

# **Mentor Training Manual**

**School District of Palm Beach County  
Volunteers in Public Schools**

**2020**

# Mentoring and You

## What is a mentor?

Mentoring is part of the School District of Palm Beach County's volunteer program. A mentor is an older, more experienced individual who seeks to further the development of character and competence in a younger person.

He or she is committed to spending the time and energy necessary to help the student succeed in school. The role of the volunteer is multi-faceted. A mentor is a big brother/big sister role model, and most of all, a friend to the student. More specifically, a mentor should:

- Be an effective listener. In many cases, the mentor/motivator is the only person that the student has identified as someone who will listen to his/her concerns or problems.
- Help the student set short and long-term goals. Convey the idea to the student that if they fail to plan, they plan to fail.
- Help the student identify the positive things in his/her life. For example, what does he/she like about himself/herself or what things can he/she do well. Concentrate on his/her strengths and use them as a framework for helping him/her to overcome weaknesses.
- Convey to the student that there is always "hope" that their situation can be changed or turned around, but to a large extent, that "hope" depends on their efforts and attitude.
- Employ role-playing as a technique for solving a student's problems. Put the shoe on the other foot. For example, place the student in the position of teacher, parent, etc. when dealing with the student's problem.
- Help the student develop personal interests or hobbies outside of school.
- Help the student become more involved in all aspects of school.
- Help the student to learn where to go for help.
- Be sincere and committed. A student can sense when you are not being sincere or do not have his or her interests at heart.
- Develop a level of trust with the student. The trust relationship established between the mentor and the student is of the utmost importance if the relationship is to be successful.
- Serve as a responsible role model for the student, who may not have many other positive role models.
- Be dependable. Always meet with your student at the scheduled times.

## Program Guidelines

### General Guidelines

- As a mentor/motivator, you will be matched with an individual student. Your responsibility is to meet with the student at his or her assigned school, during the school day, for approximately one hour per week for a designated period of time.
- Volunteers are assigned as mentors to individual students, serving as positive role models by demonstrating values of punctuality, dependability, and reliability. The mentor can help the student appreciate the importance of education.
- School-based volunteer coordinators will match you with a student and will provide necessary orientation, which will include taking web-based safety training for volunteers, and guidance regarding the student and school policies.
- All mentoring sessions are to be held on school grounds in a public area, such as the media center, cafeteria, etc., during school hours.
- Each week, have your ID scanned at the front desk through Raptor, sign in and out at the school office, and wear a volunteer name badge.
- Dress appropriately! You are, after all, serving as a role model.
- Observe the following general philosophy of helping:
  - All students are deserving of respect.
  - Students can be responsible for their behavior.
  - Students are lovable and capable; their actions may not be.
  - Children should look forward to your time together, rather than a “treat” that you may be bringing. To encourage good behavior, incentives could include a handwritten note to the teacher or volunteer coordinator about the student’s good work. Let the student read it first! Phone calls, postcards, and framing the student’s artwork can also be effective incentives. As the mentor/motivator, model the behavior you desire.
  - If you want respect, loyalty, and courtesy from your student, you can elicit such behavior more easily and quickly by displaying those characteristics yourself, rather than just lecturing the student about those qualities.
  - A student is impressed and influenced far more by your example than by your words.
  - Imitation is a highly effective and efficient form of learning.
- Volunteer coordinators have indicated that gifts to mentored students may result in jealousy on the part of other students. It also sets a standard that may make other mentors uncomfortable. Please LIMIT gift giving to very special occasions (birthdays, holidays) or as small rewards for a job well done.
- Contact the school-based volunteer coordinator with any questions or concerns regarding the program or the individual student.
- **Please keep your promise!** Your student will be anxiously awaiting your arrival each week.

