

Getting Started – Relationship-Building

Quality relationships cannot be forced; they occur naturally. Mentors need to realize that relationships will happen over time; some will develop quickly while others may take awhile to establish. Ongoing positive, solution-oriented communication and outreach to students influences the relationship.

Relationship-Building Characteristics

The following set of characteristics describes how Check & Connect mentors build these trusting relationships:

Acceptance and accountability

Mentors are nonjudgmental and use non-blaming communication. They accept the student where he/she is. There is no attempt to “fix the student.” Rather, the focus is on improving the educational performance of the student. Mentors accept students, but do not necessarily condone their behavior. They hold students accountable for their actions using a problem solving dialogue and action planning. Mentors clearly articulate expectations for student behavior and model them via follow-through with the student.

Commitment and persistence

Mentors realize that trusting relationships require hanging in there with the student — even when the student’s behavior is not changing or the student seems directionless. Mentors do not give up; they continue to problem solve, develop action plans, and communicate with the student. Persistence is integral to the relationship.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is absolutely critical for establishing trust. Students will not trust their mentor unless they believe that the mentor is trustworthy. Advisors discuss confidentiality with the student. They abide by the principle of who “needs to know.” It is important to note that advisors are mandated reporters. Should it be necessary for a mentor to report a situation, he/she would explain the circumstance to the student.

Respect and expectation

Mentors hold clear expectations for students. They believe that students can be engaged learners and attain personal goals. The emphasis is on what is wanted from the student, not what the student has done wrong in the past. Mentors provide the supports (or see that they are provided) needed by the student to reach the stated expectation. Respect for the student is characterized by ensuring that there are supports for students to reach academic and social expectations for school performance.

Role modeling

Quite simply, the mentor models the desired behavior for the student. In particular, mentors model how to problem solve. They remain calm and professional, talk through situations, and use think-aloud procedures for both academic and behavioral concerns. Mentors model optimism — there is a way to figure this situation out and to advance the student toward greater productivity in the school setting.

Relationship-Building Tips

- The first few conversations with your mentees are all about building trust with the student and establishing a positive relationship.
- Rather than providing a script for the conversation, the conversation starters below are just ideas for getting to know your mentees and to spark a conversation.

- You need not stick to the questions provided or get to all questions. Try to keep the conversation flowing naturally, and if the student wants to talk more about a particular topic, spend some time exploring that subject with him/her.
- Provide as much information about yourself as you are comfortable sharing. If you ask a student a question, be prepared to answer it yourself. Establish the two-way nature of the relationship early on.
- Keep conversations positive, particularly the first few times you talk with a student.
 - It's OK to get to challenges the student faces, but don't allow rumination on these challenges. Establish a positive, optimistic tone from the beginning.

Relationship-Building Conversation Starters

Conversations about interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like to do in your free time? • What are some of your hobbies? • What extracurricular activities are you involved in, in school or outside of school? • What books do you like? • What music do you like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What television shows or movies do you like? • What are you good at? What are your talents? (Be sure to prompt students if they aren't providing any ideas. Are they good at art? Music? Sports? Making friends? Video games?)
Conversation about Check & Connect	<p>Within the first conversation, share information about Check & Connect: "I work with a program called Check & Connect. Check & Connect is a program that will help you have a good school year. I will meet individually with you once a week at school. In these meetings we'll discuss your attendance and academic progress. For areas of concern, we'll problem solve together and help you get the resources or services you need to help you be successful. I will work with you regularly for the entire school year. Do you have any questions about Check & Connect?"</p> <p>Answer the student's questions.</p>	
Conversations about goals and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want to do after high school? • What do you want to do for a career? • What do you do well? • What do you wish you could do better? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What people in your life can you turn to when you need help? • What would make this the best school year yet? • What concerns do you have about [10th] grade?
Conversations about school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your favorite subject or class? • What subject or class are you best at? • What is something you like about school? • What is a positive school memory you have? • Which school year was your best? Why? • Who is/was your favorite teacher and why? 	<p>After a few conversations with the student, you can talk more about challenges they've faced at school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about going to school? • What is difficult for you at school? • What are some challenges you've encountered in the past at school? • What would you change about school if you could?