



# Mentor Handbook

## Mission

Empowering youth by establishing and supporting a connection with a caring adult who encourages them to discover strengths and achieve potential.

## What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a one-to-one relationship over a prolonged period of time between a youth and an older person who provides consistent support and guidance. The goal of mentoring is to help mentees gain the skills and confidence to be responsible for their own futures, including, and with an increasing emphasis on, academic and occupational skills. Mentoring is an act of community-building. It requires believing in and caring about young people—their future and ours.

## Why Mentoring?

Today, adolescents are an increasingly isolated population.

- Changes in the structure of the family, in community and neighborhood relationships, and in workplace arrangements have deprived young people of the adult contacts that historically have been primary sources of socialization and support for development.
- There are fewer “natural” opportunities for youth to sustain durable relationships with adults.
- Many young people lack nurturing and supportive primary adult relationships. While families bear the primary obligation to care for their children and to help them become healthy, contributing citizens, other institutions can help families accommodate to a rapidly changing world. A mentor can provide the nurturing, supportive adult relationship absent in the lives of many of our young people.

## Why Mentoring Works

Mentoring is frequently referred to as a youth development strategy—one that uses positive youth-adult relationships to provide broad guidance and support *rather* than aiming to fix a problem or teach a specific skill. Youth development refers to the stages that all children go through to acquire the attitudes, competencies, values, and social skills they need to become successful adults. There are five key outcomes for youth that are vital for their transition to adulthood:

## “Five C’s” of Youth Development

- **Competence.** Positive view of one’s actions in specific areas, including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational.
- **Confidence.** Improved sense of positive self-worth and belief in the future by offering consistent positive encouragement and reinforcement.
- **Connection.** Positive bonds with people and institutions—peers, family, school, and community—in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
- **Character.** Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), spirituality , integrity.
- **Caring and Compassion.** A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

These five developmental outcomes are best achieved with significant support from the entire community—family, friends, schools, and other community institutions. Yet, this support is often missing from the lives of many young people, especially those whose environments are unhealthy, unsafe, or lacking opportunities. Mentoring provides services, opportunities, and supports that enhance the young person’s environment and increases his or her ability to reach these outcomes.

### A mentor is...

- A friend
  - *Like peer friendships, mentors and mentees do things together that are fun and engaging. They teach each other. They help each other. They’re honest with each other. And sometimes they have to have hard conversations about concerns they have, and know how to ask the right questions at the right time. By being a good listener and engaging in authentic conversations with your mentee, you are helping him/her develop important life skills.*
- A caring, responsible adult
  - *For many of our mentees, there is not always a consistent adult presence in their lives who can model appropriate behaviors interactions and attitudes.*
- A nurturer of possibilities
  - *Your role is to see the gifts and strengths of your mentee and help him/her flourish personally. You should help your mentee channel his gifts toward actions that make him a resource to others in his family, neighborhood school, or community.*
- A positive role model
  - *You are expected to set a good example to the mentee for how to live your life. This is not the same as being perfect. Rather, it is about acknowledging your imperfections and sharing your strengths. It is also about advocating for your mentee when dangers to his physical or emotional well-being are present.*

### A mentor is NOT...

- All things to their mentee.
- A parent/legal guardian

- *The role of the parent or legal guardian (governed by law) is to provide food, shelter and clothing. It is not the mentor's role to fulfill these responsibilities. If the mentor believes his/ her mentee is not receiving adequate support, he/ she should contact and speak ONLY with the mentor coordinators.*
- A social worker
  - *A social worker is a licensed professional with the necessary skills and training to assist in family issues. If a mentor believes there is something wrong in the mentee's home life, the mentor should share this information ONLY with the mentor coordinators.*
- A psychologist