## **Mentoring Guidelines**

- If you must miss a mentoring session, please call the school or your program coordinator to leave a message for your student. It is important to let your student know that you did not forget about him.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that the student feels privileged and proud to be chosen for this program.
- Give your student an opportunity to share information about things that have happened during the previous week – family events, sporting or news events, accomplishments, fears, concerns, etc.
- Help the student develop a positive self-concept by giving them positive feedback. Let them know that you enjoy their company!
- As a role model, you can help the student improve their attitude toward education and develop an enthusiasm for learning. Liking you and wanting to please you can inspire a student to work harder, although the mentor should emphasize that the student works and learns for themselves and their own self-improvement.
- You will be working one-on-one with your student. From time to time, you may be asked to assist the student with class assignments.
- As early as possible, take action to contact the teacher(s) of your student (in person, by phone, or email). They are busy, but willing to talk with you. Share your interest and concern for the student and determine how you can provide help and support with the teacher's guidance.
- You may learn about a different culture, lifestyle, or age group. Try not to over-identify with your student. He/she realizes that you will probably never know exactly what he/she is feeling or experiencing. There is a big difference between the statement, "I know exactly what you are feeling," and, "I think I have a sense of what you are going through." It is helpful to paraphrase what you think your student has said or is feeling and to give examples of similar situations that you have experienced.
- If your student reaches out to you with problems that are serious and possibly harmful to them or others, please contact your school-based volunteer coordinator. You are not expected to solve serious problems or to be a therapist!
- Do not expect immediate visible results from your student. In most cases, it takes time to establish rapport and see improvement.
- Be yourself!

# Role of a Mentor

## What a Mentor is:

A mentor is a special type of school volunteer, committed to helping a student experience greater success – academically, socially, mentally, and physically. Mentors' roles generally fall into two categories:

- Helping students achieve educational or career goals.
- Enhancing students' self-confidence and self-awareness.

It is common to hear the mentor described as a teacher trainer, positive role model, sponsor, advocate, and of course, friend. The mentor will be matched one-on-one with a student, and will meet for about an hour, once a week, for at least 12 weeks.

These meetings must be held on the school grounds, during the school day, unless the mentor and student are participating in an approved school field trip or activity. Any and all of the following are important activities for mentors in the lives of their students:

## Academic Support

A mentor can help young people in school, help them graduate from high school, help them evaluate educational choices, and then direct them to resources.

## Role Modeling

A mentor can point out, demonstrate, and explain actions and values that offer the best chances for success and happiness. A mentor should help students envision and strive for broader horizons and possibilities than they may see in their present environments.

## Attention and Concern

Many students do not receive enough attention from the adults in their lives. Mentors can fill in these empty spaces with dependable, sincere, and consistent attention and concern.

## Listening

The other adults in the young person's life may not have the time, interest, or ability to listen. Mentors can encourage young people to talk about their fears, dreams, and concerns. **Remember, a mentor may be the ONLY adult in a student's life that really listens.**

A commitment made to a student for a meeting, activity, or any kind of appointment should be a mentor's first priority, barring emergencies. This consistent accountability has several benefits:

- Cements trust between mentor and student.
- Sets a good example for students to follow.
- Creates mutual expectations that can be met.
- A mentor can help with homework or missed classwork and should encourage good attendance.

## **The Role of a Mentor**

### **What a Mentor is Not:**

There is no expectation that mentors will take on the role of parent, professional counselor, or social worker. However, some of those professional traits will be part of the mentor's role: listening, nurturing, and supporting. Through the mentors' sustained caring, interest, and acceptance, students may begin to think of themselves as worthy of this attention.

They may apply this new, stronger sense of self-confidence to other relationships and experiences. Mentoring is not a cure-all for all the problems and deficiencies facing the students and their families. The essence of mentoring is the sustained human relationship.

