



Orientation and training for mentors

A person's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes —

The increased use of mentoring in youth programs can be, at least in part, attributed to the success of this type of intervention, particularly during the adolescent years of great change, risk, and opportunity. Research on traditional one-to-one mentoring has shown that protégés make significant gains in academic achievement and relationships with peers and parents as a result of frequent interactions with volunteer mentors who are primarily expected to provide support and friendship. Mentors help protégés solve problems they are currently facing, as well as avoid potential problems in the future.

Key to forming effective relationships within a mentoring program is the development, over time, of trust between the individuals involved, just as it is in naturally-forming mentoring relationships. Effective mentors

- involve youth in deciding how they will spend time together.
- are good listeners.
- give protégés a great deal of control of topics for discussions.
- are understanding and patient.
- make a commitment to being dependable, maintaining a steady presence in the young people's lives.
- recognize that relationships with protégés may be fairly one-sided for some time and may involve periods of

- unresponsiveness from the protégés.
- take responsibility for keeping relationships with protégés alive.
- pay attention to protégés' needs for fun and understand that enjoyable activities can provide valuable mentoring opportunities.
- respect the viewpoints of youth.
- point out various viewpoints regarding a situation and the people involved, propose various solutions, and facilitate discussions of alternatives.
- offer expressions of confidence and encouragement even when talking about difficult situations.
- find ways to show approval of young people and some of their ideas.
- are sensitive to the different styles of communication of young people.
- seek and utilize the help and advice of the mentoring program staff.

Less effective mentors tend to

- try to transform or reform young people by setting specific goals early on.
- emphasize behavior changes more than the development of mutual trust and respect.
- do not communicate with protégés on a regular basis.
- demand that youth play an equal role in initiating contact.
- act as authority figures or make judgmental statements about the attitudes



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of the young people involved.

- attempt to instill a set of values that may be inconsistent with those the young people are exposed to at home.
- preach to participants, telling them the one best solution to their problems.
- ignore the advice of program staff about how to respond to difficulties in the mentoring relationship. (Sipe, 1996)

Mentoring is a challenging job. Mentors can benefit from instruction and support in their efforts to build trust and develop positive relationships with young people.

The concept of mentoring is simple; the implementation of a mentoring program is challenging. Successful programs standardize procedures for the screening, orientation, training, and support of participants, including the mentors. Providing young people with mentors without giving sufficient direction to the mentors is unlikely to generate the long-term positive impact you desire.

Administrators of mentoring programs should consider including the following content and activities to train mentors.

- Provide information about program goals, requirements, staff roles, and other resources.
- Inform mentors of characteristics of the young people who are in the program.
- Make sure mentors understand that mentoring takes ongoing time and effort.
- Encourage mentors to ask questions of the administrator and of other mentors.
- Help mentors understand the scope and limits of their role as mentors.
- Help mentors understand that they are responsible for building relationships with participants; focus on establishing a bond with a feeling of attachment, trust, and mutual enjoyment; and that trust

building is a gradual process.

- Build the confidence of mentors, and help them understand the value of their unique contribution to the lives of young people in the program.
- Inform mentors of how their support can nurture internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose. For example, Search Institute (Scales & Leffert, 1999) has identified twenty internal assets for young people as characteristics of people on the road to personal, academic, and professional success. These assets are grouped into four categories—commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity—that can be used in training mentors.
- Introduce mentors to general strategies for positive youth development and support. Help them focus on the overall development of young people and value the diverse backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, and abilities of participants.
- Help mentors develop the communication skills and attitudes they need to perform well in their roles.
- Prepare mentors for the frustrations they may encounter and the limitations of their impact on the young participants; help them have realistic expectations.
- Encourage mentors to find ways to





have fun with their protégés as a way to help young people relate to them and feel that they value their company. Enjoyable activities include talking about interesting topics, sharing humorous experiences, pointing to interesting online resources, talking about current events and community service opportunities, sharing challenges in succeeding in college and getting a job, and talking about personal goals.

full participation in the online community with protégés. Note that some of this content is published in *Taking Charge: Stories of Success and Self-Determination* (Burgstahler, 2006c).

For additional guidance in this area, consult the publication *Training New Mentors* at http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/30_publication.pdf.

