperative with threats and sore bottoms.

Although a permissive style falls at the other end of the continuum, it can also result in a “No I won’t,” oppositional attitude. Whereas some parents can go overboard with their adult authority, other caretakers may not exercise enough -- a kind of “top iffy” approach. They oppose spanking and advocate for children’s rights, but they may not set clear, consistent, and appropriate limits, contributing to the rise of those princes and princesses who rule the house with an inflated sense of power. This extreme is just as troublesome.

Effective parenting, similar to good mentoring, seeks a middle way, a balance between adult authority and mutual respect, rules and negotiation, setting limits and learning responsibility. The psychologist Baumrind (1971), known for his studies on parenting, refers to this style as “authoritative,” as opposed to the more demanding and punishing approach of “autocratic” or “authoritarian.” This middle way blends caring and warmth, with adult control and positive behavioral management. Not only can it help parents to prevent oppositionality in their kids, it also can assist mentors with bossy young friends:

- Pay attention for signs of an oppositional attitude: e.g., rule challenging, defiant of requests, easily angered or annoyed, disrespectful, an exaggerated sense of power.
- Don’t go digging for the roots of the defiance. You’re the mentor, not a counselor.
- Review the principles of positive behavior management and children’s motivations.
- Establish clear rules at the onset of the relationship – and hold to them consistently.
- You are the boss of the mentoring rules -- but s/he should choose the play activities.
- Stress that mentoring is voluntary, and cooperation an agreement. Offer a choice: “You’re having trouble being respectful today. Would you prefer to return to class?”
- Affirm your mentee for appropriate displays of self power. Validate cooperation.
- Some defiance may come and go. If it is an ongoing pattern, consult the counselor.
- (Opposition) + (an inflated sense of power) + (aggressiveness) are not good signs. Your mentee may be bullying and hurting other children. ALWAYS CONSULT.

*Steer a middle path between oppositionality: firm limits with warm caring.*

## IDENTIFYING DRUG USE

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Although schools have wrestled for some time with the problem of drug and alcohol use, it does appear that this adult malady has worked its way down from high school, over to the junior high, and sadly, into the elementary grade level. In some parts of New Mexico, one can find marijuana sales taking place in a middle school playground -- even cocaine. It is concerning, particularly with older people behind these exchanges, often from gangs, profiting as suppliers. With our children facing such complex phenomena at earlier ages, drug prevention has become the mission of many community organizations, including mentoring programs. It is important for mentors to know their way through this territory.

*First of all, the best thing we can do to help confront this societal problem is to be effective mentors – to build trusting and supportive relationships.*

Nurturing friendship is always primary. All other tasks, while important, come second. This is because a mentoring relationship, by itself, is a prevention factor. It brings bottles of good stuff -- hope, trust, honesty, support, caring, confidence, critical thinking, and moral judgment -- into the life of a young person. Even if our buddy were to be using an illegal substance, and even if we happened to miss the signs, we would still be helping if consistently showing up each week, focusing on positive social values, and promoting constructive life choices. This is our simple way -- that gives mentors a clear sharp edge in the troubling terrain of chemical abuse. So beware of the signs, but be a good mentor.

*Have you noticed changes in your mentee's mood or behavior?  
Does s/he make statements supportive of drug and alcohol use?  
Do you smell alcohol, hear slurred speech, or see dilated pupils?*

### *Trouble Signals:*

- Failing with academics
- Truancy and/or tardiness
- Fighting, gang involved
- Conduct / legal problems
- Anxious and/or restless
- Dishonest, fabricating
- Depressed or euphoric
- Tired, overly energetic

### *Concerning Attitudes*

- "Adults use more than kids do."
- "Drinking is not a big crime."
- "Marijuana should be legal."
- "I wouldn't get caught anyway."
- "Using is different from selling."
- "A little doesn't hurt the body."
- "My friends do it, why not me?"
- "My parents don't care anyway."

### *Signs of Use / Intoxication:*

- Slurred or rambling speech
- Trouble with coordination
- Distracted and/or confused
- Dilated pupils, reddened eyes
- Nausea, vomiting
- Dizziness
- Perspiration, chills
- Increase in appetite

*Be on the alert, but remember: you are a mentor, not a police officer.  
Before giving information, consult with the counselor or staff member.*



# GANG INVOLVEMENT

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If you mentor a junior high student, particularly a male, from a big city or midsize town, there is a good probability that he may be flirting or involved with a neighborhood gang. Although youth gangs are not a new phenomena, dating back to the 1790's Philadelphia, they are more numerous and potentially dangerous. Small local groups commonly have indirect linkages to big "corporate gangs," centered in major cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, and Detroit. Organized around drug trafficking, violence is part of the business.