## **Do's and Don'ts of Helping**

- Do take time to establish a rapport. Academics can come later.
  - Do focus on one area, subject, or problem.
  - Do keep the student's information confidential, as long as they are not planning to hurt themselves or others.
  - Do arrange for a time to speak with the student's teacher or counselor periodically if you have a problem.
  - Do be aware of limitations. You cannot change the student's home situation.
  - Do remember that everyone has strengths. Give positive reinforcement whenever possible.
  - Do remember that everyone needs to feel valued in order to act responsibly.
  - Do listen. It is the supreme act of caring.
  - Be aware that the student's value system may be different from yours (i.e. hairstyle, clothing, and use of profanity.)
  - Do become aware of school policy concerning a student leaving school grounds.
  - Do realize that even with all your efforts, some students may still drop out or not make progress. Responsibility for change lies with the student, not you.
  - Do communicate to the student the advantages of a high school diploma.
  - Don't get discouraged if the student's progress fails to meet your expectations.
  - Don't feel awkward with silence. Use silence to allow the student to think, reflect, and make choices.
  - Don't expect the student to make quick changes in attitude or make dramatic progress in academic achievement.
  - Don't take ownership of the problem. The problem belongs to the student.
  - Don't become over-involved.
- Don't hesitate to ask for help:
- If the student begins to talk about life not being worthwhile, appears depressed (looks sad, lacks energy, grades have dropped, cries easily) or talks openly about suicide.
  - If the student threatens to harm someone.
  - If the student mentions being either physically or sexually abused.
  - If the student begins to "act strange," such as talking without making sense or mentions hearing or seeing things that are not there.

# **Mentoring Programs**

## **The Role of Mentors in Dropout Prevention**

The school dropout rate in this country is well documented. Each year, 1 million young people leave school before graduation. It is a problem that goes beyond the individuals involved, ultimately affecting our schools, communities, and society.

Mentors are in a unique position, whether they are teachers, business people, or community volunteers. They have opportunities to relate to students in ways that parents and schools usually do not. Mentors can be friends rather than an authority figure.

Students benefit from a close adult peer role model who is someone other than a family member. A mentor can also act as an advocate, effectively assuming the role of an intermediary between the school, the student, and the parents when a problem occurs.

Supporting academic achievement is an important mentoring role. Mentors can help students achieve a mastery of basic skills in order to graduate from high school and get a job or assist students in reaching a higher standard of academic achievement. Training in specific subjects, teaching basic skills, helping with homework, and communication skills are an important part of successful mentoring.

Mentors can also acquaint students with values, customs, and resources from people of different occupational and social levels. Goal setting, making personal decisions, and resolving family problems are other ways in which mentors can assist students. Offering moral support and a sense of caring can make a difference in a student's attitude and progress in school.

Finally, the mentor is a role model. Mentors are people who are successful and motivated. They are in a position to pass on these qualities to students by spending time with them. Mentors make it possible for students to identify with them and imitate their behaviors, at a critical stage in the student's growth and development.



## **Program Guidelines**

A student may be considered “at risk” for a variety of reasons:

- Failing grades.
- Poor attendance.
- Negative behavior.
- Extreme shyness.
- Absence of positive role models.

While not all students in these situations are at risk of becoming dropouts, many may need the extra attention a mentor can provide, in order to achieve their best. Establishing a positive attitude toward education in the formative stages may be a preventative measure that will decrease dropout rates in later years.

### **First Meeting**

At the first meeting with your student, introduce yourself and let them know how to address you. Learn the student’s name, correct pronunciation and spelling. Let the student know that you will be coming every week and what day and time to expect you. Determine how you will notify the student if you are unable to come. Let your student know that you expect to be notified if he/she will not be in school on your scheduled day.

The first meeting can be spent touring the school with your student as your guide. Ask your student to show you the media center, cafeteria, athletic field, etc. The first two or three meetings should be spent primarily establishing a friendly relationship and developing trust.

### **Activities**

Each week, spend 10 minutes or so talking about the past week and developing your relationship. Find out how things are going with your student. Allow 15 or 20 minutes for assisting with assignments or helping with a certain subject (going over spelling words, for example).

During your visits, the coordinator should let you know the areas in which your student needs help. If not, ask the coordinator for this information. Let the student tell you as well. Set a small, achievable goal, such as preparing a book report, coming to school each day that week, or behaving well all day. Let the student set the goal and be responsible for the achievement. Then spend the remaining time talking, playing games, reading stories, having fun together!

