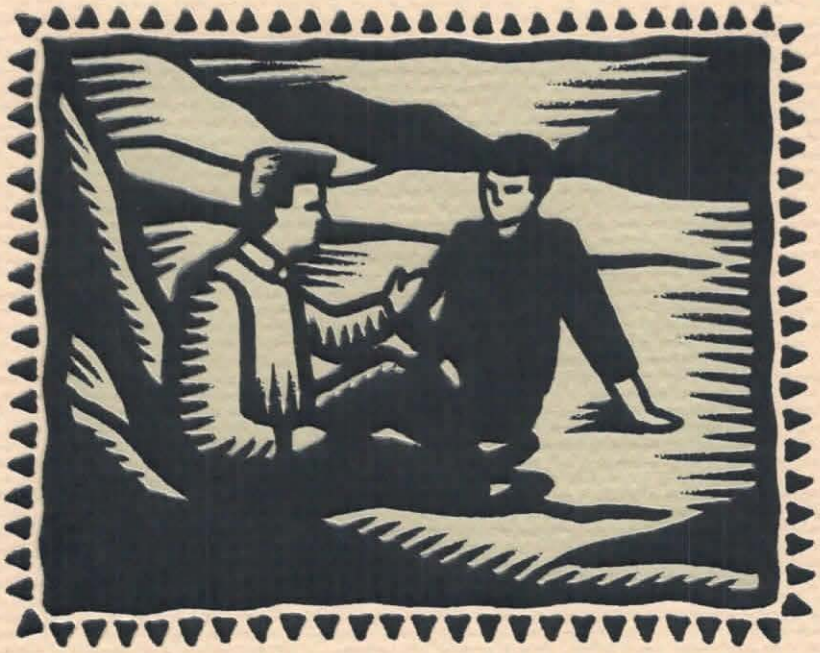
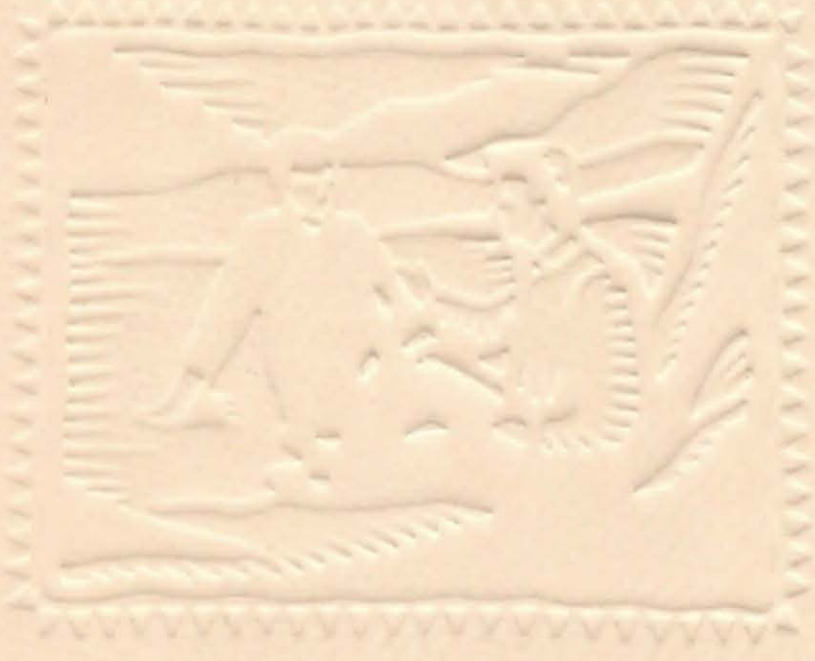
GUIDEBOOK FOR

MILESTONES IN MENTORING



A TRAINING PROGRAM SERIES FOR VOLUNTEER MENTORS

ONE PLUS ONE BUDDY SYSTEM



INTRODUCTION

As we move forward in the 1990's, a strategy for helping young people which is growing in popularity and receiving increasing attention is mentoring. Recent studies have shown that one of the most effective ways of making a positive difference in the life of a young person is through a mentoring relationship with a caring, responsible adult. As we see increasing numbers of unprepared young people entering the workforce only to fail and enter the ranks of the unemployed or underemployed, the need for additional and alternative means of preparing young people to become successful, productive members of our society becomes painfully clear. Mentoring is one of those creative means of supporting and preparing our youth.

As the need for mentoring becomes more apparent, so too does the need for effective training material. The *Milestones in Mentoring* series, which includes a videotape and guidebook, is not intended to be a comprehensive training curriculum. Instead, *Milestones in Mentoring* focuses on some of the key issues which are common to most mentoring programs.

The series is comprised of three distinct units. Each unit focuses on a different topic and can be used independently of the others. The first unit is entitled "Dealing with Diversity" and addresses the need for mentors to know how to work with young people who come from different backgrounds and lifestyles. The second unit, "Making It Work," is a mentoring workshop. It gives concrete suggestions on how to deal with some of the most common issues which arise while cultivating a healthy mentoring relationship. The third unit focuses on some of the serious family problems which mentors may encounter in their work. It is entitled "Troubled Families."

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Milestones in Mentoring was developed to help all types of mentoring programs deliver quality training to their volunteers. Mentor programs typically focus on one or more of the following areas: career exploration and work readiness, success in school or building a friendship. While each of these types of programs may vary in their length of commitment and program goals, some issues are common to all programs where adults work with young people. *Milestones in Mentoring* addresses these fundamental mentoring issues.

NOTES:

While there are many definitions of mentoring, for the purposes of this project, mentoring is defined as adult volunteers providing guidance and support to young people. This includes adults working one-to-one with a young person as well as an adult volunteer working with a group of young people.

"Mentor" is the word we will use throughout the *Milestones in Mentoring* series to refer to the adult volunteer. The word "mentee" will be used to indicate the young person.

How To Use *Milestones In Mentoring*

The *Milestones in Mentoring* series includes a 120-minute videocassette and this guidebook. In the video, panels of experts examine critical mentoring issues, giving concrete examples and practical suggestions. The videotape also features a studio audience, comprised of mentors and mentoring program coordinators, who ask questions related to their mentoring experiences.

The videotape is comprised of three distinct units (described earlier) which are divided on the tape by blank footage. The guidebook, which offers a more in-depth look at the issues covered in the videotape, is divided into the same three units. Program directors may choose to use one or all of the units, depending on their need. Each unit in the guidebook begins with a list of the panelists who appear in the videotape and an outline of the issues covered in the unit. The chapters end with activities and exercises which relate to the unit. Some of the exercises are designed to be used with a group of volunteers; others can be completed alone.

The guidebook can be used in a variety of ways. Whether training occurs in a group or on an individual basis, volunteers can view a segment of the videotape and use the companion section of the guidebook for enrichment. Or trainers may choose to show a unit of the videotape and use the information contained within the handbook as a *guide* for their presentation without distributing copies of sections of the guidebook to participants. The series was designed to enable viewers to pause the videotape at various points in order to accommodate discussion.