Since many of the *DO-IT Mentors* are not local to the DO-IT Center in Seattle, orientation and training occurs online. When applicants are accepted as *Mentors*, they are sent a series of orientation email messages designed to introduce them to mentoring goals and strategies and to the workings of the DO-IT electronic community. We include in the training specific rules and procedures of the program; responsibilities and expectations for mentors; the background, characteristics, and needs of the young people involved; relationship skills; email communication skills; and typical challenges mentors encounter. *DO-IT Mentors* are encouraged to read *Building Relationships: A Guide for New Mentors* at www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/29_publication.pdf.

As you begin to develop your own mentor orientation and training program, you may wish to use some of the following messages whose titles begin with *Mentor Tip*. They can be sent to an individual new mentor or to a discussion list or web-based forum for mentors to help them develop strategies for working with protégés. They are designed to provide guidelines to mentors before their



Mentor Tip: Orientation

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring orientation

Welcome to the [program name] program. I am the administrator of our electronic mentoring community. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [email address].

To help you transition into your new mentoring position, read the publication titled *Opening Doors: Mentoring on the Internet* at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/opendr.html>. If your computer has the capability, also view the video at this location.

[name of e-mentoring administrator]



Mentor Tip: Discussion Lists/Forums

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring discussion [lists/forums]

As a mentor you are encouraged to communicate with both mentors and teenage participants (protégés) in our mentoring community. I will post some messages to stimulate discussion, but both mentors and protégés are encouraged to share resources and pose questions of interest to the group.

The electronic community is composed of several [discussion lists/forums], each with a specific audience.

- To communicate with fellow mentors only, send a message to [list/forum address].
- To communicate with the entire community of mentors and protégés, send a message to [list/forum address].

I hope you enjoy your experience as a mentor. If you have any questions about being a mentor, how the discussion [lists/forums] work, or other issues or concerns, please contact me at [email address].

[e-mentoring administrator name]



Mentor Tip: Mentoring Guidelines

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring guidelines

Here are a few guidelines to follow as you begin mentoring the teens in our program.

- Periodically introduce yourself to the group. Share your personal interests, hobbies, academic interests, and career path.
- Read messages and communicate with other mentors and/or protégés at least once per week (time commitment: up to about one hour).
- Engage protégés in conversations. Set the tone and model appropriate interactions.
- Get to know the protégés. What are their personal interests? academic interests? career interests?
- Explore interests with protégés by asking questions, promoting discussion, and pointing to Internet and other resources.
- Facilitate contact between protégés and resources (professors, professionals, service providers, etc.).
- Remember that developing meaningful relationships takes time. Give yourself and the protégés time to get to know one another.
- Encourage protégés to set and reach high goals in education and employment.
- Maintain appropriate, clear boundaries with protégés.
- Never arrange to meet a protégé in person without the approval of program staff and parents. If such a meeting is desired, please share your interest with me at [email address].
- Tell me of any inappropriate email you receive from protégés or mentors and/or inappropriate activities protégés or mentors are involved in.



Mentor Tip: Communication of Emotions

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on communication of emotions

There are many advantages to mentoring via the Internet. Electronic messages can eliminate the barriers imposed by time, distance, and disability that can occur in face-to-face mentoring. However, electronic messages do not include the nonverbal cues people rely upon to communicate effectively. Nonverbal cues include facial expressions, eye contact, intonation, posture, and gestures. Without these cues we can fail to properly interpret the feelings and subtle meanings behind words that are spoken. The intended message in electronic correspondence can be misinterpreted by the person reading the message.

In order to make sure the meaning behind the words in your messages is clear, consider these tips:

- Start a message with a friendly greeting ("Hello," "Hi," "Dear [name]," etc.).
- Place "(grin)" at the end of a sentence to tell recipients that your comment is meant to be humorous. Similarly, insert appropriate "emoticons" to take the place of facial expressions or gestures. You can find many collections of emoticons by searching for "emoticons" on the Web, however, it's best to use text-based content rather than graphic images so that participants who are blind can access the content with their text-to-speech systems.
- Rarely use all capital letters in a message. Capitalizing all letters in one word infers strong emphasis, but capitalizing all letters in an entire message is like yelling at someone in person.



Mentor Tip: Positive Reinforcement

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on positive reinforcement

Find ways to have fun with protégés and your fellow mentors. Talk about interesting topics. Share humorous experiences. Such communications help young people relate to you and feel that you value their company. Enjoyable online activities include talking about your experiences in college and employment, interesting online resources, current events and community service opportunities, and your personal goals.

Be positive and offer expressions of confidence and encouragement even when talking about difficult situations. Find ways to show approval of our young participants and their ideas and to celebrate their successes. There are many ways to do this. Here are examples of positive comments that show approval and interest.