When working with younger children, it’s important to let them know when your time together is coming to a close. Start counting down by letting them know, “We have 10 more minutes together so let’s...,” and, “We have five more minutes so let’s pack up and head back to class.” Be friendly, but firm when it’s time to go.

## **Self-Esteem in Students**

A young person learns who he is from how people react to him. If he is told he is bad, irresponsible, stupid, or mean, he will believe that's what is expected of him. The student will expect little from himself. However, if the student is encouraged, and the good things he does are recognized, he will be able to feel that he is lovable and worthwhile.

When an adult's treatment of the student is positive, the student's self-respect and confidence can grow. The student then develops a base of personal pride, which is crucial to healthy intellectual, emotional, and social development.

Poor self-esteem impedes success in learning, the ability to develop sound human relationships, and limits other areas of the student's life. Self-esteem is manifested in the way people act. The degree of self-esteem that the student possesses can be observed in *what* he does and *how* he does it. Self-esteem and a sense of personal satisfaction can be enhanced when:

- The student has successfully expressed his self-concept through performance (for example, a student perceives himself as a good athlete and hits a home run to win the game).
- His self-concept is confirmed by others (for example, recognition of a painting done well by a student who believes he is skilled at drawing).

### **Behavior Characteristics of High and Low Self-Esteem in Students**

#### **High Self-Esteem**

- Takes pride in their accomplishments.
- Acts independently.
- Assumes responsibility easily.
- Approaches new challenges enthusiastically.
- Believes in their capabilities.
- Displays a broad range of emotions.
- Tolerates frustration well.
- Displays a sense of humor.

#### **Low Self-Esteem**

- Avoids anxiety-provoking situations.
- Demeans their abilities and strengths.
- Thinks others don't value him.
- Blames others for their weaknesses.
- Easily influenced by others.
- Does not tolerate frustration well.
- Overwhelmed with feelings of powerlessness.
- Displays a narrow range of emotions and feelings.

It is important to note that self-esteem has periods of ebbs and flows. Each student may exhibit these characteristics at one time or another. It is the pattern of behavior that needs to be observed, as opposed to simply focusing on one solitary characteristic.

## **Learning to Attend**

How can you communicate to a child that you care for him and are interested in him as a person? One of the first skills we must learn is that of ATTENDING. Attending is part of listening. It communicates to the child: "I'm here with you. I want to be here. I'm ready to share your world."

The skills of attending are not difficult to learn. In fact, we are probably all aware of their importance. Unfortunately, they are easy to forget or to ignore when we're caught up in the whirlwind of everyday living. The basic ATTENDING skills are:

1. Be at the child's eye level.
2. Face the child, squarely.
3. Maintain eye contact with the child.
4. Assume a relaxed position.
5. Tune in to the child's non-verbal messages.

### **BE ON THE CHILD'S LEVEL**

Small children in particular, spend most of their day looking up at adults. Nothing impedes effective communication more than the psychological distance that is created when a child is constantly craning his neck to see an adult's face. It gives an impression of adult power or authority over the child and makes him feel that he has a "boss" rather than a "friend".

The solution is simple. Don't stand when you are trying to communicate with a child. Sit on a chair or kneel beside the child. This simple act of adjusting yourself to accommodate the child's eye level sends a warm message. "I want to be with you on your level. I want to be your friend, not your boss."

### **FACE THE CHILD, SQUARELY**

The direction we face when we talk and listen to others communicates a great deal about our degree of interest in the conversation. Have you ever noticed two people sitting on a park bench or at a lunchroom counter, talking to each other but facing forward? It is safe to assume that they are not engaged in an intimate discussion.

Likewise, people who are totally involved with each other invariably position themselves close together with continuous eye contact. When you want to communicate to a child that you are interested in him as a person, he will be more likely to receive your message if you face him squarely, leaning slightly forward.