## **Guidelines for Mentors:**

- Be on time.
- Be honest and respectful.
- Always call the mentor coordinators if you have to change your plans so the child will know what to expect.
- Give your mentee advanced notice if you have to miss a regular visit for vacation. (Hint: a postcard or letter lets your mentee know you were thinking of him/her)
- Encourage the child to suggest activities and help plan them.
- Give your mentee your full attention when you are together.
- Allow and encourage your mentee to be open about his/her thoughts, feelings and values...but don't pry. Respect the mentee's opinion...don't discount it as foolish.
- Be aware that your actions, thoughts and words may be picked up by your mentee even if that is not your intention.
- Value diversity--chances are that your mentee will be different from you in fundamental ways. Remember that you can learn from him/her just as he/she learns from you.
- Set a positive example by obeying laws and school rules.
- Do not be drawn into family conflicts. The parent-child relationship is "family business" and you should not be involved beyond listening to the mentee's feelings.
- Help your mentee make decisions and formulate their own conclusions without telling him/her what to do. Explore alternative solutions together.
- Never make promises you can't keep.
- Give the relationship time to develop. Don't judge it too quickly!!
- Talk to the mentor coordinators if you are ever confused or concerned about anything in your match--no matter how insignificant it may seem. "Insignificant" things tend to blossom into larger issues if not addressed.

### **Four Focus Areas for Mentoring Activities**

1. **Academic Assistance:** Help mentee with homework (e.g., tutoring or providing assistance to the mentee in core academic subjects, taking the mentee to the library to conduct research for a project or select a book for a book report, helping mentee study for a test).
2. **Enrichment & Culture:** Expose mentee to local enrichment/cultural activities, resources, and sites in order to provide real world experiences to help put into context what they are learning in school.
3. **Positive Youth Development:** Help mentee deal with emotions, self-esteem, peer pressure, teamwork, leadership, etc.
4. **Community Service:** Participate in community service --focusing on activities that draw on the mentee's strengths and interests.

## Our Mentees...

Are primarily 2<sup>nd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders who come from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of these children are growing up in one parent households, their parents are working long hours, or they have an unstable home life. Some children have difficulty taking advantage of opportunities available to them in the community because of financial, social, and financial barriers. Others are struggling in school, either academically or in their peer relationships. Above all, they are all children who are on the brink of success and would thrive if their potential was tapped.

## Ages and Stages of Youth (Child Development)

It is important as mentors to value your mentees and to understand what they might be going through, based on their age and history. Remember that each individual is unique and develops at a different rate. Also, adolescent development is greatly influenced by environmental factors, such as homelife and societal pressures. We ought to make the most of this time—for them and for ourselves. As mentors, it is important to understand mentees' developmental tasks.

### Ages 8-10

#### *General Characteristics:*

- Interested in people and aware of differences.
- Busy, active, full of enthusiasm, may try too much, interested in money and its value.
- Capable of prolonged interest (maybe).
- Reasonable with a sense of right and wrong.
- Enjoys spending time talking and discussing.
- Wide discrepancies in reading ability
- Tend to be accident-prone.
- Can be very competitive and may have a strong desire to win.
- Are choosy about their friends, and being accepted by peers becomes quite important.

- Team games become popular.
- Worshiping heroes, TV stars, sports figures is common.
- Are very sensitive to praise and recognition. Feelings may be hurt easily.
- Begin feeling the pressure of conflict between peers' rules and parents' rules.

#### *Mental Characteristics:*

- Their idea of fairness becomes a big issue.
- Are eager to answer questions.
- Are very curious, collectors of everything, and may jump from one thing to another.
- Want more independence, but know they need guidance and support.
- Can be decisive and dependable.

### Ages 11-13

#### *General Characteristics:*

- Testing limits, "know-it-all attitude"

- Vulnerable, emotionally insecure, fear of rejection, mood swings

- Interest in art, crafts, models and music are popular
- Are very concerned with their appearance, and very self-conscious about growth
- Diet and sleep habits can be bad, which may result in low energy level.
- Being accepted by friends becomes quite important, which means there is a real need to conform.
- Cliques start to develop outside of school.
- Crushes on members of the opposite sex are common.
- Friends set the general rule of behavior.
- Are very concerned about what others say and think of them.
- Interested in earning own money.
- Are very sensitive to praise and recognition. Feelings are hurt easily
- Loud behavior and “showing off” hides their lack of self-confidence
- Tend to be perfectionists. If they try to attempt too much, they may feel frustrated and guilty
- Want more independence, but know they need guidance and support
- Are caught between being treated like a child and feeling like an adult.
- Because friends are so important during this time, there can be conflicts between adult’s rules and friend’s rules.
- Look at the world more objectively, but more subjectively and critically at adults.
- Understand events or problems in terms of their own experiences. Hypothetical situations may be difficult for them to comprehend.