- Great idea.
- Right on! Fantastic! Terrific!
- Great job.
- Exactly right!
- Nice going.
- Good work.
- Outstanding!
- Great! Way to go!
- Perfect.
- Excellent!
- I bet you're happy about that.
- I can tell how pleased you are about this.
- I knew you could do it.
- Wow! All your hard work paid off.
- I bet you'll celebrate this accomplishment.
- I know exactly what you mean.
- I feel the same way at times.
- Keep trying—you'll get it.
- I'd like to hear more about your thoughts on this.
- What do you recommend to other teens who wish to accomplish something like this?
- How can you build on this successful experience?



Mentor Tip: Listening Skills

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on listening skills

Careful "listening" is an important skill for a mentor. When you read a protégé's message, try to interpret both the meaning and the potential emotion attached to the content. Sometimes it is appropriate to let the protégé know that you are aware of strong emotions that he seems to be expressing.

Empathy lets the protégé know you not only understand the words used but also are sensitive to the feeling expressed. Statements like "You sound really discouraged" can let the protégé know that you care about more than the factual content of his message, that you care about how he feels.

When participants in our electronic community convey to one another that they hear both the content of what was said and the feelings that were expressed, close relationships with high levels of trust develop.

When communicating with protégés, it is important to

- read through a protégé's entire message carefully and ask questions about anything you don't understand, before composing your reply.
- be clear and specific in your questions, requests, and answers.
- ask open-ended questions rather than questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no."
- understand that a protégé's view of the world may be different from your own and remember that everyone is entitled to his/her opinions and beliefs.
- provide guidance that is supportive and positive.
- avoid lecturing or passing judgment.
- guide protégés through a problem-solving process rather than state a solution to a problem for them.



Mentor Tip: Questions for Protégés

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on turning questions back

Sometimes an effective way to encourage communication and reflection is a question to the protégé. For example, you might ask:

- What do you think?
- Can you tell me how to do that?
- What choices do you have?
- How did you do that?
- Who helped you make that decision?
- Do you have any role models (teachers, family members, friends, historical figures, etc.) who have handled this type of situation in a positive way?
- Are you happy with how things turned out?
- What would you do differently if you were presented with the situation again?



Mentor Tip: Disabilities

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on disabilities

Do not ask participants about their disabilities unless they choose to disclose their specific disabilities to you. If they choose to share this information with you, encourage them to describe their disabilities in functional terms and share strategies and accommodations that help them succeed. Such practice is important since the ability for them to describe their disabilities and request accommodations is critical for their success in college and careers.

If you would like to know more about different types of disabilities and typical accommodations students with disabilities receive in educational settings, link to *The Faculty Room* from <http://www.washington.edu/doit>. This extensive resource is specifically designed for postsecondary faculty and, therefore, is most relevant to the college environment. For examples of accommodations for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, link to *AccessStem* from <http://www.washington.edu/doit>.

For further exploration of disabilities, consult the publication *Disability-Related Resources on the Internet* at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/DRR/>.

A glossary of disability-related terms can be found at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Programs/glossary.html>.



Mentor Tip: Guiding Teens

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on guiding teens

Reflecting on the following questions can guide you in helping young people with disabilities create definitions of success for themselves and begin to develop strategies for achieving success.

- How is your definition of success similar to or different from the definitions of young people you are mentoring? How do these differences impact your relationships?
- How do you model your own definition of success yet support a young person in defining success for himself/herself?
- What's the best advice or guidance you have ever given regarding success? What made it the best?
- Think of a time when you wished you had given different advice or guidance. What could you have said or done differently?
- How can you help teens take incremental steps toward leading a successful, self-determined life?



Mentor Tip: Conversation Starters

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on conversation starters

A challenge faced by any electronic mentoring community is getting conversations started. As a mentor you have the responsibility to engage protégés in conversations that promote growth and build trust. Here are a few discussion ideas to get you started.

- Introduce yourself and ask protégés about themselves.
- Talk about your hobbies, favorite movies, books, music, family, community where you live, etc.
- Ask protégés about their hobbies, favorite books, music, family, school, academic and career plans, etc.
- Talk about your education (favorite classes, teachers, school).
- Talk about your first job.
- Talk about how you secured your current job. What specialized training have you had?
- Talk about how to locate an internship or job opportunity.
- Offer to help protégés develop or improve their résumés.
- Talk about interviewing techniques, such as dressing for success, answering specific questions, and disclosing disabilities.
- Talk about disability-related accommodations in school or on the job.
- Offer to help protégés locate summer employment or make career contacts.
- Talk about balancing school, work, and social life.
- Share websites you think protégés might find useful or interesting.



