

Tools for Mentoring Adolescents:

#3 – Aren't Mentors for Little Kids?

Especially for
New Mentors!

It is very likely that your adolescent mentee has asked or been asked this question. Yes, mentors are often adults who befriend young children. But there are lots of people out there who have and want mentors throughout their lives. Some adults even have mentors who are actually younger than them! Mentors are people who have life experience they want to share by spending time with a special person.

Having a mentor can be a really great experience for an adolescent if both mentor and mentee keep open minds and help make it a good relationship. Here is some information you can use to talk to your mentee if he/she expresses or seems to have negative feelings about having a mentor or if you just need help communicating with your mentee.

Why Would Anyone Want a Mentor?

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

A Mentor *Can Be*:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Can Mentees Do?

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

Give your mentor a chance—At first it may seem like you don't have much in common or like you'll never figure out how to relate. But if you are patient and make an effort to have a positive attitude, you may be surprised by how much you enjoy your time together.

Show your appreciation—Your mentor won't know what you like about the friendship unless you say something. Tell when you've had fun, when you are grateful for time or money your mentor has spent, or when you are just feeling good about the relationships.

Be open to new experiences—You and mentor may visit places or do things together that you've never done before. Give each new opportunity a chance and you may discover things you really like!

Share what you know—Your mentor can learn just as much from you as the other way around. Don't be afraid to share what you know, like, and do well.

Makes You Think

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

Who Mentored You?

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

Something to Talk About

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

The answers should really get you thinking!

¹ http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/evaluation/2005_national_poll.php