### **Suggested Mentor Strategies**

- Recognize allegiance to friends and “heroes”.
- Remind child of responsibilities in a 2-way relationship.
- Offer enjoyable learning experiences. It’s a great time to teach about different cultures.
- Offer alternative opinions without being insistent.
- Be accepting of different physical states and emotional changes.
- Give frank answers to questions.
- Share aspects of professional life and rewards of achieving in world of work.
- Do not tease about appearance, clothes, etc. Affirm often.
- Be a good listener!
- Take advantage of “teachable moments”

- Keep an eye out for learning opportunities and “teachable moments.” If your mentee expresses an interest in someone or something, no matter how slightly, take advantage of the situation and help develop the interest further. You never know where this might lead. Over time, the mentee may learn to be aware of and creative with his/her own potential.

## Primary Facets of a Strong Match

### 1. Building Trust

Trust is the one thing that makes all the other facets of mentoring fall into place. Without trust, there is not much of a bond between you and your mentee and the role-modeling and facilitated growth that mentoring can provide has little chance of happening. **Mentees may be slow to give their trust. Based on past experience with other adults, mentees may expect inconsistency and lack of commitment.**

*Trust Builders:*

- **Being fully present with the youth.** In other words, when you are with your mentee, you are *with them*. You are not there to fulfill an obligation or to make yourself feel good. *You don't use your cell phone* except in an emergency or to let someone know you will be late.
- **Seeing your youth/mentee as a person.** Your mentee is not a project, and you are not there to “straighten them out.” This means getting to know the mentee first, and then responding according to *who they are*, not who you are. Discover their uniqueness as a person, and how they are gifted. Encourage them in their unique and gifted areas.
- **Consistency.** Keeping your visits with the mentee consistent, even when they are being inconsistent, is key. It’s also very important that you always follow through with things you say you will do. If you say you’ll help them with something on your next visit, do it.
- **Be yourself.** Don’t try to come off as the “perfect adult” in the mentee’s life. Just be authentic. Be transparent enough so that the mentee sees that you make mistakes, too. The important thing is that you learn from mistakes. Avoid phrases like “I would never . . .” or “I always. . . .”
- **Set a good example.** Be an example of a trustworthy person. For example, don’t divulge things that others told you in confidence. Follow the rules of the program. If you meet out in the community, treat those you encounter respectfully— for example, treat servers at restaurants with patience and respect. Your mentee notices everything you do.

### 2. Setting goals and boundaries

Two of the most important tasks in new mentoring relationships are the establishment of goals, which guide the relationship activities, and boundaries, which keep the mentoring relationship structured and positive. Goal setting is a real cornerstone to a healthy mentoring relationship. Goals help youth develop self-confidence, explore available options, create motivation, and foster a sense of accomplishment and competence. And depending on the nature of the youth’s goals, they may wind up dictating the bulk of the

activities the match does together. Before attempting goal-setting, spend time together to establish a relationship of trust and confidentiality.

- **Goals should be realistic, obtainable, challenging, specific, measurable, and time-bound.** These qualities ensure that the goal is appropriate and achievable. “Having a lot of money” does not meet these criteria; “becoming a veterinarian” does.
- **The mentee must “own” the goal.** In other words, it must be his/her idea and he/she must be committed to it.
- **Develop a plan in writing.** This organizes the work toward the goal while also helping it seem more manageable. The plan should cover the smaller steps needed to reach the goal, potential barriers and solutions, and benchmarks to measure progress. Developing a written plan for a goal can be a great way of teaching planning, organization, and discipline skills to a young person.
- **Provide “lessons learned” from your own goals.** You can help the youth set goals by talking about how you achieved your own goals in life. And even more meaningful instruction can come from discussing goals you *didn’t* achieve, and why.

