READY TO USE MENTORING

# Rules for mentoring (and parenting too)

Maybe you’ve been mentoring young people for years or maybe you’re just starting out. Maybe you’ve been a parent to a young person for a long time or maybe your child has just hit secondary school. Whatever your situation, it never hurts to go over some basic guidelines for practise. How many of these form part of your mentoring or parenting? What might you need to revisit?

## Never interrupt

Even if you feel what they are saying is ridiculous / untrue / unfair / misguided., always let them finish their sentence before you begin to form your reply. The ‘right’ answer is not always the most important thing. Whether they are right or wrong will *never* be more important than whether or not they listened to.

## Clearly vocalise expectations

In a mentoring context this might mean they should text you if they can’t make a session, communicating appropriate boundaries and timescales…In a parenting context this might mean specifying contributions to the running of the house, attitudes and vocabulary that are not OK, when and how communication will happen. But do this is in a calm, preferably fun conversation and write it down – do not try this when angry, tired or as a response to something that has annoyed you. Take them for out for a doughnut to do it! Include positives.

## Ask them about their expectations of you

Give them opportunity to give you feedback about your performance and ask what you could do better for them.

## Review and affirm progress

In mentoring, regularly refer to goals and conversations you have had previously and vocalise progress (or lack of). Decide together if more work needs to be done (or not). Do not just let old issues, goals or action points slide out of view unaddressed. In parenting this means constantly verbalising progress, affirming positive behaviour and ways they have learned and grown and how they did that.

## Find ways to pass over responsibility

Treating a mentee as an equal and anticipating mature behaviour from them is empowering (even more so in a family context). Find ways to empower them in the relationship and actions; authorise them to take control of the situation and lead aspects of the relationship; invest, and expect them to surprise you. Speak to the more mature version of them than the one in front of you. In parenting this is hard as there is so much emotional baggage, but work at giving them space and opportunity to surprise you. Allow them to see you doing this and they will grow into that space.

## Choose your moments

Don’t shy away from talking about the hard stuff. Small talk is easy, facing up to feelings around grief and bereavement, disappointment, body image, sex and sexuality, friendships and relationships, depression and anxiety and so on. Do *not* come with an agenda. Instead, regular, open questions about tough and personal stuff (as appropriate) will cut to the chase. They will soon learn that this is the level of the relationship and will begin to speak comfortably in response. In parenting it must become normal and unawkward – don’t allow them to see if you are embarrassed (or at least be honest about it if you are), as how you come across will set the tone for how they feel and respond too. Be confident, conversational and matter of fact and they will follow suit. Do not be judgemental and remember to allow them to explore and process things out loud.

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