Background

The *Milestones in Mentoring* series is the result of a unique collaboration between the National Media Outreach Center, a division of QED Communications in Pittsburgh, and the BUDDY SYSTEM, a division of The Minneapolis YOUTH TRUST.

The need for training materials was originally discussed by a group of Minneapolis and St. Paul mentoring program directors. Subsequently, the BUDDY SYSTEM received a grant from The Pillsbury Company to develop training tapes for mentors. Meanwhile, public television production center QED Communications and its National Media Outreach Center had begun a national project with a mentoring focus, called One PLUS One, which was funded by the Chrysler Corporation Fund, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the National Education Association. One PLUS One is a dimension of the nationally recognized PLUS project on literacy, co-produced by PBS and ABC. The One PLUS One project had pledged to create a number of print publications and videotapes to enhance and support mentoring efforts.

The BUDDY SYSTEM and the National Media Outreach Center agreed to collaborate; the result, *Milestones in Mentoring*, is a series which helps meet the tremendous

demand for training materials for volunteer mentors.

In order to determine the most critical training needs of mentors, more than 50 mentors and volunteer coordinators from around the country were interviewed. Several themes were identified which helped to define the content of the series.

We hope you find the *Milestones in Mentoring* series inspiring and informative. Best of luck in your mentoring endeavors!

UNIT I

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

PANELISTS

Peter Bell,* Executive Director
Institute on Black Chemical Abuse

Lydia Muniz, Executive Director
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Miami, Inc.

Richard Mammen, Executive Director
Youth Coordinating Board

Jean Egbert, Coordinator of Volunteer Services
American Refugee Committee

* Peter Bell is currently an independent consultant based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

OUTLINE

■ Definition of Cultural Diversity

- ☐ Culture is more than race or ethnicity
- ☐ Cultural diversity includes differences in values, lifestyles and social norms associated with age, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic status
- ☐ Lack of understanding can lead to being judgmental

■ What Can You Do?

- ☐ Learn more about your mentee's cultural context
- ☐ Examples of:
  - ■ Ethnic diversity
  - ■ Socio-economic diversity
  - ■ Youth culture
- ☐ Suggestions and reminders
- ☐ Cultural reciprocity

Orientation Exercises

#1: Visualizations
#2: What If...

INFORMATIONAL NOTE:

In the videotape one of the panelists refers to a form of play called "The Dozens." This is an oral tradition in the African American culture. It is a style of communication which involves a sort of game of wits between the players in which they see who can come up with the best "put-down" of the other.

Dealing With Diversity

This unit addresses one of the most critical training needs which surfaced in our survey of mentors and volunteer coordinators: the need to help mentors deal with diversity. Some mentors talked about "culture shock" in reference to their initial apprehension and lack of familiarity with, and/or understanding of, the world from which their mentees came. When you think about it, it is normal and natural to feel a certain amount of apprehension about meeting someone for the first time, especially if it's expected that you will become a trusting friend. Add to that a significant difference in age, in socio-economic status and/or in racial and ethnic background, and it is easy to understand why this is such a critical issue for mentors.

Some mentors talk about "culture shock" in reference to the world of their mentees.

Toward A Broad Definition Of Cultural Diversity

Many mentor programs prefer to match mentees with mentors who come from similar backgrounds in terms of race, socio-economic status, etc. Often this is not possible and mentors are matched with young people who may look and act very differently from themselves and whose backgrounds and lifestyles may be dissimilar to theirs.

Culture, in this sense, is more than race or ethnicity; it encompasses values, lifestyle and social norms, including such things as different communication styles, mannerisms, ways of dressing, family structure, traditions, time orientation, response to authority and more. These differences may be associated with age, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic background. A lack of understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity can result in mentors becoming judgmental, thus foreclosing the opportunity to develop a trusting relationship.

Culture is more than race or ethnicity; it encompasses values, lifestyles and social norms.

What Can You Do?

As in many other situations, knowledge is the key to understanding. Following are descriptions and examples of different types of diversity issues. Each has the potential to cause misunderstandings between a mentor and a mentee. However, cultural understanding is not something you can learn exclusively from a textbook.

Talk to your mentee about his or her background and ancestry, about what life is like at school or home or with his/her friends. Find out why s/he does and says the things s/he does. Your program director, other mentors, friends and co-workers may also have insights into cultural differences.

***MENTOR TIP:* BE UNDERSTANDING AND NON-JUDGMENTAL.**

As you begin to learn and understand more about your mentee, you will be less likely to make negative value judgments. We hope that these few examples will help you become more knowledgeable about, and encourage you to explore, the cultural context from which your mentee comes.

Ethnic Diversity

If your mentee comes from a different ethnic background, learn about the values and traditions of that culture. Such things as the role of authority and family, communication styles, perspectives on time, ways of dealing with conflict, marriage traditions, etc., vary significantly among ethnic groups.

For example, people from Scandinavian and Asian cultures typically are not comfortable dealing directly with conflict. Their approach to problems or disagreements is often more subtle and indirect. Consequently, a mentee from one of these cultures may find it difficult to discuss a problem with candor. Similarly, many Asian and Hispanic families place a high emphasis on respecting and obeying adults. For them, disagreeing with an adult, particularly a family member or in this case a mentor, is forbidden. Conversely, the role and style of communication of some African Americans is much more direct and assertive.

Many Asian cultures have unique courtship and marriage traditions. For example, a Hmong girl typically marries before age 18 and most often is expected to marry a Hmong man of her parents' choosing. She may have no choice about whom she marries.

***MENTOR TIP:* TAKE TIME TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR MENTEE'S LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE.**

Ethnic groups can also vary in terms of their beliefs about and orientations toward time. For instance, some Native Americans may follow an "inner" clock, which they believe to be more natural, rather than adhering to a predetermined agenda or timetable.

Families which have recently emigrated to this country often develop distinct reaction patterns. Second generation children, i.e., those who are the first generation to be born in a new country, typically react negatively to their parents' insistence that they follow the "old ways." Children from this generation are often ashamed of their culture and their traditions; they may even be ashamed of their parents. Mentors can help their mentees celebrate the uniqueness of their culture by showing curiosity and interest in its history and traditions.

Obviously, these are gross stereotypes; they are described here only to exemplify the range of diversity between and among different ethnic groups. It is your task as a

mentor to learn about ethnic diversity from your mentee, from your observations, and from discussions with program staff so you can better understand the context of your mentee's attitudes and behavior.

Socio-Economic Diversity

Oftentimes, mentors come from different socio-economic backgrounds than their mentees. While one may have grown up on a farm, the other may never have been outside of the city. One may own a house, while the other may not know anyone personally who owns a new car, let alone a house. A mentee's family may move frequently, perhaps every few months, and may not have a telephone. A mentee may have to share a very small apartment with many people. A mentor must learn that many things s/he may have taken for granted are not necessarily common to all. These types of cultural differences are common between mentor and mentee and require time and understanding for an appreciation of their significance. Remember, however, that *poverty is color-blind*, i.e., many white people are poor, many people of color are not, and dysfunction can occur regardless of income, geographic location or level of education.