Setting boundaries can be a more complicated process. This is often driven by unexpected behavior on the part of the mentee (or even the mentee’s family). Some mentors may find the idea of setting boundaries to be harsh, mean, or controlling. In reality, boundaries are important in helping youth feel safe and protected. Boundary setting is important so that each person in a mentoring relationship is clear about his or her role. Boundaries help to establish and nurture trust in a relationship. Most significantly, they help to protect not only the youth, but also the volunteers and the program. A discussion on appropriate boundary setting will help volunteers start on the right foot and avoid having to change things later once a strong pattern of behavior has been established.

**Common areas where boundaries are needed include:**

- Time
- Money
- Working with parents
- Self-disclosure

### ***Time Boundaries***

Boundary setting and unrealistic expectations seem to go hand in hand. Your role is not to solve all the mentee’s problems single-handedly. Appropriate boundaries in regard to the frequency of meetings and phone calls will help to protect your ability to be there for your mentee long term.

- Consistency and frequency of meetings are important elements of a successful mentoring relationship. However, spending too much time together can create dependency and it will lead to the development of unrealistic expectations on behalf of the youth and the family about what a mentoring relationship can and cannot do.

- Do not feel like you have to solve every problem the mentee has. Seek help from staff and community resources often.
- A child who calls too often or tries to cling to the relationship too hard may be worried about being abandoned. Several meetings are not going to satisfy his needs or calm his fears. However, setting regular and consistent meetings will help assure him that over time, the mentor will be there. Mentors and mentees can create a calendar of activities together by scheduling their meetings and the days they will talk on the phone. If a mentor does not set boundaries with regard to his personal time, he can unknowingly create the very conditions that will lead to burnout and a premature ending.

### ***Money Boundaries***

- **A mentor's role is not that of provider.** If a young person is going through financial difficulties, it is important for you to remember that you can help by connecting your mentee to the appropriate resources and by being supportive of their emotional needs through your friendship. Creating financial dependency will only end up causing a rift in the relationship. Mentors who take on financial responsibility for their mentees tend to feel used, overburdened, and end up resenting the relationship. Trying to solve all the mentee's problems can create in the youth a sense of guilt and dependency. It also sends the wrong message to the youth that they are in fact helpless, weak, and unable to solve their own problems.
- **Gift giving should be reserved for special occasions (i.e., birthdays, holidays, graduations, etc.).** Gifts should also be kept to a reasonable amount. Excessive gift giving takes attention away from the relationship. For many youth who come from chaotic environments, buying things is sometimes used as a way to compensate for the lack of relationship. The gift of time and friendship is more valuable than any material thing they can give their mentees.

### ***Self-Disclosure Boundaries***

You need to be careful about the type of personal information you share with your mentee. When disclosing personal information, it is important for you to ask yourself: What purpose does it serve to share this information? Am I doing it because I need the support? Or do I think this information will serve a higher purpose? Will sharing information about myself cut off communication or lead to more open communication?

- You should be careful not to burden your mentee with your own life problems. Though mentors greatly grow and benefit from the mentoring relationship, this growth should not take place at the expense of a reversal of roles. Your primary responsibility is to be supportive of the youth and listen to his/her concerns. The motives for sharing should always be youth centered, not self-centered.
- You should be careful not to disclose information that may be inappropriate. Some specifics of your life may be information that can be shared with other adult friends, but not with a child.
- When self-disclosure is done in the appropriate context and to an appropriate extent, self-disclosure can be a powerful way to connect with youth and build trust. Appropriate sharing combined with

genuine interaction can empower youth to open up and help them to reap the benefits of learning from the experiences of someone they respect.

### ***Boundaries with Parents***

- It is important that you remember that the relationship is between you and the mentee—not the parents or other siblings. Extending this relationship to other family members usually jeopardizes the friendship. Many times the very reason why youth are in mentoring programs is because they lack the one-to-one attention they need. Do not get caught up in an unhealthy cycle by becoming involved in the family’s problems.
- It is not your responsibility to be the family’s babysitter or to give the parent “a break.” In general, activities should be planned outside the child’s home and should not include other family members or friends, except for very rare occasions.
- You should discourage parents from sharing too much personal information with you, whether about the child or other family problems. If the parent needs help, suggest she contact the mentor coordinators.
- It is important that the child always be present during any contact you have with other family members. You should not give reports on the child to the parent or listen to a parent’s complaints about the child. This can cause mentees to feel “ganged-up” on.