### **MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT WITH THE CHILD**

We all feel more comfortable talking with people who return our eye contact. Likewise, when we attempt to talk with someone who constantly stares past us, keeps his eyes glued to the floor, or shifts his gaze around the room, we feel uncomfortable, disconcerted, and are very likely to conclude that the person is not interested in what we are saying. In school, children have limited opportunities to have eye contact focused on them as individuals.

Even though a teacher may be attempting to help a particular child, her attention is frequently necessarily focused on the class as a whole. Therefore, eye contact is an especially effective nonverbal means of showing that your attention is focused on a child exclusively.

## ASSUME A RELAXED POSITION

Children are adept at “reading” nonverbal messages and are especially quick to pick up double messages. For example, if we smile at a young child yet cross our arms, tap our feet, or stare, we are sending conflicting “messages” or “cues” to the child, and the child will doubt the usual meaning of a smile. When focusing on a child, we can be most helpful if we are open and relaxed ourselves. This communicates to the child the message that you are content right now and can listen to their concerns.”

## TUNE IN TO THE CHILD’S NONVERBAL MESSAGES

Young children are not able to tell us in words how they feel or what they are thinking, but if we become accustomed to looking for unspoken expressions or actions, we will soon be able to “tune in” to a child and respond appropriately. These are a few of the signals a child may use to tell us how they are feeling:

- |                     |                          |                 |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| ▪ Laughing          | ▪ Stamping foot          | ▪ Folding arms  |
| ▪ Smiling           | ▪ Tapping finger on desk | ▪ Looking away  |
| ▪ Frowning          | ▪ Curling up in a ball   | ▪ Hunching back |
| ▪ Raising eyebrows  | ▪ Rolling eyes           | ▪ Swinging foot |
| ▪ Hands over ears   | ▪ Staring at floor       | ▪ Yawning       |
| ▪ Head on desk      | ▪ Twiddling thumbs       | ▪ Screaming     |
| ▪ Gazing out window | ▪ Crying                 |                 |

## Program Guidelines

### CLOSURE

Closure can be difficult for both the volunteer and the student. The student should be told at the beginning that the match is for a designated time (several weeks, a semester, a school year).

- At the first meeting, let the student know how long you intend to meet with them.
- Closure actually happens each time you meet with the student. At the end of a meeting, let your student know that you will be returning, and give them some positive feedback about that day or week. Suggest to the student that they keep a diary of comments and feedback in a notebook.
- Discuss the achievements made, no matter how small, during the time together each week.
- You might give your student a calendar so that he can keep a record of your visits together and reinforce the time span involved.
- Discuss any holidays, class conflicts, out of town trips, or vacation breaks that will conflict with your scheduled visits.
- Have someone take a picture of the two of you together to share with your student as a reminder of your time together.
- ***Don’t just leave!*** At-risk students don’t need to feel abandoned or rejected. They will understand schedule changes, moving away, and so forth, better than your unexplained disappearance. Remind the student a week or two before you leave about the final parting time.
- It’s never easy to say goodbye, but the pain of letting go is not as difficult if the date of the final meeting is planned and discussed in advance. Perhaps a special activity can be arranged.

## **Building Good Relationships**

Good social relationships build a strong sense of personal worth and self-confidence within a child. Children who have no confidence in themselves create barriers that make learning difficult. You should use every opportunity to build a strong sense of personal worth in each child. Helping the child to create a better self-image may be as valuable as any skills you can teach, because this makes all of the child's schoolwork easier and more successful.

The school volunteer who builds a good relationship with a child is setting an example from which the child can build good relationships with others. This is your first and most important step toward helping a child to help himself.

A good relationship can grow only in an environment of trust and acceptance. It will not be accomplished in one or two meetings. Many of the children you will work with have reason to distrust adults. It may be a while before they are able to accept a stranger's unselfish motivation.

