

# How to be a good Mentor

## 1. Honor Your Commitment -- *This is extremely important!*

Children can overcome a thoughtless comment, a misunderstood deed, or an occasional disappointment. They may never overcome abandonment. A mentor needs to be there for the child on a regular basis over a sustained period of time, usually nine months to a year.

## 2. Be Positive! *A mentor should:*

- + Be caring, positive, encouraging, and supportive.
- + Be patient, dependable, honest, and sincere.
- + Be a responsible individual and citizen. Expect the same from the child.
- + Have realistic expectations and acknowledge accomplishments, big and small.
- + Be consistent, but flexible. Expect changes in plans.
- + Be an active listener. Respond in language the child can understand.

## 3. Avoid Negatives

Children need adults to listen without interruption and accept them as individuals with dignity and worth; especially if they have little self-esteem. Teasing, sarcasm, telling a child what he/she should do, has a negative impact on a relationship. It is important that mentors are not critical, judgmental, negative, or prying about any aspect of the child's life. It's all they have at the moment.

Sharing your own problems with a child or youth is confusing and distressing, but it is a good idea to mention if you are tired or irritable so that the child does not think you are upset with her or him. Use the time together to enjoy the relationship and accomplish something positive.

## 4. Appreciate What's Special About Children and Youth

- + They respect adults as long as they are given respect in return.
- + They might get angry with you one day, and forget about it the next (don't take it personally).
- + They're very bright, and can be experts at manipulating your words (so be honest and sincere).
- + They like to "crack" on each other (it's a game).
- + They can be highly perceptive, so be straightforward with them.
- + They can have a lot of energy and could use help channeling it.
- + They are usually loyal to family and friends.
- + They may have difficulty thinking about the future.

## 5. Mentoring Do's and Don't's

### *Do:*

- + Encourage, praise, and compliment -- even the smallest of accomplishments.
- + Be concrete in explanations.
- + Be straight, honest and sincere with them (they pick up on falseness and shallowness).
- + Ask their opinions and have them take part in decision-making.
- + Be enthusiastic -- it's contagious.
- + Be fair -- they notice if things aren't equal.

### *Don't:*

- Don't be lenient in order to be liked- it won't earn their respect; they need consistency and structure.
- Don't refer to youth that reside in public housing as being from "the projects."
- Don't tell them what to do (instead, you should suggest, invite, encourage. The choice is theirs).
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Don't pry into the child's life. If a child pries into your affairs, it is OK to say that some things in your life are private just as they are in the child's life.

## 6. Have Fun!

Mentors are people who enjoy interacting with children and who derive pleasure from helping children become self-sufficient and positive about growing up. Some of the best sharing may occur during a game or checkers or while walking in a park. It's through activities that children will begin to trust a mentor; but it takes time. Having fun together and learning from each other is the foundation for a good relationship.