### **3. Offering encouragement**

One of the most valuable things you can do is offer positive encouragement and reinforcement to a child. You can help your mentee build self-confidence, self-esteem, and cultural pride to last a lifetime by focusing on their talents, assets, and strengths. You can be the one to help your mentee see the connection between his/her actions of today and dreams and goals of tomorrow. For example, if your mentee dreams of graduating from high school with classmates, be sure to point out how skipping school today will affect chances of completing school on schedule, if at all. Bring in examples of struggles that are real to your mentee—a hero or community leader. Be as concrete and relevant as possible.

- Identify your mentee’s talents, strengths, and assets.
- Give recognition for effort or improvement—no matter how slight.
- Show appreciation for contributions and demonstrate confidence and faith in your mentee.
- Value your mentee no matter how he/she performs.
- Find and point out positive aspects of behavior.
- Suggest small steps in new or difficult tasks.
- Have reasonable expectations.
- Help your mentee use mistakes as learning experiences

## 4. Inviting Questions and Effective Listening

- **Limiting the number of questions.** Too many questions can cause a mentee to feel uncomfortable. He/she may begin to wonder why the mentor wants to know so much and what will be done with the information.
- **Avoiding “why” questions.** Questions that begin with “Why” can arouse a mentee’s defenses because it may sound like the asker is making an accusation. For example, “Why do you feel that way?” is risky to ask an adolescent. A better way to ask this question would be, “What happened that bothered you so much?”

*Effective listening happens when you:*

- **Pay attention to your own body language.** Are you in an inviting position? Or are you subtly telling the mentee something else?
- **Make eye contact.** This makes some youth feel uncomfortable, but it always lets them know you are engaged and present with them.
- **Do not interrupt.**
- **Do not plan out what to say next while the mentee is talking.**
- **Listen for attitudes and feelings, not just words.**
- **Reflect what they’ve heard and ask non-threatening follow-up questions.** Paraphrasing mentees’ responses lets them know that you have heard them and gives them a chance to clarify anything that was heard mistakenly. Follow-up questions let them know you are interested in what they have said. Don’t ask so many that the youth feels badgered, but don’t let something important slide just because it would mean asking another question.

## 5. Closure

When the time comes to end your mentoring relationship, it must be done carefully and thoughtfully. The way the relationship ends can shape what your mentee thinks about and learns from the experience. Keep the following in mind when you approach the end of your formal mentoring relationship:

- Terminating the mentor/mentee relationship may recall the ending of other important relationships in participants’ lives.
- It must take place gradually.
- Terminations sometimes include grieving, depending on the relationship.
- It can be a time for growth; you can work to regard the situation as a “graduation” rather than a loss.

While working with your student on termination issues, please use the following guidelines:

- Be clear about the date of your last meeting and be sure to inform your mentee of this ahead of time.
- Be honest, candid, and supportive, regardless of the reason for the termination. Encourage open discussions about feelings associated with this transition.
- Be prepared for your mentee’s anger or denial (often in the form of missed appointments); help him/her anticipate these feelings.

- Be aware of and monitor your own feelings of guilt, sadness, relief, etc.
- Use the termination process as a means to recall your mentee's strengths and progress.
- Reassure your student about your confidence in him/her.
- Do something fun and special on your last meeting to celebrate all the success of your relationship
- Mutually agree on how and when you will stay in touch.
- Follow through on that commitment.
- Don't make promises that you cannot keep.