Poverty is color-blind.

It's important to be aware that there are psychological effects of chronic poverty. Some mentees may develop a short term "culture of survival" frame of mind. In the videotape, a mentor from the audience comments on how her mentee, who comes from a poor family, spends large sums of money on seemingly frivolous things (the example she gives is $100 jeans). Poverty often prevents people from believing that their future holds any promise of getting better. Saving money and investing in the future is a luxury they don't believe they have. Buying a pair of $100 jeans when there isn't enough food to eat may very well be a function of the "take what you can get while you can get it" perspective which comes from chronic poverty. During a focus group interview with mentors, one participant mentioned that whenever he was short on cash, he would feel compelled to go shopping and buy things he could not afford. This is perhaps analogous, albeit to a lesser degree, to the attitudinal effect of poverty.

Youth Culture

Many of the characteristics of adolescence are normal, common, developmental traits and consequently don't vary significantly from one generation to the next. For instance, while many adults believe that, in general, teenagers are exceedingly more rebellious than they themselves were as young people, rebellion is a common (and perhaps necessary) ingredient in an adolescent's transition into adulthood. Most of us, as teenagers, dressed very differently—perhaps even outrageously—by our parents' and grandparents' standards. We did things our parents didn't do; we talked differently than our parents, etc.

While many adults believe that, in general, teenagers are exceedingly more rebellious than they themselves were as young people, rebellion is a common (and perhaps necessary) ingredient in an adolescent's transition into adulthood.

Take the time to remember what it was like to be your mentee's age. If you think about the following questions, you'll find that much of what you went through at that age, your mentee is also going through:

When you were in _____ grade:

What was a typical day like?

What was really important to you at that time?

What was your father/mother like? Did you get along? Were you close?

Think of your friends. Were friendships always easy or were they sometimes hard?

In general, did you feel as though adults typically understood you well?

(A more complete exercise on visualization is included at the end of this section.)

However, it is also important to remember that some things, particularly sociological trends, do change dramatically and result in very different experiences from one generation to the next. There is significantly more alcohol and drug abuse today than there was when you were growing up (although, to be sure, there was alcohol and drug abuse); sexually-transmitted diseases are more common and more dangerous; crime and violence have drastically increased throughout the country particularly in urban areas; single-parent families have become more common while greater demands are being placed on all families.

One mentor talked about a conversation he had with his mentee about school dances, which for the mentor were filled with fond memories of discovering dating and dancing. For the mentee, on the other hand, school dances were dangerous, as gunfire was a common occurrence. Obviously, it is important to be aware of these generational changes in lifestyle and children's coping responses to their life circumstances.

MENTOR TIP:
REMEMBER... DIFFERENT DOES NOT MEAN BETTER OR WORSE.

REMEMBER...

Here are some suggestions which may help you successfully deal with diversity:

- Keep in mind that you are the adult—you are the experienced one. Imagine, for a moment, what your mentee must be thinking and feeling. In general, young people of all ages, but particularly teens, believe they are not respected by adults and worry about whether a mentor will like them or think they're stupid. They are coming to you for help and may already feel insecure and embarrassed about the problems in their lives. Thus, it is your responsibility to take the initiative and make the mentee feel more comfortable in the relationship.

- It's also important to remember to be yourself. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, we try to "relate" to young people and try to use their slang and be like "one of the gang." Mentees can see through this facade and may find it difficult to trust people who are not true to themselves.

- Furthermore, you may learn a lot about another culture, or lifestyle, or age group, but you will never be *from* that group. Don't *over*-identify with your mentee; s/he realizes you will never know exactly what s/he is feeling or experiencing. A mentee may actually feel invalidated by your insistence that you truly know where s/he is coming from. There is a big difference between the statements, "I know exactly what you're feeling" and "I think I have a sense of what you're going through." It is helpful to paraphrase what you think your mentee has said or is feeling and to give examples of similar situations which you have experienced.

- If something about your mentee is bothering you, first determine whether the behavior is simply *troubling* to you because you would do it differently, or whether it is truly an indication of a more seriously *troubled* youth.

  If, in fact, you feel the troublesome situation facing your mentee is detrimental or harmful to him/herself or others, you have an obligation to discuss this with your program coordinator. The coordinator will know when and where to refer the young person for professional help. For example, if it is a serious problem—your mentee's abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, for instance—the program coordinator may refer the mentee to an adolescent drug abuse program.

  You will want to know what you should and should not do or say to your mentee. You are not expected to solve the problem or to be a therapist, but there may be situations where you can be helpful. Your program coordinator might suggest that you actively support your mentee's attendance and participation in support groups, or s/he might suggest that you talk with your mentee about similar situations which you have either experienced or heard about and the ways in which these problems were successfully overcome. Get

suggestions from your program coordinator about ways in which you can be supportive.

Some troublesome behaviors are not indicative of a serious problem but are dysfunctional, nonetheless.

Some troublesome behaviors are not indicative of a serious problem but are dysfunctional, nonetheless. For example, being chronically late for appointments, adopting certain styles or ways of dressing or excessive swearing may have negative consequences. While your mentee has the right to dress, talk and be responsible as s/he sees fit, you can help by letting him/her know:

- How the behavior makes you feel
- What judgments others may make about the mentee as a result of the behavior
- The reactions and consequences s/he might expect from others

EXAMPLE: Let's say your mentee usually wears torn jeans and a leather jacket with signs and symbols on the back and is quite proud of his/her *unusual* hairstyle. Although these outward differences made you uncomfortable at first, you (being the great mentor that you are!) got beyond these "troubling" aspects and realized that, in this case, "different" did not mean "bad person."

Now, your mentee is looking for a job. Initially, you have decided to say nothing about the impact of appearances during job interviews, but your mentee is having trouble getting a job. You might ask him/her such things as:

Why do you think you didn't get the job?

What do you think was the interviewer's first impression of you? What do you think gave him/her that impression?

Could the interviewer have thought that you were in a gang because of your leather jacket with all the symbols on it?

Do you think the impression you gave is one which is helpful in getting a job? What can you do about this?

If you were 30 years old and owned a business, would you be hesitant to hire someone who looked and dressed in a way which was completely foreign to you?

You might also discuss ways in which your mentee could still keep his/her individuality and identity (both very important needs in adolescence)

yet look more respectable to those s/he is trying to impress. A typical response from a young person might be to refer to the "hypocrisy" and "material values" of the adult culture. Don't mislead or misrepresent the truth—the fact is, like it or not, there are standards and norms in certain situations with which one is expected to comply.

Included at the end of this section is an exercise called "What If" which lists some of the typical kinds of situations mentors commonly run into. It is designed to be used as a discussion-starter within a training session or for role-playing what you might say and do in these situations.

Cultural Reciprocity

MENTOR TIP:
CONFRONT INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR DIRECTLY, BUT WITH CARE AND CONCERN.