While gang prevention and intervention truly takes a village effort to significantly impact such an old societal pattern, one mentor can make a big contribution in his/her small way. In fact, a respected report from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989), examining the gang predicament, called for more supportive, adult-youth relationships as an integral part of a comprehensive solution. This makes good sense, particularly when we consider that many young people seek membership in a gang for a sense of belonging and feeling of self importance – both of which a close mentor friendship can provide.

*With societal problems such as gangs and substance abuse, the best thing a mentor can do is to befriend a child. The relationship is part of the solution.*

But it is helpful to know some basic features about gang formations in case your mentee is involved with a neighborhood group, or perhaps flirting as a "wannabe," or afraid of their dangerous presence. In sum, a gang is an organized group of young people, with a shared identity and formal rules of membership, which claims and defends its "territory," defined by geographical, ethnic, or economic boundaries, from threats by other groups. In other words, marking one's turf is key to a gang's mission, as evidenced by its graffiti, a main form of group communication, along with street talk, dress codes, and hand signs.

*Not all youth gangs engage in destructive or illegal behaviors. A benign group may actually serve a positive function in one's social development.*

- Beware of signs of negative gangs: e.g., initiation tests with fights and petty crimes, drug selling, purse snatching, drug use and glue sniffing, beer / wine drinking, rape, grand-theft-auto, and threats / intimidations.
- Look for "pre-gang behavior:" e.g., academic failure, truancy, resentful of authority, little remorse, negative contact with police, gang attire, identified with martial arts.
- Gang involvement has different levels: (1) the fantasizing and at-risk "wannabe," (2) the new recruit in training, and (3) the hard core gang member.
- The primary goal of most gang prevention programs is to engage at-risk youth in "socially constructive alternatives." That is, to encourage positive activities.
- Focus your mentee's attention on the positive. Affirm his/her interest in doing something special with the gift of life, in using his/her potentials to better the world.

*Gangs may be around, but you can't go wrong with good mentor options: (self esteem) + (positive activities) + (respect for rules) + (responsibility)*

## QUESTIONS ABOUT SEX

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Whether we big people approve or grimace, the young are becoming more interested and involved in sexual activities at earlier ages. Perhaps due to a number of social factors, including a show-it-all media, an easily accessed Internet, a plethora of public opinions, and a widening gap in adult supervision, it is not uncommon to hear school-age children posing the question of whether “to do it or not.” “Kissing,” as one third grader explained, “is no biggy. It’s the other stuff you want to go for.” In truth, the “other stuff” should be an immense concern for our society with sad lists of teen pregnancies, child exploitation, and sexually transmitted diseases. Because of such real childhood dangers, many parents and teachers have become ardent advocates of sex education in the school.

“But what does this other stuff have to do with mentoring?,” a volunteer may fairly ask. “Should we be discussing sex with our mentee?” Not really.

### BEST STAY AWAY FROM SEX-RELATED QUESTIONS...

for obvious and understandable reasons:

- √ One, someone else may misinterpret our good intentions, file a complaint, and cause us unnecessary grief.
- √ Two, we are not specialists or educators in this complex area.
- √ Three, this is simply not our job. We are positive role models.

Although we could very well be asked for our honest personal opinion on a sexual matter, and while our mentee may genuinely need guidance to navigate this confusing territory, leave this learning conversation for the child’s parents or counselor.

*Openness is important to us -- but no need to discuss all his/her interests.*

Therefore, if ever faced with a child’s bold or innocent curiosity on a sex-related issue, do your best to tactfully redirect the conversation.

- Do not criticize your mentee for asking a question of a sexual nature. S/he is just curious – as you once were.
- His/her question indicates a certain degree of trust in your friendship. So affirm the comfort level: “I appreciate your openness to ask...”
- BUT – just give an honest and simple explanation of your boundaries. “I realize that this topic is of interest to you, but I’m just your mentor, and questions like this are best asked to your parent or counselor.” “You know friend, mentors aren’t supposed to talk about everything with their mentees...and this is one of those topics.”