## **Diversity Issues**

As mentors please remember to consider the following:

- Youth culture has unique rules. Young people often experiment with dress and behavior. You will need to distinguish typical, rebellious adolescent behavior from broader cultural differences.
- Diversity is a two way street. You may represent a different world to your mentee. For example, your mentee may know of no one else who has a career like yours.
- Poverty has its own culture. Many young people come from economically deprived background.
- Be understanding and nonjudgmental. Your mentee may come from a world very different from your own. Don't make assumptions or judgments, and your relationship will develop trust.
- Share your culture. Young people are curious. Answer their questions with patience. Use this questioning and answering as a means to build trust.
- Don't be afraid of diversity. Take time to get to know your mentee, and his or her "differences" will no longer be so apparent.

## **Confidentiality for Mentors**

As a mentor, you will likely learn a lot about the private matters of your mentee and his/her family. There will be times when you want to talk to roommates, friends or relatives about what is happening in your relationship with the mentee or what you know. This is where confidentiality comes in.

PLEASE...

Remember that Jackson is a small town. A person who has probably had a very difficult time trusting many people in his/her life has entrusted you with private information. Please respect the family's right to keep some matters private. If you need to talk, call or make arrangement to see the mentor coordinators. Things can be worrisome, shocking, annoying, etc and it is understandable that you need to process this information. We ask that you do so in the appropriate and mature manner.

HOWEVER... confidentiality does not prevent you from disclosing information or evidence of a harmful situation for you or your mentee TO THE APPROPRIATE PEOPLE. Situations that cause you to be uncomfortable inhibit your ability to fulfill your mentor role and will be addressed. And it is the LAW that you report all cases of potential abuse, including harm to self and others. Consider the Teton Mentor Project staff as part of your support system. Your friends and family do not have the whole picture or the contact with the family, so their input, however well-intentioned, is not going to be the most useful. For

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## Quick Tips for Getting the Help You Need

Attend ongoing training offered by the program and offer ideas for additional training

Take advantage of the ideas, suggestions, and support of other mentors in the program

Actively participate during check-in phone calls and /or mentor support groups

Honestly report how your match is going during check-in calls and on match logs

Don't be afraid to contact the mentor coordinators for any reason at any time

Ask mentor coordinators to make contact with parents or guardians if needed

Educate yourself about issues that face your mentee

Remember that asking for help from program staff is a sign that you care about your mentee and are finding the best ways to make your relationship successful

specific legal confidentiality policies, please refer to the Teton Mentor Project's Policy and Procedure Manual.

## Staff and Contact Information:

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The Teton Mentor Project office is located in the Jackson Hole Middle School. Please come see us at any time.

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## Delicate Topics

Sex  
Peer Pressure  
Hygiene  
Behavior  
Alcohol and drugs  
School Performance  
Self-image/personal insecurities  
Class/cultural identity

## Issues of Concern

Unsafe sex  
Fist fighting  
Delinquent behavior  
Drug and alcohol use

## Crisis Requiring Intervention

Child abuse and neglect  
Abusive relationships  
Chemical dependency  
Severe violence  
Arrest/extensive delinquency  
Depression/suicidality  
Mental illness  
Other trauma

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DELICATE TOPICS are likely to come up during discussions between mentors and mentees. Caution needs to be taken, however, since these topics can be touchy and strongly affect the relationship. Generally speaking, delicate topics should be discussed only when initiated by the mentee, and confidentiality takes on greater importance. While mentors can deal with these topics on their own, they should be encouraged to seek support and feedback the mentor coordinators or other mentors when these issues come up.

ISSUES OF CONCERN may have significant implications for the life of the mentee, and *therefore mentors need to report these concerns to the mentor coordinators*. However, these issues do not necessarily require direct intervention. Many of these conditions are ongoing conditions that mentees face, and mentors may need to accept these aspects of the mentee's lives without judgment. It is important that mentors do not focus too heavily on changing behavior when these issues arise; however, they should be aware of the challenges their mentees face, and over time they may be able to help mentees to restructure them.

CRISES are of grave concern and may require direct and immediate intervention—*mentors should never be expected to handle crises alone!* Some, like child abuse and neglect, are mandated by law to be reported to the county; others may require a referral or a direct intervention by Teton Mentor Project. Many of these situations will require collaboration with families of mentees and this should be handled by the mentor and the staff of Teton Mentor Project.