An important but often forgotten aspect of cultural diversity is the mutuality of the mentoring relationship, which is what we call cultural reciprocity. This phrase refers to the fact that mentors and mentees alike can benefit from their increased understanding of others who may at first seem unfamiliar.

For the mentor, a greater breadth and depth of understanding of others can facilitate better relationships at work, at home and in other social situations. As your mentee begins to trust and know you, s/he will begin to learn about life outside his/her limited circle of peers; and s/he can discover new opportunities and alternative ways of doing things that s/he never knew existed: you can model diversity for your mentee. The more options we have, the better off we'll be.

Remember: Our lives are enriched by diversity.

Remember: our lives are enriched by diversity!

ORIENTATION EXERCISE #1:

VISUALIZATIONS

PURPOSE: This is an exercise designed to help the adult mentors remember what it was like to be their mentee's age.

INTRODUCTION: It's easy to forget how we felt, what we thought about and what was important to us when we were younger. As adults who work with young people, it is important for us to draw upon our own experiences and our own past in order to help us relate better to the young people with whom we work.

TIME: 15-20 minutes

1. Visualizations work best if participants are in a comfortable setting. Turn the lights down or off. You may want to close the shades. Tell the mentors to get in a comfortable position and close their eyes.

2. Talk slowly in a quiet, soothing tone. Tell the mentors to relax and take some slow, deep breaths. Breathe deeply with them. Wait a minute until everyone settles in.

3. You want the mentors to remember what it was like to be their mentee's age. However, it is usually easier for people to recall what it was like to be in a certain grade than a certain age.

Ask the mentors to think about what grade their mentee is in. Using that grade, have them think about the following questions or make up some of your own. Ask each question very slowly, leaving ample time between questions for them to reminisce.

When you were in the same grade as your mentee:

Who was your teacher? What was your teacher like?

What did you look like when you were in that grade? What was your hair like? How did you dress?

Who were your best friends? Did you always get along with them, or did you sometimes fight?

What did you do for fun?

Were you interested in the opposite sex?

What were your parents like back then? Did you get along well with them? How about any brothers or sisters?

What was important to you when you were that age?

Did you get into trouble? What were some of the crises you had when you were that age?

Were you happy back then? If not, how did you feel—how would you describe your life back then?

4. Tell the mentors to remember how it felt to be that age and to come back slowly to today. Tell them to open their eyes when they are ready.

5. Ask for general comments or reactions. These types of questions sometimes help spark discussion:

- What was the feeling which best describes that year for you?
- What was the most surprising thing you remembered?
- How does your life differ now? What is still the same?
- What did you learn from your visualization?

6. Ask the mentors how they think their lives were different than their mentee's life. Also ask them what things may still be similar.

7. Ask them whether (and then how) they think this information is helpful in relating to their mentee.

Orientation Exercise #2:

What If...

Purpose: This role-play exercise is designed to help mentors deal with diversity in challenging situations with their mentees.

Time: 30-45 minutes

It helps if those who are pretending to be the mentee have some realistic base of knowledge from which to enact their role. Therefore, you may want to do this activity after the mentors have been with their mentees for awhile (1-2 months).

1. Tell the mentors that they are going to be doing some role plays. Explain that role plays are valuable because they: 1) give us an opportunity to find out how we might react in a given situation; 2) allow us to evaluate and amend, if necessary, our reaction; 3) give us a chance to see how others deal with the situation; and 4) allow us to practice helpful ways to resolve the situation.

2. There are many ways to do role plays. You may want to have one pair do a role play in front of the group and have the group give feedback. Or, you may want to have everyone get into pairs so that all can practice and participate. In either case, you may want to demonstrate the first role play and play one of the roles yourself.

3. Role plays should be brief, no more than 5 minutes each. After each role play have the group discuss what was good about the mentors' reactions as well as things which could have been better. Have people come up with alternative ways to deal with the situation. You can have the role players switch roles and do another role play.

4. Examples of role plays are given below. You should develop your own role plays to more accurately reflect the population with which you work.

What if...

Your 15-year-old Hmong mentee calls to tell you that she got married last week. She did not know the man very well but had no choice; her parents decided she should

marry him. She is not pregnant.

Your mentee has moved three times in the last nine months. And now the family doesn't have a telephone. You have finally gotten together with your mentee, and you are frustrated because it is so difficult to find and contact him/her.

Your mentee is 14 years old. S/he is talking to you about his/her friends having sex. The mentee is sexually active and is really looking for some advice from you.

5. Use this opportunity to talk about examples of cultural diversity. Remember that culture, in this sense, is defined as the lifestyles, values, attitudes, behaviors, etc., which are associated with such things as different races, ages and socio-economic backgrounds. Explain some of the ethnic traditions and reasons for different attitudes and behaviors.

UNIT II

MAKING IT WORK

Panelists

Lonnie Edmonson, Project Manager
Fannie Mae/Woodson Senior High
Incentive Scholarship Program

Rebecca Saito, Youth Development Consultant

Bob Hechlinski, Mentor
Career Beginnings

Nancy Perkins, Mentor
Teaching-Learning Communities

OUTLINE

■ Getting Started

- ☐ Setting up the first meeting
- ☐ What to say, what to expect, what to do

■ Early Issues

- ☐ Boundary setting
- ☐ "Testing" behaviors and fear of abandonment
- ☐ Honesty and directness

■ The Ongoing Relationship

- ☐ Role Play *#1*: The Problem Solving Model
- ☐ Role Play #2: The Shopping Spree
- ☐ Role Play #3: Respectful Confrontation
- ☐ Terminating relationships

Orientation Exercises

#3: The Problem Solving Model
#4: "I" Statements
#5: What If...

Making It Work

This unit is designed to be much like a live mentoring workshop. It deals with very practical, concrete tips and suggestions about how to handle common situations which arise during a typical mentoring relationship. The unit is divided into three segments parallel to the videotape. The first segment, *Getting Started*, addresses questions concerning the very first meeting between mentor and mentee. In the second segment, *Early Issues*, panelists give us some insight into some of the common problems which often emerge in the early phases of a developing relationship. In the third segment, *The Ongoing Relationship*, you will learn how to use the Problem Solving Model, a technique designed to help people think through problems and solve them effectively. Three role plays, performed by professional actors, are also included in this section of the videotape. A detailed explanation of the Problem Solving Model and two sets of exercises are included at the end of this unit.

Getting Started

The first meeting between a mentor and mentee is often arranged by and occurs with a staff person from the program. Many times, however, mentors are expected to initiate this first contact on their own. Typically, mentors need to be very persistent in their efforts to set up this initial meeting. Although this is certainly not always the case, mentors often find they have to make as many as 10-15 telephone calls before the meeting actually occurs. There are reasons for this resistance. First, this is probably a new experience for your mentee. Imagine how nervous you would have been in this situation when you were your mentee's age! Second, a very common developmental reaction to meeting a new adult is for young people to be extremely concerned that they will not be well-liked or that they, or their family, or their lifestyle, will be judged in some negative way. In addition, young people are in the habit of expecting adults to take the lead, tell them what to do and when to do it—in some ways, society teaches kids to be passive and non-assertive. And finally, a common explanation of why mentees feel particularly uncomfortable calling a mentor at work is that they are uneasy dealing with secretaries: sometimes they get nervous and hang up; they may be unfamiliar with being put on hold and believe they have been disconnected; they also may not know to leave a message with a secretary.