*Setting clear boundaries is not an insignificant act.  
In fact, it is a primary teaching of sex education.*

## RELIGION & CHILD SPIRITUALITY

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Just like a mentee may ask you a question about sex, you may also get one about “God.” It is the same innocence and curiosity – expressing itself in a climate of safe friendship. Within the world view of every major religion, children are regarded as spiritual beings, sacred in their simple nature, in their openness as seeds unfolding, and in their wonder of the magical unknown. A school age child, while generally very connected to the myriad of God’s creations -- to the birds and trees and clouds – is trying to make cognitive sense of religion and the spiritual. So s/he needs to ask big questions: “Where does God live?” “What does He look like?” “What happens to people when they die...what about dogs?” “What do Muslims believe?” “What’s a Buddhist?” “Is God a human?” “What’s the difference between a Christian and a Jewish person?” The most surprising, thoughtful, and challenging inquiries can spring from a child’s mouth -- in search of larger truths.

Child spirituality is nothing a mentor should or can hide from. A mentee’s curiosity in this vast territory is just his/her humanity searching and talking freely with an open mind. as one might look up, imagine, and comment at the evening stars. How we respond to our young friend’s investigations, if s/he happens to surprise us during a weekly session, is the tricky part. While few mentoring programs have policies for how to navigate the spiritual domain, there are some practical things to consider.

*We volunteer to be friends – not to teach religion and personal beliefs.*

- The legal principle of church vs. state is an old national standard. Though the subject of ongoing debate, public schools redirect religion away from class and back to home.
- How would you want a mentor of your child to handle religious or spiritual questions?
- What if his/her parents were Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant...?
- Showing RESPECT for a child’s traditions and beliefs should be our main guide here.
- That is, imposing our beliefs is not our mission, no matter how much we value them.
- However RESPECT does not mean we need to avoid the issue of religion altogether. The child may want to know what we believe or how we pray.

*The best policy in responding to a child’s religious or spiritual questions is to give honest, simple answers. Usually that satisfies his/her curiosity.*

- But do affirm the child’s interest in your world view. Thank him/her for asking.
- If s/he wants to explain his/her beliefs and/or religious practices, listen with your undivided attention, as you should with all his/her sharings.
- Validate his/her concern for you, for other people, and for all of life’s sacredness.
- If you do not disagree with, or cannot accept, the church vs. state principle, explore the possibility of being a mentor in a private school of your religious orientation.

*Mentors do teach spirituality through their unconditional caring.  
As role models we act as “kindness guides” on a child’s life path.  
Our relationship is founded upon hope and faith in human good.*

## MENTORING AND ACADEMICS

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There is a high probability that the child who you mentor will have academic problems, particularly if you volunteer with a school-based program. This is because mentoring agencies focus their efforts on at-risk children, and a common characteristic of this group is poor academic performance. For one or more reasons, such as poverty, family conflict, disruption in primary relationships, misbehavior, inattention, learning disabilities, or other factors, the typical mentee will have low grades, often in science, math, or reading. Children who succeed in school are seldom matched with mentors.

So what does an at-risk child need most -- a mentor or a tutor? This is a tough question, and in many cases, the best answer should be “both.”

*(Mentoring + tutoring) = extra help for a child with academic problems*

In other words, better grades can boost a child’s self-esteem -- but s/he may be more motivated to learn with the added support of a positive adult friend. Thus, the majority of mentoring programs, especially those which are “relationship-oriented,” concentrate on the emotional and social well-being of the child, leaving the academics for trained tutors.

*(Mentoring alone) + (an at-risk child) = a happier learner*

In fact, effective tutors have good mentoring skills. Offering their hope, patience, and encouragement, they approach children as whole people with many developmental needs, not just as students with math problems. Similarly, seasoned mentors have the ability to weave tutoring principles into their relationship. They seek and create opportunities in their friendship activities:

- √ **to encourage an open and fun attitude towards learning**
- √ **to reinforce a child’s efforts to concentrate and learn**
- √ **to help him/her apply self-confidence in the classroom**

- Read stories together, of interest to the child. Check them out with the teacher for grade level appropriateness.
- Bring some board games which require counting and concentration.
- Science is all around you. Choose something to explore together.
- Your program may allow more formal tutoring. Ask if interested.
- If not its focus, but you have time and interest, seek tutor training.
- Above all, always affirm a child’s sincere efforts to study and learn. Celebrate improvements on report cards. Small changes may be big.
- If appropriate, share a story of your own past struggles as a student.
- If you are concerned with a child’s learning problem, or high level of frustration, do consult the teacher and / or counselor for guidance.

*A big part of your job is to promote a “you can do it” school attitude.*

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

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1. The most difficult question a mentor may have to face in his/her relationship with a child is the possibility of abuse and neglect. Become familiar with the more **common signs of physical abuse, physical neglect, emotional maltreatment, and sexual abuse**. The signs may be physical/medical in nature such as bruises, burns, or hunger, or behavioral/psychological such as withdrawal, aggression, and depression.

