

# **Tips for Building A Mentoring Relationship**

*Courtesy of California Governor's Mentoring Partnership and Los Angeles Youth Mentoring Connection.*

## **Be there.**

When you show up for every meeting with your mentee and strive to make things work out you send your mentee a strong message that you care and that he or she is worth caring about.

## **Be a friend, not an all-knowing authority.**

Be the adult in your mentee's life who is just there without having to fix him or her. Hanging out and talking is surprisingly helpful to a young person's healthy development. Young people learn more conversing with adults than they do just listening to them. In the words of a mentee:

"My parents lecture me all the time. Why would I want my mentor to be the same way? I have the best mentor in the program, but sometimes he tries too hard to be a mentor instead of just being himself. What I mean is that he thinks he always has to share some wisdom or advice, when sometimes I would rather just kick it and joke around."

Of course, when your mentee comes to you for help or advice, it is appropriate to help them develop solutions. It's also okay to check in with them if you suspect that they are struggling with something. They just don't want non-stop advice. So, take the pressure off of yourself and just enjoy your mentee's company.

## **Be a role model.**

The best that you can do is to lead by example. By becoming a mentor, you've already modeled the most important thing a human being can do: caring about another. Here are some other ways you can be a positive role model for your mentee:

- Keep your word: Call when you say you will. Do what you say you will. Be there when you say you will;
- Return phone calls and e-mails promptly;
- Have a positive outlook;
- If your program has group sessions, participate fully;
- If you enter a competitive activity with your mentee, keep it in perspective and by all means do not cheat (or even fudge a little) to help your mentee win, get a better place in line at an event, etc.; and
- Let your mentee see you going out of your way to help others.

## **Help your mentee have a say in your activities.**

Some mentees will have a lot of suggestions about what you can do together, but most will need a little guidance on your part. If your mentee doesn't have any preferences, start by giving them a range of choices. "Here are some things we can do. Which ones sound good to you?"

## **Be ready to help out.**

When your mentee lets you know that he or she is struggling with a problem, you can help out by following these tips:

- Be there for your mentee and make it clear that you want to help;
- Be a friend, not an all-knowing authority: Don't fix a problem. Ask questions and help your mentee figure out how to come up with answers;
- Model ways to solve problems. You can also be a role model by describing how you overcame a similar problem in your life. Metaphor is a great teacher;
- Give your mentee a say: Once he or she comes up with a solution, don't try to come up with a better one, but help explore all the possibilities and offer support; and
- Be ready to help out by checking back and seeing how things worked out.