

Relationships and Boundaries

It's important to remember that you're not only a tutor, but a mentor as well. It's likely that you will develop close relationships with the students you tutor. While it's great if you and your tutee(s) become close, it's also important to be aware that there are boundaries that should not be crossed. Below are some guidelines that might be helpful.

- ***Understand that your tutee will be reluctant to trust you.***

Be patient-it may take awhile to build trust between you and your tutee. Young people don't get enough of an opportunity to be friends with adults, especially adults who listen to them.

- ***Offer reassurance and support.***

Remind your tutee that you're available to talk. Don't be afraid to tell your student that you believe in him or her. Too many young people rarely hear those words.

- ***Be a good listener.***

It is extremely important for a mentor to be a good listener; young people often think that no one listens to them.

- ***Suggest ways to solve problems.***

Try to listen carefully and offer possible solutions without passing judgment. Practical suggestions rather than preaching are usually most helpful. Whenever possible, try to think together of ways to solve a problem rather than lecturing your tutees about what you think they should do.

- ***Identify your tutee's interests and take them seriously.***

Ask your tutees with what they need help and give them choices whenever possible.

- ***Do not force your tutee to talk about personal issues.***

Delving into your tutee's personal or family life, particularly early in the relationship, is usually not productive. It's unwise to ask youth to discuss information they may be ashamed of, such as a criminal record or an abusive family member. If your tutee resists sharing information, don't push. Silence does not necessarily mean rejection. It's important not to measure a relationship's success by the extent of the youth's disclosure. On the other hand, you may be surprised by how much your tutee shares with you early on without any prompting or inquiry from you.

- ***Talk to a professional if you need to.***

If you believe that something is wrong in your tutee's home life, share your concern with the student's teacher, school counselor, or social worker.

- ***Have realistic expectations.***

Many mentors get discouraged when they feel their tutees aren't "turning their lives around" or making huge improvements. Although you will certainly have an impact on your tutee, it's unlikely that your tutee will be completely transformed by this relationship. Gains may be small (e.g., expressing appreciation, missing fewer days of school, increased motivation to do homework), but they are nonetheless signs of progress. Adjusting your expectations and understanding that your tutee may not always express gratitude directly will prevent mentor "burnout" and frustration.

- ***Try to relate to your tutee's personal experiences.***

Although you may not have faced the same problems as your tutee, try to remember some of the difficulties you had growing up.