

# FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN IN MENTORING PROGRAMS: GUIDELINES AND GROUND RULES

Following are some basic guidelines and ground rules for helping to make the mentoring relationship a success. They are followed by common questions parents may have about both their role and that of the mentor. Neither are intended to replace or supersede the rules developed by your mentoring program. If you have questions at any time, please contact your program coordinator.

## GUIDELINES AND GROUND RULES

- Please do not ask your child's mentor to provide transportation, buy presents, be the disciplinarian, or babysit for your family. The mentor's role is to be a companion to the mentee.
- Please don't discuss your child with the mentor in the presence of your child. If you think there is something the mentor should know, call him/her when your child is away.
- Try to let the mentor know, once in a while, that his/her efforts are appreciated, and please help your child be considerate of the mentor (e.g., remembering his/her birthday, making occasional phone calls).
- Remember, the relationship that exists is between your child and the mentor. Please don't ask that you or siblings be included on outings, and try to avoid excessive quizzing about their visits, so that your child can enjoy having his/her special friend. However, if you feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the match, or if something about the relationship concerns you (i.e., your child is acting secretive or unusual in regard to the match), contact your caseworker immediately.
- The agency strictly discourages overnight stays for the first three months of the match. Exceptions to this include agency-sponsored activities, such as campouts and raft trips. These activities are supervised by staff members of the agency.
- Forgive minor mistakes in judgment. The mentor is neither a trained professional nor perfect. You will probably disagree with him/her sometimes.
- Please don't deprive your child of the weekly visit with his/her mentor as a means of discipline.
- The mentor will tell you when he/she plans to pick up and return your child. Please make a point of being home at these times and call the mentor if your plans change.
- Mentors are encouraged to plan activities that are free or low cost, but we ask that you contribute what you can to the cost of your child's visit with his/her mentor.
- Scheduling the times for the weekly visit can sometimes be difficult, so please be flexible.
- The mentoring relationship needs time to develop—at least three months—so don't judge it too quickly; give it time.
- Notify the agency when you have a change of phone number or address.

- Please keep in mind that all information is confidential and should be shared only with your caseworker.
- The success or failure of a match depends on the cooperation of all the individuals concerned. It is important to discuss your child's match with your caseworker periodically to prevent problems and to keep the caseworker updated. We want your child to have fun and to grow positively from the match.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **What should I do if my child cannot attend a meeting with the mentor?**

To encourage responsibility in your child, have him/her call the mentor when a meeting must be rescheduled. If your child is very ill, you may want to call yourself. Be sure you have the phone numbers to reach the mentor at home and at work.

### **What if family plans conflict with a meeting?**

Time with the mentor is not intended to displace time with the family. You should continue your normal family plans, including get-togethers, special trips and vacations. As much as possible, the mentor and your child should plan their time together around your normal schedule. It may be helpful to let the mentor and your child know about planned family events. The mentor and your child should let you know when they are planning special activities. Good advance communication will help avoid conflicts.

### **Can I or other family members go with my child and the mentor?**

A mentoring relationship is special, in part, because it is a one-to-one relationship. Even teens who feel very close to their parents sometimes need to talk with friends outside the family. The mentor is an adult friend with whom your child can talk about things that concern him/her.

The mentor and your child will inform you about their plans each week. If at any time you are uncomfortable with their plans, please let them know. Mentors will be sensitive to parent concerns and will try to find an arrangement that is acceptable to you.

### **How can I be sure that the mentor will support my rules and regulations?**

Talk with the mentor about rules or regulations that you expect to arise in his/her relationship with your child. If you have strict rules about bedtimes, places the youth may not go or foods he/she may not eat, please discuss these with the mentor. By making this information known at the beginning, you can help avoid misunderstandings later.

### **What if the mentor says things with which I do not agree?**

No matter how carefully we match mentors and mentees, you may find some areas where your beliefs or ideas differ from your mentor's. If these are important to you, let the mentor know. You can request that the mentor *not* question your most important beliefs or values when with your child.

### **Who will pay for the activities for the mentor and youth?**

Mentors always pay their own expenses but are not responsible for the child or the family. If the planned activities involve fees, you or your child will be asked to pay for the youth's share. You need not pay for activities you feel are too expensive. The most important part of the mentoring program is the relationship between the mentor and the youth, not a lot of costly activities.

However, because activities help build competence, we hope all mentor/youth pairs can do special things occasionally.

The youth should not expect the mentor to buy things for him/her. As with any friend, gifts should be appreciated when and if they are given, not expected on a regular basis.

**If my child has misbehaved, should I allow him/her to see the mentor?**

The mentor's weekly visit should *not* be used to discipline your child. Time with the mentor is a pleasure but it is also a time of learning and growth. Punishing your child by denying time with the mentor puts you in opposition to the mentor instead of emphasizing your mutual concern to build your child's competence. Even if your child is grounded, the mentor should be allowed to see him/her.

**How often should I be in contact with the mentor, and how much should I say about family problems/concerns?**

Get to know the mentor well enough to feel comfortable with him/her being with your child. Before each meeting, discuss plans and time for returning home. Try talking directly with the mentor and your child in front of your child. If there is something the mentor should know, call when your child is not around.

**What if there are concerns or questions I don't want to discuss with the mentor?**

Please feel free to call the program coordinator. He/she is here to help make the program work for mentees, mentors, and parents. He/she will call you several times during the year to see how things are going. But don't wait for him/her to call; we want to know about anything that concerns you.

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Courtesy of "For Parents with Children in Mentoring Programs, Guidelines, Ground Rules, and Answers to Questions,"  
The Resource Center, August 1996.