

How Mentors Help

Many mentors may feel unsure about the impact they are having. While it is difficult to measure, there are a few universal things mentors do that make the student feel the benefits of having an extra person by their side.

Mentors can play a significant role in developing a child's self-esteem. In broad terms they show them that the community cares. There are also some smaller things you can do to help your student grow their confidence.

- Celebrate every success, no matter how small.
- Model your own healthy self-esteem.
- Help him/her understand that there are many ways in which he/she is successful.
- Teach your student that he/she can turn failure into success by trying again.
- Encourage your student each time you are together.
- Identify and acknowledge your student's strengths.

Set an Example

Ask your student for his/her input on what you will do together. The goal is to provide experiences that the student's usual environment does not provide. The more "real world" exposure a mentor can provide a student, the more that student will learn. Students will gain new perspectives on lifestyles that may differ from what they experience at home and their own potential.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the way people feel about themselves. Self-esteem develops in infancy and is shaped by the feedback children receive from parents and other significant people in their lives. Some people believe that self-esteem is the single most important element in children's lives. It affects everything they do. Over 90% of mentors report they notice an increase in their students' self-esteem each year.

Children with high self-esteem:

Are physically healthier
Are more motivated to learn
Get along better with others

Children with positive self-esteem are more willing to:

Tap into their creativity and risk expressing it
Approach life with energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity
Stretch to reach their full potential

Positive self-esteem facilitates:

Self-confidence
Self-direction
Responsibility

Goal Setting

After building rapport and trust, mentors might consider identifying and working towards short-term goals. It is important that the mentor have the resources necessary to help the student achieve his/her goal. If mentors have questions about this, please call LSS. With time, students will view their mentors as important parts of their lives and as a sounding board for advice.

Start by outlining goals for the relationship and the year ahead. Take the time to help students identify the goal(s) they want to accomplish, view it realistically, break it down into small steps, and explore ways of reaching it.

- Mentor pairs can draw up a “contract” for their relationship, outlining each person’s personal, social, and educational goals for the year.
- Each month the pairs can assess their progress and pitfalls, charting the results, and reaffirming (or reassessing) the value of the goals.
- For each measure of accomplishment, mentors and students can reward each other with a certificate of achievement, a small gift, or a special treat.

Students’ goals must be their own, not goals that others have set for them. Unless it is their idea, they won’t embrace the goal and the chances of reaching it are diminished. It doesn’t matter how outrageous these goals may seem at first. What is important is that the goals belong to the student. Once they are set, mentors can show students how to break down more complex goals into small, achievable steps.

For example, a student who decides that she wants to live in a mansion one day can learn how a good education will lead to job opportunities in which she could earn enough money to live in a mansion. The mentor pair could explore careers and the education required for these career choices. In this way, a goal that may seem unrealizable can be transformed into smaller, realistic goals; the student still feels they are theirs. Mentors can use every goal set by the student as an opportunity for the student to learn new things.

Developing Life Skills

As a mentor, you can work with children to accomplish specific goals, such as improving academics and social skills. You can help students acquire and practice broader life skills, such as decision-making, planning, and positive coping skills.

Many youth have little experience interacting with people unlike themselves, or may feel uncomfortable when exposed to unfamiliar people or situations. Mentors can help by modeling behaviors and language skills that will help them assimilate. When exposing youth to a broader view of the world, mentors should always be respectful. Mentors must never promote their own values as superior. Rather, the mentor’s role is to introduce the youth to behaviors and attitudes needed to interact successfully at school, work, and in society.

Problem Solving

Whether large or small, problems can seem insurmountable for some students. It is important to treat each problem presented as the student perceives it. Dismissing even the seemingly insignificant problem may be interpreted by the student as you dismissing them as a person. The mentor's role when problems arise is to help solve them. Giving advice, while it may seem helpful, often goes unheeded. For many of the same reasons that goals ought to be the brainchild of the student, solutions ought to be, as well. Problems are more likely to be solved when the student helps develop the solution. The difference between giving advice and working together to find a solution is significant. Involved problem solving can tap into the student's ability to reach his or her fullest potential.

Giving Advice Can Be Appropriate

While developing a solution together is the right course of action when tackling a problem, there may be times when giving advice is appropriate. If you are an expert in a particular field, the student may benefit from your knowledge and advice. If the student is "stuck" after going through the problem-solving process, go ahead and give advice on how to proceed.

If you ever have a question on if the advice you gave was accurate, please call LSS. Chances are you are not the first mentor to encounter that situation. If you do not have any immediate advice for your student, it is fine to say let me think about that this week and I will get back to you next time.

Genuine advice can be helpful when students truly want to hear what a mentor has learned from experience. The trick is to recognize when the advice will be accepted. Mentors may find these types of questions useful in clarifying the student's issue.

Ask the student:

- What do you really want in this situation?
- What is important about this outcome to you?
- What are all the ways you can go about getting what you want?
- Who/what can you use as resources to get what you want?
- Who do you know that has already achieved this, and how did they do it?
- Is this possible to achieve?
- Can it be initiated and sustained by you?
- Is this consistent with who you are?
- Considering the effort involved and the possible consequences, is it worth it?

How to Elicit Values, Needs, and Wants

Here are a few more questions that can help the student express how they feel about what may result from the actions they are considering:

- What is important about achieving this particular outcome?
- How will you know that you have achieved it?
- If you get what you want, what will this do for you?