2. **When you suspect child abuse or neglect, CONSULT. In the rare case that your support system does not act, and you still have a "reasonable suspicion" – you call Child Protective Services.** The worse case scenario is when a child is being abused and no one is speaking up. In the big picture, protecting him/her is far more important than any possible change in the mentoring relationship.

4. All children have fears and worries, just like us adults. Any disruption or irregularity in a primary relationship can stir up anxiety. And since September 11, with more adults concerned with dangers and uncertainties in world relations, more kids are experiencing a **floating sense of anxiety**, a burden common to children in gang-invested neighborhoods.

5. Because of our special attachment with mentees, constructed of trust, hope, and safety, our reassuring presence and secure relationship serves as a calming force in a child's life.

6. You may have a mentee with an **oppositional attitude**, one who takes the position: "I'm the boss here, and it's my way or none." Good mentoring, like effective parenting, seeks a middle way with these overly empowered kids, a balance between adult authority and mutual respect, rules and negotiation, setting limits and learning responsibility.

7. The best thing you can do to address the problem of drug and alcohol abuse is to be a clear-minded mentor -- to build a trusting support friendship. **Mentoring is prevention.** It brings bottles of hope, trust, honesty, support, caring, confidence, and critical thinking into a child's life. Learn the signs of drug abuse, but above all, be a genuine role model.

8. The same applies with the gang problem. **Do what you know you can do: Mentor!** Because many young people seek membership in a gang for a sense of belonging and feeling of self importance, your close friendship can help to fill this gap. A primary goal of most gang prevention programs is to engage youth in socially constructive alternatives. Mentors facilitate positive activities and encourage positive attitudes.

9. **Beware of signs of negative gangs:** e.g., initiation tests with fights and petty crimes, drug selling, purse snatching, drug use and glue sniffing, beer / wine drinking, rape, grand-theft-auto, intimidations. And remember, not all youth gangs are bad or harmful. Like a mentor, a benign group can act as a positive social force in a young person's life.

*Keep your mentee focused on the positive. Affirm his/her interest in making the best of one's gift of life, in using his/her potentials to improve the world.*

10. It is a wise to stay away from sex-related questions, for obvious and understandable reasons: one, someone may misinterpret our good intentions; two, **we are not specialists** or educators in this area, and three, this is not our job. We are positive role models.

11. Do not criticize your mentee for asking a question of a sexual nature, and do affirm his/her trust in your friendship, but **redirect him/her to a parent, teacher, or counselor**.

12. We volunteer to be friends – not to teach our religion and personal beliefs. Showing **RESPECT for a child’s traditions and beliefs** should be our main guide. Imposing our beliefs is not our mission as mentors, no matter how much we value our spiritual practice.

13. However **RESPECT** does not mean we need to avoid the issue of religion altogether. The child may want to know what we believe, or even how we pray. The best policy in responding to a child’s religious or spiritual questions is to **give honest, simple answers**.

*Mentors do teach spirituality through their presence and compassion.  
As role models we act as “kindness guides” on a child’s life path.*

14. For several possible reasons, there is a high probability that the child who you mentor will have **academic problems**. A skilled mentor weaves tutoring principles into the friendship activities. S/he encourages a fun attitude towards learning, reinforces the mentee’s efforts to concentrate, and helps him/her apply self confidence in the classroom.

15. Before you consider forming a **small group with two children**, make sure that: (a) you have established a secure trusting relationship with each child; and (b) the children are a good compatible match for cooperative learning. Help the pair practice the values of the mentoring program, and remember our mission: **care and support for each child**.

16. Although we may have little contact with parents and/or guardians, at a minimum they should receive an initial letter of orientation to the program, a document to obtain their informed written consent, and ideally, a call from the school counselor or liaison.

17. If you do have contact with your mentee’s parent(s), always **show proper respect**, even if you have concerns about the child’s home life. Affirm the caretaker(s) for allowing your mentee to participate in the program. And remember: a parent is a child’s primary teacher and mentor. You are part of the community support team.

*In the final analysis, when we consider the real and nearby  
dangers, fears, and battles that face today’s children,  
the best thing we can do as mentors, or “citizens soldiers,”  
is to mentor -- that is, to be a trustworthy friend.  
Consistent caring and support is our simple way  
to make our village, and the world, feel safer to a child.*

## NOTEPAGE

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