

Mentor's Role

A mentor is a caring adult who devotes time to a young person. Although mentors can fill any number of different roles, all mentors have the same goal in common: to help young people achieve their potential and discover their strengths. Mentors should understand they are not meant to replace a parent, guardian or teacher. A mentor is not a disciplinarian or decision maker for a child. Instead, a mentor echoes the positive values and cultural heritage parents and guardians are teaching. A mentor is part of a team of caring adults.

By exposing a young person to new experiences, a mentor encourages positive choices, promotes high self-esteem, supports academic achievement, and introduces the young person to new ideas.

When asked, young people invariably say that they want a mentor to help in three key areas:

Advice

Access

Advocacy

Advice: As a mentor, you bring a wide range of life experiences to the relationship. Because of this, you can be a great source of advice and information. From time to time, your mentee may need a second opinion, or a different perspective that you can provide. Help your mentee gain a new perspective by sharing your experiences. What did you do in a similar situation? How did it work out? Be willing to share, but check to make sure your mentee is interested first!

Remember that you and your mentee are different people. Your mentee will have his/her own values, which may be very different from yours and may lead them to very different ideas about what to do. Your role is to offer insight, advice and suggestions. It is your mentee's role to evaluate the options, consider what you have said, and then make the best decision.

Access: One of the most valuable things you can do for your mentee is to help open doors. That's what access is all about—helping your mentee find and get involved in new situations. You can help your mentee find people, opportunities and information that he/she might not have found on his/her own. You can take your mentee to new places, introduce them to new people and help him/her learn about resources that will help reach his/her goals. Improved access to resources is one of the most valuable benefits you can give to your mentee!

Advocacy: Have you ever had someone stand up for you when you needed it? Or speak on your behalf? That's what advocacy is all about. If your mentee needs a job reference or a college recommendation, you can be a big help!

But remember, in order to be an effective advocate, you have to really get to know your mentee. You will have to create opportunities to get to know your mentee as a person. The more you learn about your mentee, the stronger an advocate you can be!