

What Mentors Do

At LSS, we pride ourselves on being a quality mentoring program. We follow guidelines and practices set forth by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership. LSS expects volunteers to make the same commitment to quality mentoring that we do as a program.

It is common to hear a mentor described as a coach, advocate, guide, role model or friend. Here are examples of the various roles mentors have.

Role Modeling

Role modeling is a natural component of mentoring. Mentors can point out, demonstrate, and explain their own actions and values in an effort to help students identify options. Increased exposure to possibilities allows kids to see more or different opportunities than they may see in their present environment.

Remember that relationships take time to develop and for communication to flow both ways. Do not give up if it seems like you are the one always doing the talking. Keep at it by role modeling your continued interest in the child. Successful mentors have patience when the relationship moves slowly, and are willing to learn about things that are important to their student.

Attention and Concern

Due to a variety of circumstances, many students do not receive enough attention from the adults in their lives. Mentors can fill these empty spaces with dependable, sincere, and consistent attention and concern.

The most successful mentors show up with their genuine selves and enjoy being a small part of a child's life. Mentors can help children make decisions and see them become the best they can be. Research shows that changes are really noticed when meeting with the student for an extended period of time (more than nine months). Mentors who make a commitment for the long haul are in a better position to make a difference.

Even without having had the same life experiences, mentors can empathize with feelings and personal problems. There is a line between expressing concern and feeling pity for the student.

Accountability

Students are told to expect to meet with their mentor one hour per week at school. This commitment is essential to uphold in order to establish accountability with your student. This consistent accountability sets a good example for students to see and emulate, cements trust between mentor and student, and creates mutual expectations that can be met.

Mentors can build accountability in their student. Mentoring does not work if you come with the attitude that your own ways are better or that the student needs to be “rescued.” Mentors who convey a sense of respect and equal dignity in the relationship will win the trust of their student.

Listening

Mentors often help simply by listening, asking questions, and giving students an opportunity to explore their own thoughts. When people feel accepted, they are more likely to share what they are thinking about and what is going on in their life.

Hopefully, students will talk about their fears, dreams, and concerns. Successful mentors balance a respect for the real and serious problems faced by their student with optimism for finding equally realistic solutions. Mentors are able to make sense of a mixture of issues and point out sensible alternatives.

Encouragement

Mentors can have significant influence on students by keeping them in school and getting them involved in community and school activities, and directing them to other positive choices. If a student does not want to do homework or study for a test or get a job, they will not react well to that being forced upon them by their mentor. A mentor's role is more to encourage positive behavior, not to make choices for the student or demand that they do something a mentor feels is in their best interest.

Mentors Are Not

While it is true that mentors will listen, support, nurture, and advise, mentors are not parents, professional counselors, tutors or social workers. A mentor's sustained caring, interest and acceptance may give students a stronger sense of self-confidence, which they can apply to other relationships and experiences. Mentoring, however, is not a panacea for all the problems and deficiencies faced by students and their families. There are some barriers that mentoring one hour per week cannot overcome. The essence of mentoring is the power of human relationship.