



Mentor Roles and Tasks

Here are some games to play that present a mentor's roles and responsibilities (as well as what they are not responsible for). This is one of the most important sections in the training, so the more fun it is, the more memorable it will be.

What Is and What Is Not a Mentor?

Real-Life Mentors

For people to really understand what a mentor is, it helps to have them think about someone who has been a mentor for them in their own life. This activity is a good lead-in to the "what is a mentor" piece of the training.

- Ask if anyone has had a mentor before. (Often, no one will answer "yes" because they think mentors have to be people you meet through mentoring programs.)
- Explain that a mentor could be anyone older in their who has offered advice, guidance, or a listening ear (such as a teacher, sibling or neighbor).
- Ask again who has had a mentor (you will find more positive responses this time). Ask these people to share with the group who their mentor was and what qualities made him or her a good mentor.

Mentor Family Feud

Beforehand: Prepare a flip chart with two columns as follows (or use whatever words you think best describe a mentor's role):

A Mentor Is:
Friend
Guide
Listener
Confidant
Resource Broker

A Mentor Isn't:
Parent/Guardian
Social Worker
ATM
Babysitter
Disciplinarian

Cover up the answers with slips of paper so that you can reveal them as people guess them correctly. Split the audience into two teams. Pick one team to go first. They must pick a column (what a mentor is, or what a mentor isn't) and try to guess one of the answers. You can tell them that these are all nouns and were generated by conducting a large survey. These responses are the top five recorded answers from the survey.

Qualities of a Good Mentor

While you are discussing what a mentor is, you may want to have the group think about what the qualities of a good mentor are. Have them brainstorm a list of qualities that their own mentors have had, the kind of mentor they want to be, or the kind of mentor they would like to have themselves. This brainstorming exercise can help clarify what a mentor is and can give the volunteers a list of qualities to aim for.

Courtesy of Mass Mentoring Partnership, Mentoring 101 Train the Trainer Curriculum.

A Mentor Is . . .

- A trusted guide or friend
Young people today do not get much of an opportunity to be friends with adults, especially adults who are going to listen to them.
- A caring, responsible adult
He or she provides access to people, places, and things outside the mentee's routine environment.
- A positive role model
A mentor may be a positive role model. A role model is someone the youth aspires to be like, whereas a mentor is someone who offers to help the youth be whoever he or she wants to be. Today, youth have many role models; however, they are not necessarily positive role models.

Key Qualities of a Good Mentor

- Good listener;
- Persistent;
- Committed; and
- Patient.

A Mentor Is Not . . .

Mentors must understand that they cannot be all things to their mentees. Quite often when mentors run into problems in their relationships, it is because the mentor, the mentee or the parent/legal guardian did not understand the proper role of a mentor.

The mentor may have taken on one of the following inappropriate roles:

A parent/legal guardian

The role of a parent or legal guardian (governed by law) is to provide food, shelter and clothing. It is not the mentor's role to fulfill these responsibilities. If the mentor believes his or her mentee is not receiving adequate support, he or she should contact the mentor program coordinator rather than trying to meet the needs of his or her mentee.

A social worker

A social worker is a licensed professional with the necessary skills and training to assist in family issues. If a mentor believes there is something wrong in the mentee's home life, the mentor should share this concern with the mentor program coordinator and not assume the role of a social worker and attempt to solve the problem.

A psychologist

A mentor is not a formal counselor or therapist. A psychologist or psychiatrist is a licensed professional.

It is more appropriate for a mentor to act as a resource broker and show the mentee how to access the services and resources he or she needs than to provide those services.

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The Four Primary Tasks of a Mentor

Establish a positive, personal relationship with mentee:

- Establish mutual trust and respect;
- Maintain regular interaction and consistent support;
- Make your meetings enjoyable.

Help mentee to develop or begin to develop life skills:

- Work with your mentee to accomplish specific program goals (e.g., drop-out prevention, general career awareness);
- Instill the framework for developing broader life-management skills, (e.g., decision-making skills, goal-setting skills, conflict resolution, money management).

Assist mentee in obtaining additional resources:

- Provide awareness of community, educational and economic resources available to youth and their families, and how to access these resources. Act as a resource broker as opposed to a resource provider;
- Act as a guide and/or advocate, coach and/or model;
- View the role of a mentor as a friend rather than a counselor or case manager.

Increase mentee's ability to interact with people/groups/things from various backgrounds (cultural, racial, socioeconomic, etc.):

- Respect and explore differences among people/groups from various backgrounds. Do not promote values and beliefs of one group as superior to those of another; and
- Introduce mentee to different environments, such as workplace vs. school setting; discuss differences in behavior, attitude, and style of dress.

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