***MENTOR TIP:* BE YOURSELF...KIDS WILL TRUST YOU MORE.**

You *will* eventually reach your mentee. So what do you say? If your program does

not give you guidelines for your first conversation and meeting, here are some suggestions. After you introduce yourself, suggest that you get together for an activity. Ask your mentee what s/he likes to do. Be prepared to make some suggestions, e.g., get a bite to eat, go to the zoo or museum, etc. Be sure that the activity does not have too many distractions and permits you to spend some time talking and getting to know each other. On the other hand, while you want to allow enough time to get to know each other, be sure you don't plan an activity that will drag on for too long—an hour or two is about the right length for a first meeting. (It may or may not be appropriate to meet with your mentee's family. Talk to your program coordinator about this.)

Try to set the meeting within a few days of your telephone conversation, or your mentee is likely to forget. Once you have decided what you are going to do, and where and when you are going to meet, reiterate this information to your mentee. You may want to ask whether s/he would like you to call the day before to re-confirm. You may decide to give your mentee your work and home telephone numbers. (Check your program guidelines about this.) End the conversation on a positive note, telling the mentee that you are excited about meeting him/her, that you think it will be fun, etc. Your mentee may not sound very excited about your first meeting. Don't expect him/her to be enthusiastic. It is a common defense, particularly among adolescents, to look and sound aloof. In other cases, it may not be a defense: the mentee may have poor social skills or low self-esteem.

At your first meeting, you may want to tell your mentee a little about yourself and why you decided to volunteer (e.g., you enjoy young people, you'd like to be a friend to a young person and do things with him/her). Be sure s/he knows you are a volunteer—not a paid staff person. Telling a young person that you chose to become a mentor because you wanted to help people deal with their problems is probably not a good thing to say. It makes him/her feel embarrassed and defines the relationship in very unequal terms.

Think about what you hope to learn and get out of this experience, and share your hopes with your mentee. You may also want to set some goals with your mentee, particularly if your program is a tutoring or career exploration program. You should discuss your expectations of the mentee and what s/he can expect from you, e.g., showing up on time, calling to cancel meetings, frequency of meetings, etc.

Oftentimes mentees ask their mentors very personal questions, like, "How much money do you make?" or "Why did you get a divorce?" If not at the first meeting, it is likely that at some point during the relationship you will be asked these or similar questions. You must decide for yourself how you want to respond and how much you are comfortable divulging about yourself. Think about this ahead of time. It's important to understand that your mentee may be asking these questions quite innocently in his/her effort to get a better picture of what life is really like as an adult in this society. These can be marvelous "teachable moments." For example, you can discuss careers in reference to how much money you make or the realities of human relation-

Remember the rule of reciprocity: Do not ask your mentee questions that you yourself would not like to answer.

ships with regard to divorce. Similarly, remember to follow the rule of reciprocity: Do not ask your mentee questions that you yourself would not like to answer.

Again, don't expect your mentee to show his/her appreciation or to be visibly excited about the prospect of developing the relationship. Although this may happen, it is perhaps the exception, not the rule. Also, don't be discouraged if the first meeting does not go as well as you planned.

Early Issues

Mentors decide to volunteer for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons usually includes an altruistic desire to help others. While this is obviously an admirable quality, it can sometimes get mentors into serious trouble if appropriate limits are not set. This inability to know when to say "no" is sometimes called the "Savior Syndrome." Conversely, the ability to set good limits is called boundary setting. Mentors must set healthy limits on the amount of time they are willing to spend with the mentee, the amount of money they want to spend and their level of personal involvement (e.g., Do you want your family and friends to get to know your mentee? How well should you get to know your mentee's family and friends?). If healthy limits are not set, the mentor will end up feeling angry and taken advantage of. Mentees need to know very concretely and specifically what the rules are. Remember, your role is not to "rescue" kids; rather, you are there to be a role model and help them develop skills for effective living.

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Another aspect of the "Savior Syndrome" is the expectation that mentees should talk about their personal problems to their mentor and that this is the primary measure of success in the relationship. While helping mentees through difficult personal dilemmas may be a healthy part of some relationships, in other matches, mentors play a different, yet similarly important, role. For example, mentors can enhance the social development of their mentees by providing them with opportunities for safe, constructive fun. Tutoring or career guidance can be critical in the construction of a firm foundation for a sound future.

Mentors often talk about mentees "testing" the relationship. For example, they may be unusually rude or irresponsible, especially at first. While these are perhaps not altogether uncommon behaviors among young people, the testing behavior may also reflect the mentee's fear of abandonment by significant people. Oftentimes mentees experience an inordinate amount of disruption in their lives, particularly if they come from a dysfunctional family. A mentee may regularly move several times a year and thus may have learned to believe that all relationships are temporary. Your mentee may be wondering to him/herself, "When will my mentor leave me?" Continuity in your relationship is a critical issue—don't take it lightly.

Regardless of the reasons a mentee may seem to be testing a mentor, when a mentee does something inappropriate, the mentor should confront it directly, but with sensitivity. Let the mentee know specifically what s/he did that you thought was unacceptable or inappropriate. If the behavior made you angry or hurt your feelings, be honest and let your mentee know this. While confrontation can be scary for both the mentor and mentee, it is your opportunity to model for the mentee an appropriate way to confront someone respectfully. A model for respectful confrontation is included at the end of this section.

MENTOR TIP:
PRAISE WORKS BETTER THAN SHAME.

Similarly, if you make a mistake with your mentee, for instance, you say or do something wrong, be honest with your mentee. Admit that you were wrong or made a mistake and apologize to him/her. This is a beautiful "teachable moment" because it not only shows the mentee an effective and respectful way to address mistakes, it also shows the mentee that you are human too.

Your mentee may dress, act, talk and look very different from you. Remember that different does not mean better or worse. Making a value judgement based on outward appearances or different styles is probably the most detrimental thing a mentor can do. This issue of diversity is covered extensively in the first unit, "Dealing with Diversity."

The Ongoing Relationship

This segment of the videotape contains three role plays which are based on actual stories from mentors: one which demonstrates the use of the Problem Solving Model, another which tackles the issue of boundary setting (a concept which was discussed in the "Early Issues" portion of this unit) and a third which models respectful confrontation. The role plays, which are described and elaborated upon below, demonstrate effective ways to handle difficult situations.

Role Play #1: *The Problem Solving Model*

Synopsis: This role play is about a mentee who has been suspended from school because he continually falls asleep in class. In the first version, the mentor preaches to the mentee about how important school is and how irresponsible it is to fall asleep in class. The mentee is not given an opportunity to explore why he falls asleep in class or what can be done about it.

