

Asset-Building Ideas for Mentors

Mentoring relationships can be found in all different walks of life among people of many different ages and at many different stages of life. Working adults sometimes have a more experienced coworker 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, religious leader, 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 easily, almost “naturally,” when a good 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 a one-day 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, friends who also mentor, a religious leader, or another trusted person.
- Show your mentee that he or she is a priority by keeping in touch or getting together on a regular basis (such as monthly, biweekly, weekly, or daily). Even if you cannot be together very often, write letters, 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.
- Be flexible. If your mentee has ideas about things to do or ways to do them, let her or him take the lead. You don’t need a careful plan to build assets.
- 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 hobbies. Help her or him find opportunities to get involved with organized activities or programs that use or develop those interests and hobbies. For example, if he or she likes writing poetry, look for creative writing classes or workshops through community education or youth programs.
- Talk about and model your personal values. Encourage your mentee to think about the values that are important to her or him and how those values impact behavior and decisions.

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- Share a new experience together, such as fishing, visiting a local museum (some have days when entrance fees are waived or reduced), taking a class, eating at a new restaurant, watching a movie and talking about the asset-building themes in it, flying a kite, renting a canoe or paddleboat, or snowshoeing or hiking.
- Practice life skills together. For example, 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 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.
- Enjoy your time together and have fun!