

Maintaining the Mentor Relationship

Once mentors find their role and get to know their student, it is important to still keep things fun and fresh. Keep in mind that you will need to rely on your own persistence and grit at times. Once again, the matches that stay together the longest are those that experience the most benefits.

If a mentor gets burnt out, but can see the student is benefitting from the relationship, that is when it is most important to stay the course. Mentors who have a “next man up” mentality and think their student will just get another mentor have the potential to do additional harm. Instead of someone else just slipping in and taking the place as the new mentor, students will tend to focus on the loss rather than embrace their new mentor. There are far more youth on waiting lists to receive a mentor than volunteers signing up for the program. We don’t want someone to volunteer “for a little while” because this can actually be detrimental to a youth’s self-esteem if the relationship lasts for less than three months.

First and foremost, keep in mind that LSS is available to help with any questions you may have. We can offer suggested activities and ways to keep things fun. In addition, here are some tips to help ensure you are in it for the long haul:

- Listen and offer friendship, guidance and encouragement to youth.
- Desire to be involved and help youth, respect for youth and their cultures and backgrounds.
- Have empathy and authenticity.
- Compatible personalities, interests and expectations.
- Flexibility, openness and ability to see solutions and opportunities and help youth see them as well.

Sometimes students are the ones who want to end the mentor relationship. This happens during transitions to a new school (elementary to middle school or middle to high school) or if the student feels they have “outgrown” having a mentor. Below are a few things that students expect from their mentor:

- Be real, legitimate and truthful.
- Show up when you say you will and be on time.
- Do activities that interest youth.
- Tell the youth up front if you don’t plan to follow them to the next grade level.
- Meet regularly not periodically.
- Have flexibility to youth’s changing needs.
- Be conscious of and sensitive to your authority in the relationship.
- Maintain confidentiality.

LSS will be calling each new mentor throughout the first year of mentoring to find out how things are going. We will continue to check in with all mentors periodically. At any time you may reach out to LSS staff by emailing or calling, and we are happy to walk along side you in getting over difficulties or make suggestions for a positive, continued relationship.

If Things Are Not Working

Not every mentor match is one made in heaven. There are times when things just don't work out, and your relationship may not progress. If this happens, contact LSS. We can give you ideas and help talk through some issues. If needed, we will help you determine whether or not to continue the relationship. It is important to get different perspectives on this before giving up.

- The match between mentor and student may not be right.
- Some students have been so disappointed by earlier experiences they are unable to risk involvement in a relationship.
- Some students will get stuck in the "testing" stage.
- Some students may drop out of the program.
- The mentor may feel burdened by the relationship and feel angry or annoyed by the student's behavior or words.

Don't give up if you are feeling anything listed above. Sometimes the most difficult kids on the surface are the ones who need mentors the most. If the program is not what you expect, please contact LSS before making a decision to quit. If a match is truly one that is not working, we will suggest you go to a different school or be matched with a different student.