

## Asset-Building Ideas for Mentors

Mentoring relationships can be found among people of many different ages at different stages of life. Working adults sometimes have a more experienced co-worker or supervisor who serves as an adviser or teacher. Young children often have an older sibling, tutor, or friend who acts as a trusted guide and confidant. Many teenagers learn from and are supported by a youth worker, teacher, minister, or coach. All of these relationships can be called “mentoring” and all of them have the potential to build assets. While asset building is likely to happen naturally when a mentoring relationship develops, there are some things you can do to ensure that your mentoring relationship is an asset-building one:

- Remember that the focus of mentoring is on forming a relationship and being a positive adult role model. *What* you do matters less than the fact that you are spending time together and providing the person you mentor (your “mentee”) with support and care.
- If you are part of a formal mentoring program, understand and honor the boundaries set by the program. Some, for example, expect the mentor not to discuss the mentee at length with family members. Others ask for at least a one-year commitment. If you are uncomfortable with the guidelines set by a particular program, talk with the leaders about why the boundaries are the way they are.
- Have clear boundaries for what is appropriate and not appropriate in your relationship. For example, it may be acceptable for you and your mentee to go on an outing alone together, but not to go somewhere overnight. If you are not sure what’s OK and what’s not, talk with the leaders of your mentoring program, your mentee’s family, your friends who also mentor, a minister, or another trusted person.
- Show your mentee that he or she is important by keeping in touch or getting together on a regular basis. Even if you cannot be together very often, talk on the phone or send e-mail.
- Let your mentee know that you care about things that are important to her or him. For example, if your mentee has a special friend or pet, ask regularly about how he or she is doing. If your mentee plays a sport, attend a game or match. If he or she sings or plays an instrument, ask for a personal recital once in a while or attend a school concert.
- Be flexible.
- Meet and get to know your mentee’s family. Once you know them, they will likely have more trust in you and you will have a better understanding of your mentee’s life experiences.
- Get to know your mentee’s interests and talents. Help her or him find opportunities to get involved with organized activities or programs that use or develop those talents and interests.
- Talk about and model your personal faith and values. Encourage your mentee to think about the values that are important to her or him, and how those values impact behavior and decisions.

- Share a new experience together, such as fishing, visiting a local museum (some have days where entrance fees are waived or reduced), taking a class, eating at a new restaurant, watching a movie and talking about it, flying a kite, renting a canoe or paddleboat, snowshoeing or hiking.
- Practice life skills together. For example, shop for food then prepare a meal and serve it to your mentee's family or friends.
- Emphasize the importance of a lifelong commitment to learning. Go to the library together and check out books to read and discuss together. Also look for books on tape that you can listen to together. Help your mentee with homework or find someone who can.
- Talk about some of your hopes and plans for the future and ask about your mentee's vision of the future. Share ideas with each other about how you can make your respective dreams come true. If it seems like your dreams can't or won't come true, work together to come up with ways to deal with barriers.
- Volunteer together for a serving project that benefits others in the community.
- Enjoy your time together and have fun!

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