In the second version, the mentor uses the Problem Solving Model to help the mentee discover that the real issue is that his job, which ends very late in the evening, is preventing him from getting enough sleep. From there, they explore solutions to the problem.

MENTOR TIP: **OPEN COMMUNICATION IS CRUCIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING RELATIONSHIP.**

One way to help mentees make good choices when problems arise is to teach them the Problem Solving Model. The model is very simple: 1) Define the real problem; 2) Brainstorm alternative solutions; and 3) Act on the best solution. (A more in-depth description of the model is included at the end of this section.) This model is helpful in making impersonal, non-critical decisions as well as making decisions about how to solve some very personal and interpersonal situations.

ROLE PLAY #2: *The Shopping Spree*

Synopsis: In this role play, the mentor and mentee have been window shopping, and the mentee has been asking the mentor, directly and indirectly, to buy him things. The mentor tells the mentee that he is uncomfortable with this assumption that he can or should spend lots of money on the mentee. The mentor explains that he doesn't have a lot of money but that even if he did, he doesn't believe that spending money should be the basis or expectation of their relationship.

This is a very common situation in mentoring relationships and it is just one example of the need to set appropriate, clear limits with your mentee. The expectation that mentors will spend a lot of money is probably due in part to the mentee simply testing the limits. However, a more salient factor may be that the mentee honestly assumes that the mentor is wealthy. S/he may have no idea how much money you make, or if s/he does, may not understand that it is not enough to enable you to have an endless and unrestricted budget. Explain this to your mentee if this situation arises in your relationship.

In some dysfunctional families, gift giving at holidays and birthdays is one of the few outward signs of love. Children who come from these families may associate love and concern with gift giving. This is your opportunity to show and explain that there's more to being a friend than giving gifts.

There's more to being a friend than giving gifts.

ROLE PLAY #3: *Respectful Confrontation*

Synopsis: The mentee in this role play has been consistently late for his meeting with his mentor, or in some cases, has not shown up at all. The mentor explains to the mentee how this makes him feel and they discuss a plan which might help solve the situation.

It is often difficult for people to resolve conflicts with others, especially if it requires talking honestly and openly about the situation. Conflict is uncomfortable for most people. This role play demonstrates a communication technique which is often taught in courses on conflict resolution and to clients in therapy. Put simply, it

involves explaining what happened and how it made you feel. (This technique is described more fully at the end of this section.) Beginning your sentences with "I" statements, e.g., "I feel _____when _____ happens," is much less offensive than starting sentences with "You," e.g., "You are so irresponsible! You make me so mad—you drive me crazy!"

Certainly there are many effective ways to resolve these types of situations; you must develop your own style and use these role plays merely as examples of options. At the end of this section are additional scenarios that you may want to review and, if possible, role play with another mentor.

Terminating Relationships

Ending a relationship is always difficult. It brings up many emotions: guilt, fear of change, sadness, feelings of abandonment, anger, etc. There are many different reasons for terminating a relationship. Sometimes the mentor and/or the mentee become too busy to meet on a regular basis. This may in fact be a strong indicator of a successful relationship. If the mentee had no friends and was not involved in extra-curricular activities at the time he first met his mentor but became outgoing and self-assured as he developed a trusting, supportive relationship with the mentor, termination under these circumstances would be a positive sign.

Other circumstances may change for the mentor or mentee. One of them may move far away because of work or school. Or they may both simply decide to end the formal, structured relationship but keep in touch on an informal, less regular basis. Experienced volunteers describe how some long-term relationships (those which last more than a year) naturally evolve into less structured, more informal relationships. Contact may naturally ebb and flow.

Other relationships end because of a problem between the mentor and mentee. Your program director will help you determine when it would be best for a relationship to end. Some matches are simply not good ones. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with either the mentor or the mentee. Given the myriad of factors on which a successful relationship can depend, it is not surprising that some matches don't work. It is important to remember that you are not helping your mentee or yourself by hanging on to an unhealthy relationship.

Remember that you are not helping your mentee or yourself by hanging on to an unhealthy relationship.

When the decision has been made to end the formal mentoring relationship, set a specific date for your last meeting and inform your mentee of this ahead of time. Regardless of the reason for the termination, be honest, candid and supportive. Talk about the reasons for ending the relationship. Talk about your thoughts and feelings for the mentee and your feelings about the termination. Encourage your mentee to do

the same. Be positive and supportive, especially about what the future may hold for your mentee. If it seems appropriate, encourage your mentee to get another mentor. Don't make promises you may not keep, e.g., that you will always keep in touch.

The majority of matches prove to be significant sources of growth for both the mentor and mentee. With support and guidance from your program coordinator, you most likely can "make it work."

Orientation Exercise #3:

The Problem Solving Model

The Problem Solving Model is a technique which helps people think through and solve problems in a logical, step-by-step process:

Step 1: Define the real problem

Sometimes the presenting problem, i.e., the issue which first appears to be the problem, is not the real problem.

Restate the problem to reflect the actual dilemma.

Example: Your mentee has been suspended from school because s/he regularly falls asleep in class.

The mentee believes the problem is that his/her "teacher is a jerk."

As you discuss the situation with your mentee, you discover that the real problem is that s/he works until 11: 00 p.m. and as a result does not get enough sleep.

Step 2: Brainstorm alternative solutions

Brainstorming involves coming up with as many solutions as possible. Write them down if necessary. Do not discount any alternatives.

Example: Alternatives might include:

- Drop out of school
- Quit work
- Get a different job
- Try to get a study hall first hour
- Try to switch to an earlier shift at work

Step 3: Choose and act on the best solution

Step 3 actually involves two stages: helping your mentee decide which alternative is the best solution and encouraging your mentee to act on that solution.

Weigh the benefits and drawbacks of each alternative. Decide which would be the best solution.

Help your mentee develop a plan of action, e.g., when would be the best time to do this, what are some things to keep in mind about the situation, what are some good ways to approach the situation, etc.

Offer support and encouragement.

Example: After you and your mentee have listed the pros and cons of each alternative, s/he decides that the best solution would be to see if s/he can change to an earlier shift at work.

Support his/her choice and tell him/her you think it makes a lot of sense.

Talk to him/her about setting up a time in advance to meet with his/her manager; ask what s/he will say—perhaps role play the situation; ask what can be done to make amends at school; set up a specific date by which your mentee is going to talk to his/her manager; follow-up with an encouraging telephone call before that date, etc.

Sometimes the first plan of action does not solve the problem. In this case, re-evaluate the situation, review the other alternatives and choose another.

ORIENTATION EXERCISE #4:

"I" STATEMENTS

Using "I" statements is a communication technique which is useful in resolving conflicts or arguments. Explaining how you feel as a result of what has happened is much less offensive than blaming the other person.

For example, which of these statements is more likely to result in a successful resolution?

#1 You are so _____ ! You make me so _____ !

#2 I feel _____ when _____ happens.

Example: Your mentee is frequently late for your meetings with him/her. Sometimes s/he doesn't show up at all. This makes you very angry.

