

How to Be A Patriot Pairs Mentor

1. The Most Important Factor in Predicting Mentoring Success: Relationship...Relationship...Relationship

While the Patriot Pairs Mentoring Program is an academic mentoring program, its success relies, as in all mentoring, on the establishment of a strong personal bond between the mentor and the mentee. We have learned, through many years of experience in this and other programs, **that a teenager will only listen to you about academics and school after they feel bonded enough with you to care what you think and value what you think about them.** You do not need to be, and you should not be, your mentee's best friend, teacher, parent or social worker. You **do** need to become a respected adult in your mentee's life, and your mentee needs to:

like you

trust you

feel like you have his or her back

feel like you are reliable

feel like you care about him or her

feel like you are on his or her side

feel like you will not give up on him or her, even when he or she makes mistakes

The beginning of any new relationship can be awkward, and a mentoring relationship is no exception. Neither you nor your mentee knows what to expect. You may each have ideas about the other, either from stereotypes or from things that you've heard about people in similar circumstances. Follow these guidelines to build a strong relationship with your mentee:

- **Be there.** This is your most important job. When you show up for every meeting, on time, 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. Many mentees have had prior experience with adults who have not followed through.
- **Be a role model.** Your mentee may not have an adult in his or her life who can serve as an academic role model—an adult who can demonstrate how to be a successful student, including the importance of being on time for every class, being organized, keeping track of assignments, turning in work when due, advocating for him or herself with teachers, counselors and others, choosing the classes necessary for success, being respectful to adults who they need help from, and taking responsibility. An essential part of your role is leading by example. By becoming a mentor, you've already modeled a very important quality: caring about another. Here are some other ways you can be a positive role model for your mentee:
 - Demonstrate to your mentee the personal characteristics of consistency, dependableness, and trustworthiness. These are traits that are necessary for a good mentor/mentee relationship, and that teenagers can learn from watching an adult. Show up for your mentoring sessions each week and on time. Follow through on

promises that you make to your mentee and, except in the case of the few legal situations when legal reporting is required, keep to yourself any confidences that your mentee shares with you.

- 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.
 - Set goals with your mentee and monitor effort toward achieving them, obstacles encountered, and ways to overcome barriers.
 - Demonstrate having a positive outlook.
 - When there is an issue with a teacher or other adult, demonstrate for your mentee how to brainstorm and resolve the issue by conversing with the teacher or other adult in a calm, constructive way. Demonstrate how to pursue grievances without becoming belligerent. Teach your mentee about taking matters "up the food chain" when necessary.
 - Demonstrate problem solving skills. Mentees often think that there is no way to solve an academic problem such as forgetting to turn in an assignment or doing poorly on a test. Meet with teachers with your mentee to demonstrate that a problem often can be resolved by communication and self-advocacy. Many teachers will work with students who ask by giving partial credit for late assignments, letting students retake tests, etc. If the problem does not get resolved to your mentee's satisfaction, model dealing with disappointment in a respectful and constructive way.
 - Demonstrate appropriate behavior. Never use profanity or other inappropriate speech in front of your mentee. Exhibit patience and courtesy. Model using academic language and being respectful of adults in the school building.
 - Role play difficult conversations that mentees need to have with friends, teachers or parents. Help your mentee plan possible ways to overcome obstacles. Model how to address problems with adults, but never make inappropriate remarks about your mentee's family, teachers or the school or its staff.
 - Have open-ended conversations with your mentee. Model expressing and supporting opinions. Ask your mentee what he or she thinks about current events, and ask him or her to tell you why. Talk about future goals and dreams. Some mentees may not have these kinds of conversations in their homes.
- **Establish Trust.** Trust comes from a sense of comfort with another person, and comfort comes from repeated experience. Do less talking and more listening so your mentee can share his or her views and concerns with you. Don't expect too much too soon. Trust is developed over time. It can take some teenagers quite a while to open up to and trust a mentor. Be considerate and respectful of your mentee's boundaries, and let the relationship grow over time. Demonstrate to your mentee that you can be trusted. Unless legal reporting is required, keep your conversations with your mentee confidential. Some mentees have been let down by adults in the past, and may act out and test boundaries. Hang in there and demonstrate to your mentee that you are sticking with the relationship.
 - **Be Positive.** Keep a positive outlook. This relationship is new for both of you. There will be all kinds of new experiences that arise because you are in this new relationship. Your mentee will not always be truthful about what is going on at

school, and will not follow through on every promise he or she makes to you. This does not mean he or she is a bad person—just a teenager testing boundaries. If you look for the positive aspects of situations as they occur, you will keep yourself and your mentee moving forward. Be an advisor, not a parent, teacher or preacher. Support, positive reinforcement and expressions of pride are much more effective than criticism. Encourage, praise and compliment – even the smallest of accomplishments.

- Be yourself. You don't need to be "cool" or like the same things as your mentee. Your mentee will bond with you because you consistently care about him or her. Let your mentee know a little about who you are. This is both of your opportunity to learn about someone from a different background.
- Be Patient and Realistic. Your student probably is academically behind in one or more areas and may not have good study and academic or other skills and habits. This situation developed over a number of years and will not be magically fixed overnight. You are mentoring to help your mentee make improvements, both as an individual and as a student, in whatever way that he or she can. Be gentle with your freshman as he or she adjusts to a large and overwhelming new school environment. Do not give your mentee ultimatums. They don't work! Hang in there and offer support and guidance. Ask your mentee how he or she is doing and ask what you can do to help. We want to have high expectations for our mentees—that they can graduate from high school and attend appropriate post-secondary programs. We want to believe in in our mentees' ability to succeed, and help our mentees acquire this belief about themselves. We don't, however, expect perfection from your mentee or from youjust progress toward becoming a better student, setting achievable goals, self-advocacy, responsibility and a plan for the future.
- Understand Your Limitations. Be a sympathetic listener, and help your mentee determine what additional help he or she may need. You are not a psychologist but GW High School has one. You are not a social worker but you can set the mentee up to meet with the school's social worker. If tutoring is needed, you can help your mentee arrange for that. There are many resources available to you and your mentee through the Patriot Pairs Mentoring Program and through GW High School. Your job is not to fill all of your mentee's needs. Your job is to help your mentee figure out what additional help is necessary and available and help your mentee acquire that help. If you are not sure how, contact Caren. If your mentee seems to have serious, non-academic problems that require immediate help, such as mental health problems, drug or alcohol issues, family-related concerns, homelessness, or hunger, contact Caren right away and the two of you will figure out how to get appropriate adults at GW High School involved.
- Don't Expect Thanks. Our mentees are teenagers. Some teenagers may never say "thank you," no matter how appreciative they are. You may get a hug or a smile instead of words—that is just as good!
- Trust But Verify. There are days on which your mentee will tell you he or she has no homework to work on, no test to study for and no long term project to plan. When you see 0's on Infinite Campus, your mentee may tell you that the teacher just hasn't entered grades yet. Your mentee may tell you that he or she always attends class. Remember, you are dealing with a teenager. Check Infinite Campus regularly. Make sure that your mentee knows that you will follow up on answers that seem unrealistic. Contact teachers if you are not sure that you have the full story about

what is going on in a class. Email usually works best and all teacher email addresses are available on Infinite Campus and under "Contact Us" on the GW website at <http://gwhs.dpsk12.org>. Teachers are required by school policy to respond to all emails within 24 hours. If you are having trouble getting information from a teacher, please let Caren know.

- Have fun! Being a part of this program is something the mentees and their families really want and need. The mentees feel fortunate and excited to have a mentor! So have a good time, relax, and get to know a new and interesting young person!