Let the child know that he/she is important to you, that you enjoy being there. If you come one week but not the next, your student may feel that you didn't come because you really don't care about him/her. If for some reason you must leave the program, explain why you are not able to continue during your last session with the child. If your absence is going to be temporary, be sure the child knows you are coming back.

As you get acquainted, direct friendly questions toward the child's interests. Meet the child on his level. Think of your own experiences at that age and share them with the child. Avoid questioning a child about his father or mother or their jobs. If the child tells you about their home life, accept what he has said without comment.

When you have learned a child's interests, talk about them. Encourage the child to express his ideas. Do not try to impose your own tastes, attitudes, or values on the child. Each child will have some special qualities that you will admire. Perhaps you will learn from the child.

## **How to Talk to a Teenager Who Doesn't Want to Talk to You**

Adolescence is a time of emotional and physical upheaval. Sometimes communication between adults and adolescents lean towards teens being reprimanded or instructed. To establish an atmosphere of trust, understanding, and flexibility, try this:

- Acknowledge and legitimize a teenager's feelings.
- Try not to take adolescent mood swings and silences personally.
- As much as you are tempted, don't pump a teenager for information.
- Resist the temptation to control. Instead, EMPOWER!
- Try not to lecture or criticize.
- Pay attention and listen when they talk.
- Encourage teens to develop relationships with adults who love them and care about their growth.
- Be patient.
- When it's appropriate, negotiate with a teenager to let them know that you value their opinion and insight.
- Keep a good sense of humor at all times!

## **Strength-Based Approach That Fosters Resilience**

When we view and treat young people and their families as human beings who have strengths and goals as well as needs, and if we look at their communities as more than a nest of problems, then we are able to design and implement interventions that work.

One of the interventions that work is a mentor. Mentors focus on developing competence and enabling self-fulfillment. Mentors focus on strengths, recognize progress, and reward effort.

Every community is filled with young people who have rebounded or are in the process of doing so, despite risks, trauma, and mistakes. This rebounding or resilience is based on three main assumptions:

- People bounce back when the focus is on finding and building on their strengths, rather than on labels and perceptions about what is wrong with them.
- Every person has the seeds of resilience, talent, capabilities, strengths, and positive attributes within them.
- Relationships build resilient attitudes, more than programs or structures.

This is where mentors come in, helping to build resilient attitudes. Resilient and successful kids share four resiliency factors:

- Social competency.
- Communication/negotiation skills.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Sense of purpose, sense of the future, and a sense of themselves.

To gain these factors, students need a caring adult in their lives, an adult who has had success in their relationships, education, and career. You may be the person to help an at-risk child become a successful adult.

## **Guidelines for Goal Setting**

One of the most important tasks of the Mentor is to assist the student in setting short and long-term individual goals. There are several important factors to consider before beginning the task of setting goals with your student:

1. Time must be spent with your student in establishing a relationship of trust and confidentiality before goal setting should be attempted.
2. Involve your student in the setting of goals.
3. A short-term goal, which can be immediately achievable by your student, is a good starting point. For example, a short-term achievable goal may be to complete all math homework assignments for the next week.
4. Goals must be specific and measurable. For example, "Joe will complete and turn in all math assignments for the next week."
5. To assure that an attempt will be made by your student to meet the goal, a commitment should be carried out between the Mentor and the student. For example, a written agreement or handshake may serve as a commitment.
6. If your student fails to achieve his goal, the following points should be examined:
  - The goal may have been too difficult for the student to achieve.
  - The goal may have been developed without active involvement and commitment of the student.
  - The student may be fearful of achieving a self-enhancing goal. Often, students believe themselves to be losers and become accustomed to making poor choices, which reinforce their negative self-image. The volunteer may need to speak to the student about his fears of being successful and making self-enhancing decisions.

A long-term goal may need to be articulated before a short-term goal can be explored with a student. A student may not see the need to work toward a short-term goal unless the student sees the relationship of the short-term goal to the long-term goal. For example, graduating from high school may be the motivating factor to help a student work toward short-term goals.