Mentor Tip: “Dos” when Mentoring Teens

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Tips on “dos” when mentoring teens

Since becoming self-determined is a lifelong process, you can be a co-learner as you help young people develop self-determination skills. Successful individuals with disabilities offered the following advice as part of an electronic mentoring community discussion.

- Allow them to reach for their dreams, regardless of how impossible it may seem. Encourage them when the going gets rough, let them work at it themselves to achieve their dreams, and be there to say, "Job well done!" when they make it! I thank God daily for those teachers, my family, and friends who didn't give up on me or my goals. They made my success possible!! (college student who is deaf)
- Help a disabled student accept the fact that they are disabled. Some disabled students do not want to admit their disability. Some blind students, for example, don't want to use a cane because they fear that people might look at them differently. Every child wants to be like everyone else. I remember when I was declared legally blind I didn't have the self-esteem to admit that I was blind. I didn't want to use the adaptive materials that my vision teacher provided. My grades started to slip, and I didn't feel good at all. The day that I got over the self-esteem issue was the day that I could see that adaptive materials could actually help me out in the classroom. (college student who is blind)
- Allow young people to keep their door of opportunity open, and remind them that the door will always be open as long as they allow it to be open. (college student who had a stroke)
- Caring adults can impact and shape the self-esteem of a kid, especially one who is disabled. When a kid is supported by someone outside of the their family, they feel special and valued. This “mentor” can let the child know that they believe in them. A belief is one step on the road to success. (high school student with Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder)
- Give children with disabilities responsibilities at a young age, similar to those given to other children. (college student who is blind)

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Mentor Tip: “Dos” when Mentoring Teens (continued)

- Everyone should always try to reach their full potential, and they should expect nothing more and nothing less. (college student with low vision)
- If a student is having a difficult time in one academic area, gently point out to him/her what his/her strengths are, what he/she is better at. (college student who had a stroke)
- Instill self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-advocacy at a very young age. Allow children to learn how to be independent so that they don't have to learn how to do it when they become adults. I think when parents do everything for their children it hinders their ability to develop and be able to make their own judgments. Instill information into children that will allow them to make good judgments. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- Parents, teachers, and society need to come to understand that disabilities are merely factors of life, not life itself. Parents of disabled children should reinforce, from the time their children are young, that disabilities are circumventable. They must help their children accept their disabilities and then encourage them to lead their lives to the utmost normalcy. As for teachers, they must come to understand that disabled children are, in most instances, capable of achieving the same levels of academic success as any other child. Teachers must come to see disabilities as superficial qualities but simultaneously realize that disabled children may need some special accommodations. Last, society must be educated as to the capabilities of disabled individuals. While there have been vast shifts in societal thought concerning the abilities of the disabled, too many individuals still hold outdated and ignorant views about people with disabilities. It is not enough that laws exist to protect the interests of the disabled. Society must learn to take those laws to heart to ensure that all children, disabled or not, are able to form and maintain high expectations for themselves. The change will be gradual but well worth it! (adult who is blind)
- Teach your child about right and wrong. Encourage him to stand up for what is right. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- What really helps kids with disabilities is being treated just like everyone else. If they get special treatment, then they will expect to be treated like that all their lives. (high school student with speech, hearing, and mobility impairments)

Keep these words of wisdom in mind as you mentor protégés.



Mentor Tip: “Don’ts” when Mentoring Teens

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Tips on “don’ts” when mentoring teens

Successful individuals with disabilities offered the following advice as part of an electronic mentoring community discussion.

- Don’t disregard their beliefs or feelings. Be supportive of kids' beliefs. (college student with mobility and health impairments)
- Don't let children sit and feel sorry for themselves. Find activities of interest that they are able to take part in. Find community partners to take them places if they are unable to go on their own. (college student with Cerebral Palsy)
- Don't polarize disabilities and abilities. They are not two ends of a spectrum. For example, my deafness gives me access to sign language and typing skills that I might never have learned if I had not gone deaf. So in many ways the disability (if you call it that) is an ability. At the same time, my physical disability gave me an opportunity to do dance. Something I NEVER did as a nondisabled person. It's as important to identify parts of life as a disabled person that give us skills as identifying other abilities/disabilities. (adult who is deaf and has a mobility impairment)