A typical confrontation might be something like:

> *This is the fourth time in the last two months that you've been late for our meetings, and I'm sick and tired of it! You are being incredibly irresponsible. It's amazing you've gotten as far as you have. Don't you realize how rude it is to make me wait?*

A more appropriate response, using "I" statements, might sound like this:

> *This is the fourth time in the last two months that you've been late for our meetings. I need to let you know that it really bothers me. It hurts to think that maybe I'm not important to you. I get angry and feel taken advantage of when you don't show up. Can you understand how it makes me feel when this happens?*
>
> *What do you think we can do about this pattern?*

Orientation Exercise #5

What If...

Purpose: This role-play exercise is designed to help prepare mentors to deal with common yet challenging situations and issues which often arise during a typical mentoring relationship.

Time: 30-45 minutes

(See the "What If" activity for Unit 1 for complete instructions on how to develop and implement role plays.)

These are some examples of situations which might be appropriate for your mentors to role play. You should develop your own role plays which are more specific to your target population.

What if...

After several attempts to contact the mentee, you have finally arranged a meeting. This is your first meeting together.

You have come to pick up your mentee. Your mentee's mother asks you to take your mentee's siblings with you for the afternoon. She has asked you to do this before, and you have complied.

Your mentee had a fight with his/her parents and has run away from home. S/he has come to your house and wants to stay with you.

Your mentee is very aggressive and hostile. S/he has temper tantrums and has insulted you, your friends and, now, your spouse. You have discussed the situation with your program director, and s/he agrees that you should end this relationship. You are meeting with your mentee for the last time.

UNIT III

TROUBLED FAMILIES

PANELISTS

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Outline

■ Introduction

- ☐ Serious family problems are common in lives of mentees
- ☐ Mentors are not family therapists
- ☐ Mentors can help by identifying, referring and being supportive

■ Definitions and Descriptions

- ☐ Addiction
- ☐ Abuse
  - ■ Physical
  - ■ Sexual
  - ■ Emotional
- ☐ Neglect

■ Signs and Symptoms

- ☐ Not easy to detect
- ☐ Trust your intuition
- ☐ Red flags: Duration, Implausibility and Severity

■ What Should You Do?

- ☐ Talk to program staff
- ☐ Get support for self
- ☐ Be supportive

Orientation Exercises

Exercise #6: What If...

Troubled Families

In our discussions with the staff of mentor programs from around the country, many have indicated that serious family problems, like alcoholism, sexual abuse and physical neglect, are increasingly common in the life histories of their mentees. For some, in fact, it is this awareness that schools and families need help in providing constructive, safe, nurturing environments for young people which is one of the driving forces behind the development of their program.

Certainly this unit was not designed to teach mentors how to do family therapy, since this is not the role of a mentor. However, mentors can play a crucial role in helping to identify these problems, in referring mentees to appropriate professionals and by being supportive.

Mentor programs vary in terms of their goals and objectives and the depth or type of relationship they want and expect their mentors and mentees to develop. Regardless of the type of program, however, *all adults who work with young people* should familiarize themselves with the range of dysfunctional, abusive family patterns which they could encounter in working with children and adolescents. Thus, "Troubled Families" defines various types of abuse, describes the signs and symptoms of each and explains what to do if you suspect abuse.

All adults who work with young people should familiarize themselves with the range of dysfunctional, abusive family patterns which they could encounter.

It is always hard to talk or think about such severe problems as addictions and abuse. It is particularly difficult to confront and deal with the possibility of your mentee living with some of these problems. This is one reason why it is critical that the issues covered in this unit, even more so than the other units in the *Milestones in Mentoring* series, be discussed further in your program orientation and training. If you are viewing this tape alone, you should have a follow-up discussion with program staff.

Definitions and Descriptions

There are three general categories of serious family dysfunction which are discussed in this unit: addictions, abuse and neglect. It is important for mentors to remember that these family problems can and do occur in all neighborhoods. People with a lot of money or very little money; people who live in the city, the suburbs or the country; people of all races and ethnic groups; people from any religion as well those who are not religious; the middle-aged, the young

Family problems can and do occur in all neighborhoods.

and seniors: any of these people may have very serious family problems.

Addiction

While we often associate alcohol and drug abuse with teenagers, remember that not all teenagers use drugs and alcohol and that other family members can have serious problems associated with substance abuse which can affect the entire family. When a parent has a serious addiction, children often develop dysfunctional reactions to their parent's problem. Some may become what is often referred to as "parentified children." Young people in these circumstances often find themselves making excuses for their parent's abusive episodes. For instance, they may regularly have to make excuses for a parent not showing up for appointments or work, they may tell others that mom or dad did not get out of bed because of an illness or they may be expected to do unusual amounts of housekeeping and caring for younger siblings. In this way, children of alcoholics often become somewhat "over"-responsible, to the detriment of their own personal development. In addition, they may feel in some way responsible for their parent's addiction, which only serves to encourage this "people-pleasing" behavior and accelerates the child's downward spiral.

MENTOR TIP:
CHRONIC PROBLEMS ARE SIGNALS. BE ALERT TO:
- **ANGER**
- **LACK OF TRUST**
- **INJURIES**
- **RUNNING AWAY**
- **DEPRESSION**

Abuse

There are three kinds of abuse: physical, sexual and emotional. Each state has its own legal definition of physical and sexual abuse. As a mentor, you should become familiar with your state's statutes about definitions and reporting requirements. If you do not receive this information during your training, ask for it—it is for your own protection!

Physical Abuse

In this series, the definition of physical abuse includes any form of contact which results in serious injuries or leaves long-lasting marks, bruises or scars. Physical abuse ranges from severe pinching, hard slaps with an open hand, hitting with a closed fist or some other object, to burning or in any other way mutilating any part of the body. Internal injuries may also be signs of abuse.

Sexual Abuse

In general, when people talk about sexual abuse, it can include incest, i.e., sexual

abuse which occurs within a family, or non-familial sexual abuse. The discussion of family dysfunction in the *Milestones in Mentoring* series focuses primarily on incest. Once incest has occurred, it is perhaps the most difficult problem for a person to deal with and overcome. Socially, it is one of the strongest taboos and, consequently, the biggest family secret. Incest, or family sexual abuse, can range from inappropriate touching or kissing to actual sexual intercourse. While touching and kissing can be good and an expression of appropriate love, children tend to know intuitively the difference between good and bad touch.

Emotional Abuse

MENTOR TIP:
YOU ARE A FRIEND—NOT A PARENT OR THERAPIST.

Emotional abuse is hard to define but includes such things as withholding love or making it conditional, severe and consistent put-downs and shaming a child, i.e., saying things which make a child feel as though s/he is a bad or worthless person. It is probably the hardest to detect but has a long-lasting impact on the self-esteem of a child.

Neglect

Neglect is closely related to emotional abuse and they often occur together. Physical neglect is characterized by a severe lack of attention to a child's hygiene, clothing, need for food or proper shelter, medical care, etc. Children who are neglected typically look unusually disheveled, their clothing may be dirty and inappropriate for the weather, they may be chronically ill or have frequent injuries and they may show signs of malnutrition. Emotional neglect consists of such things as ignoring children's needs for nurturing and emotional support or not providing opportunities for play or developmentally appropriate activities.

