

Boundaries

The definition of a boundary is a border or limit. It is very important for mentors to think in advance about setting appropriate boundaries with their mentees. When working with young people, there are *do's* and *don'ts* which are prescribed by the nature of the relationship, the

1. Physical

Be clear with your mentee about what type of physical contact is appropriate. Decide what type of physical contact, if any, you and your mentee will have. For example, is it okay for your mentee to give you a hug at the end of your meetings? If you have a young mentee, will you hold hands when you cross the street?

2. Emotional

Deciding what and how much personal information to share with your mentee can be challenging. Your mentee may bring up sensitive issues such as sexual activity or drug use. Listen without judging, and remember to keep such conversations confidential unless the mentee or someone else may be harmed. How much information you share about yourself will depend upon the age of your mentee and the policies of your mentoring program. *However, do not share if a certain topic makes you uncomfortable or you are not sure whether you should.*

3. Social

Your program most likely has specified guidelines about the meeting schedule you and your mentee will follow. You might meet once a week for an hour. But what if your mentee would like to see you more often? What if s/he would like to talk on the phone every day? Let your mentee know how often and what type of contact is appropriate.

Here are five things you can consider as you make decisions about what is or is not acceptable in your mentoring relationship:

1. Is it safe? Is it legal? Is there potential for harm (physical, social or emotional)?
2. Is it within the rules and guidelines established by your mentoring program?
3. Have your mentee's parents/guardians told you what they expect and will accept, and it is within those guidelines?
4. Will it contribute to the positive and healthy development of your mentee?
5. Does it fit your comfort level and expectations for your mentoring relationships?

If the answers to any of the five is no, this may be a sign of a potential boundary conflict. If you have any concerns about an activity or decision, follow up with your program coordinator, your mentee's parents/guardians, or (depending on the age of the mentee) your mentee to clarify any uncertain areas.

Source: Search Institute for Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota. Copyright 2007 by Search Institute, Minneapolis Minnesota www.search-institute.org All rights reserved.

Ways to Maximize the Relationship

- Give mentees your full attention
- Help mentees to find life direction, never push them
- Give insights about keeping on task and setting goals and priorities
- Educate about life and your own career
- Use your personal experiences to help mentees avoid misstates and learn from good decisions
- Be available as a resource and a sounding board
- When necessary, point out areas that need improvement, always focusing on the mentee's behaviors, never his/her character
- No matter how painful the mentee's experience, continue to encourage them to learn and improve
- Give specific advice on what was done well or could be corrected, what was achieved and the benefits or various actions
- Show that you care about mentee's progress in school and career planning, as well as his/her personal development
- Continue to be successful yourself, but also foster success in others
- Be respectful to mentees, and model respectful behavior in your organization and in the community