

#4 – Building Trust & Attachment with Your Mentee

Every mentoring relationship cycles through phases as it matures. These phases tend to come in order, but there are many times when you'll feel you've looped back or jumped ahead.

Phase 1: *Beginning the Relationship*

Early on, you and your mentee will be testing the water with each other. Your mentee may feel nervous or wary, and may be on their best behavior for you. They may also get frustrated if things don't go as expected. You, on the other hand, may want to "fix" everything. You may find yourself adjusting your initial expectations about being a mentor once you've experienced it for real. Both of you may be trying to bridge each others' age, cultural, and lifestyle differences as well as finding things in common.

Strategies

- ◆ Be consistent and reliable.
- ◆ Show you are willing to listen.
- ◆ Focus on doing things *with* rather than *for* your mentee.
- ◆ Be aware of your own feelings about age, cultural, and lifestyle differences.
- ◆ Be nonjudgmental.
- ◆ Reach out, be available.
- ◆ Be open and honest about what you can, cannot, or have to do.

Phase 2: *Building Trust*

Now that the two of you know each other better and have some shared experiences, you and your mentee may experience greater trust. Your mentee may be opening up, having more self-esteem or simply feeling more confident because you have demonstrated that you care. As a result, your mentee may begin sharing more information, and perhaps relying on you more for support and validation. In this stage there is the possibility of your mentee becoming over-dependent upon you. You may be feeling overwhelmed by the issues and needs of your mentee, or you may be feeling more satisfaction with the relationship.

Strategies

- ◆ Be patient.
- ◆ Expect setbacks.
- ◆ If you think your mentee is becoming too dependent, set limits around the frequency and duration of visits and encourage him to broaden his support network.
- ◆ Be involved, yet keep perspective.
- ◆ Continue to be consistent and reliable.
- ◆ Continue to treat your mentee as capable.

Makes You Think

Research by Search Institute (www.search-institute.org) shows that only 20% of young people think that adults in the community value youth.¹ You can strengthen your mentoring relationship by demonstrating how much you value your mentee's ideas, perspectives, and companionship!

Phase 3: *Testing the Relationship*

Now that rapport and trust are built, it is typical for the mentee to start testing boundaries, perhaps to see just how much staying power the relationship really has. This testing may include inappropriate requests of you, or even resentment or hostility toward you. You may start resenting what seems like negative behavior, and you might also feel caught in the middle between your mentee, your mentee's family, and other service providers.

Strategies

- ◆ Don't take testing personally.
- ◆ Reinforce limits, if necessary.
- ◆ Again, continue to treat your mentee as capable.
- ◆ Reaffirm your intention to remain in the relationship.

Phase 4: *Increasing Independence*

Once you have come through the trust building and relationship testing, you may find your mentee becoming less dependent on you and finding other sources of support. On the upside, you might see an increased self-worth in your mentee. However, setbacks are still possible during this stage as your mentee may take bigger risks in life and in the relationship. As a result of all this, you may feel discouraged or less needed during this stage.

Strategies

- ◆ Point out the shifts you are observing in behavior and reinforce your mentee's efforts to seek support from others.
- ◆ Continue to support your mentee while encouraging independence.
- ◆ Expect some setbacks as a natural part of this stage.

When a Mentoring Relationship Ends-

Mentoring relationships evolve over time, and some eventually come to an end. Whatever the reason, it's important to talk with your mentee about the time you spend together, the experiences you had, things you learned, what you liked and didn't like, and so on. If appropriate, leave your mentee with some sort of memento, even just a note or greeting card, of your time together.

Try It!

Research shows that empowering your mentee to select activities you'll do together is one factor that contributes to a strong, successful match. At your next visit create two "idea" jars, one filled with low-cost things that you'd like to do, the other filled with low-cost things that your mentee would like to do.

Then draw and do one activity from each jar at each visit.