Signs and Symptoms

Identifying abusive situations is a difficult task, even for trained professionals. However, as a mentor, you may be in a unique position to notice when something feels or looks wrong, because mentors are often one of the few non-familial adults who spend quality time on a regular basis with a young person. While there are no clear-cut, sure-fire signs of abusive situations, we have identified some of the likely characteristics of a child who comes from a seriously dysfunctional family system.

As a mentor, you may be in a unique position to notice when something feels or looks wrong.

Some symptoms are associated with specific types of abuse:

- Physical abuse, which is perhaps the easiest to detect, may be suspected if a child has frequent injuries whose explanations don't seem plausible. At the very least, frequent injuries probably signify neglect and require further investigation. Physically abused children are often unusually fearful of or nervous around the abusive parent.

- Sexual abuse victims often have an unusual, extreme dislike for being touched. On the other hand, some sexually abused children try to please adults by being physically affectionate in ways which have sexual overtones. If you feel that the way your mentee shows affection is inappropriate for his/her age, and if it feels sexual, trust your intuitions and talk to your program coordinator. If a child shows high levels of anxiety or fear at being left alone with a particular member of the family, this also can be an indication of sexual abuse.

- Emotionally abused children may tend to put themselves down or criticize themselves a lot. Sometimes parents who are emotionally abusive have very negative nicknames for their children.

Duration, Implausibility, Severity

Other signs and symptoms which are common to most abuse victims, regardless of the specific kind of abuse, include *persistent and unexplained* depression or withdrawal, excessive anger and aggressive behavior, an unusually pervasive lack of feelings or emotions, self-mutilation, consistent running away, inability to trust, difficulty in developing healthy long-term relationships and suicidal/homicidal thoughts. It is important to keep in mind that many, if not most, adolescents do some of these things some of the time; this is normal adolescent development. However, if any of these problems last for a long period of time *(Duration)*, and there is no plausible explanation *(Implausibility)*, and the behavior is extreme *(Severity)*, then an investigation and intervention is absolutely necessary.

What Should You Do?

If you suspect abuse, the first thing to do is talk to your program advisor.

If you suspect abuse, the first thing to do is *talk to your program advisor.* You may feel as if you are breaching your mentee's trust or making a "mountain out of a molehill"; but, as the staff person at your program will tell you, your willingness to take the risk to discuss your observations comes from your concern for your mentee and is *always* the right thing to do. Trust your intuitions! The well-being of the mentee should be your primary guiding concern.

Your program coordinator will want to know what you have observed, when, how

frequently, what you did or said, your mentee's reaction, etc. From there, s/he is in the best position to determine what further steps are indicated and appropriate. In some cases, s/he must report the information to the Child Protection Unit of your county's social welfare department. In these circumstances, be sure you get information about sources of additional support for yourself (e.g., further meetings with staff from the program, support groups, etc.) because discovering and uncovering these kinds of family secrets is extremely troubling.

Your program staff will advise you on how to deal with the situation with your mentee. If s/he is not sure that a serious problem exists, s/he may ask that you watch for additional signs and talk to you about what kinds of things you can say to or ask your mentee. If abuse is confirmed, you will have questions about what to say to your mentee, how you should act around him/her, etc., and you should discuss these with your advisor. S/he may suggest that you be honest and open about your feelings and reactions with your mentee and suggest that you encourage your mentee to do the same. In special situations, your advisor may ask that you not discuss the abuse with the mentee. If this is the case, s/he will explain why this is the best course of action.

MENTOR TIP:
TRUST YOUR INTUITION AND SEEK HELP FROM PROGRAM STAFF WHEN NECESSARY.

If your mentee discloses abuse to you, it will, of course, be a shocking and difficult experience to know how to handle. Try your best to listen and be supportive, and don't be afraid to be honest about your feelings. Do not make assumptions about how your mentee *should* feel but validate what s/he *is* feeling. Let him/her know s/he is not alone; this happens in other families as well. Do not discount what your mentee is saying to you. Explain to him/her that you must disclose this information to the program coordinator so that s/he can get appropriate help. And finally, do not talk about your opinions of the perpetrator. Remember that they probably still love each other, even though it is hard to understand how someone could do these things to a loved one.

MENTOR TIP:
NEVER PROMISE SECRECY.

Once abuse has been identified and the appropriate referrals have been made, a mentor often feels unsure about how to continue or deal with his/her relationship with the mentee. In some situations, the most helpful thing to do is to be someone the mentee can be with and do things with, without feeling pressure to talk about or deal with the problems at home. You can be a much needed diversion—someone with whom s/he can have fun. You might also provide your mentee with telephone numbers to youth hotlines or crisis lines in your area.

If the professional staff feel that open discussion about the abuse is okay, it is important to understand the difference between sympathy and empathy. Empathy is the ability to "get into another person's shoes," i.e., to try your best to understand what the other person is thinking and feeling. Sympathy, on the other hand, has more to do with feeling sorry for the other person

MENTOR TIP:
SOMETIMES THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR A MENTEE IS JUST BE THERE.

and getting stuck too deeply in the problem to know how to help. You must have a certain amount of healthy detachment from the situation or you will be of no service to your mentee.

It is also important to remember not to normalize the situation. That is, don't downplay the abuse and pretend it happens to everyone; your mentee will feel as though you don't really understand how difficult it is—s/he will feel discounted by your aloofness. Just be honest and listen empathetically.

Commitment is easy during the good times; it is during the rough times that we are truly tested.

While serious family problems are something we would rather not have to face, we have a responsibility as mentors to learn how to support our mentees effectively, even as we face some of these most difficult issues. Commitment is easy during the good times; it is during the rough times that we are truly tested.

Orientation Exercise #6:

What If...

Purpose: This role-play exercise is designed to help prepare mentors to talk with their mentees about serious family problems.

Time: 25-30 minutes

(See the "What If" activity for Unit 1 for complete instructions on how to develop and implement role plays.)

These are some examples of situations which might be appropriate for your mentors to role play. You should develop your own role plays which are more specific to your target population.

What if...

You have never seen your mentee's mother out of her bathrobe. She always seems very uninvolved with her children and depressed. Your mentee seems to do all of his/her own cooking and cleaning and never talks about his/her mother. You notice that your mentee is losing a lot of weight, doesn't look healthy and his/her general hygiene is diminishing.

Your mentee has frequent and unexplained bruises all over his/her body. When asked about them, s/he just shrugs off your questions. Now s/he has a broken arm and says s/he just fell down the stairs.

Your mentee has admitted that his/her father beats him/her. He also beats the mother. Your mentee is pleading with you not to report this information to anyone.

Every Thursday your mentee's uncle babysits for him/her. Lately s/he does not want to be home that day. S/he pleads with you saying s/he will run away if you don't let him/her stay with you. In addition, you have known your mentee for a long time, but s/he still will not let you touch him/her.

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