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INTRODUCTION

When STEM professionals serve as volunteer mentors in youth programs, they add major value to the program. STEM professionals serve as role models that youth can aspire to emulate, and they are uniquely positioned to teach youth about possible STEM career paths. STEM professionals can also support inquiry-based learning and promote other STEM-based skills. These STEM professionals benefit, too, through the rewarding experience of giving back to the community and by serving as ambassadors for their employers.

This guide is aimed at STEM professionals who are becoming volunteer mentors in youth programs. This toolkit begins with an overview of Why STEM Mentors Matter, then it walks STEM mentors through the various facets of the STEM mentor experience. The areas covered here include:

- **Understanding Your Role:** This orientation checklist ensures that you cover the most important topics during your site-based volunteer orientation.

- **Mentoring Strategies:** These guides will help you with youth-friendly communication, leading an activity, supporting youth learning, the stages of youth development, and behavior management strategies.

- **Policies for Youth Work:** This section describes how you should conduct yourself to keep youth safe and healthy.

This toolkit was developed for OregonASK to support their work to strengthen afterschool and summer programs, especially in STEM. OregonASK is a collaboration of public and private organizations and community members that seek to support, expand, and educate on quality expanded learning opportunities for children, youth, and families throughout Oregon. The STEM Volunteer Toolkit builds on previous work by OregonASK and includes research and material from the Institute for Youth Success and other sources. Program providers can and should adapt the tools provided in this guide and use them in their programs. However, this guide should not be construed to constitute legal advice.
An additional guide, the **STEM Volunteer Management Toolkit**, is available to support youth program coordinators as they incorporate STEM professionals as volunteer mentors in their programs.
WHY STEM MENTORS MATTER

STEM industries need bigger and more diverse workforces.

By 2020, the US will have

1 million

more computing jobs

than graduates to fill them

In 2016, women earned just

And underrepresented minorities earned just

20.9%

of engineering bachelor’s degrees

21.6%

of science and engineering bachelor’s degrees

When STEM professionals mentor youth, they help them...

↑ knowledge

... of STEM careers

... of lesser-known STEM fields

Develop a positive STEM identity

Youth are more likely to pursue a STEM career.

Representation of women and people of color in STEM improves.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE

Your on-site orientation is critical to understanding your role as a volunteer mentor. Since orientations vary from site to site, this checklist can help you identify questions you may need to ask during your orientation.

- **Organization/program background**
  What is the history of the organization and program?
  What is/are the mission, vision, values, and goals?

- **Facility/program space tour**
  Take a tour of the facility, especially the spaces used by the program.
  Meet the staff, including custodians, teachers, and program staff.
  How do I access the building and sign in?
  Where should I store personal belongings, such as my coat or purse?

- **Schedule**
  What is the program schedule? What will I do during each block?
  What time should I arrive and leave?

- **Staff and volunteer roles**
  What is my role as a volunteer in the program versus the role of staff?
  What are our respective roles during lessons/projects? In behavior management?
  What rules must youth follow? What am I responsible for enforcing?
  What should I do if I suspect a youth is being abused?

- **Appropriate conduct**
  What rules of professionalism (dress code, phone use, etc.) should be followed?
  What are the expectations relative to absences and timeliness?
  What is the social media policy? Can I take and share photos?
  What are the policies on safe practices with youth (communication, safe touch, etc.)?
☐ **Miscellaneous**

What are the safety rules in the space?
What name should I go by with youth? (ex: Mr. Bill)
What social media accounts do I want the program to tag for my company?
What procedure should I follow if I have a grievance?

☐ **Formalizing role and next steps**

What steps (including forms) do I need to complete to finalize my commitment?
Is there a volunteer handbook?
What contact information should I have to reach the program and staff?
MENTORING STRATEGIES

As a new STEM mentor, you bring STEM expertise to your new role but may not have much experience working with youth. This section guides you through strategies for effectively promoting STEM learning:

- **Youth-Friendly Communication:** Many STEM professionals are not used to discussing their work with youth. This resource helps you speak in a way that resonates with youth.

- **Leading an Activity:** As a STEM mentor, you may or may not be asked to lead an activity. If you are, this guide walks you through important considerations, especially how to keep youth engaged.

- **Supporting Youth Learning:** When working with youth, many of our natural instincts can be counterproductive. A better understanding of growth mindset and inquiry-based learning will help you support the learning of the youth in your program.

- **Stages of Youth Development:** These charts highlight the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development stages that youth pass through as they age.

- **Behavior Management Strategies:** These techniques will help you retain control in your classroom, whether or not program staff are present.

In addition to these tools, the Techbridge Role Models Matter Toolkit¹ has a wealth of resources to support STEM professionals as they volunteer in youth programs.

¹ https://www.techbridgegirls.org/rolemodelsmatter/toolkit/
Youth-Friendly Communication

Often, STEM professionals are so accustomed to talking about their work with colleagues and other adults that they do not know how to communicate effectively with youth. The National Academy of Engineering\(^2\) makes these recommendations for sharing your work with youth:

- **Don’t** imply that STEM is only for people who “love” math and science.
- **Don’t** focus on “in-the-weeds” details of day-to-day work.
- **Don’t** use overly technical language that is not audience appropriate.
  - You can use some technical jargon, but make a point to define it in a youth-friendly way, and limit it to 3-5 terms.
- **Do** prioritize these messages that inspire interest:
  - STEM professionals are creative problem-solvers.
  - STEM professionals make a world of difference.
  - STEM is essential to our health, happiness, and safety.
  - STEM helps shape the future.

ROLE MODEL INTRODUCTIONS

You can practice youth-friendly language by rehearsing introducing yourself to a group of youth. Techbridge\(^3\) offers the following recommendations:

- Use youth-friendly language as you describe your work
- Share your academic/career path, including strategies to overcome challenges
- Show how your career helps others
- Make it personal, fun, and relatable by mentioning your hobbies and pets

Finally, remember to ask the program coordinator what name you should go by in the program. While you may be accustomed to using your first name, program norms may dictate that you go by Mr. Bill or Mr. Smith instead. Make a point to also ask how you should address other volunteers and program staff in front of the youth.

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\(^2\) [http://engineeringmessages.org](http://engineeringmessages.org); these messages are adapted here to reflect STEM more broadly.

\(^3\) [https://www.techbridgegirls.org/rolemodelsmatter/tool/hosting-your-own-rmm-training/](https://www.techbridgegirls.org/rolemodelsmatter/tool/hosting-your-own-rmm-training/)
Leading an Activity

Depending on the program in which you are volunteering, your mentoring role may involve leading an activity or a lesson. A few key strategies can make all the difference in whether the experience is fun and productive or chaotic and unsuccessful. They largely revolve around the issue of engagement, an essential element to a successful lesson. In planning your activity, remember this formula:

**Disengagement → Boredom → Misbehavior**

This concept should inform your decision-making as you plan your activity. Here are some tips for each part of your lesson:

**INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS**

- **Limit the length of the introduction and instructions:** Youth have short attention spans, especially during whole-group instruction. Research shows⁴ that off-task behavior increases among youth after ten minutes of instruction time. A common mistake among first-time teachers is to allow too much time for introductions, teaching, and directions; as time wears on, misbehavior can crescendo to the point of chaos by the time you are ready to explain the instructions for the hands-on activity. Limit the length of this initial “talk” portion, and be ready to advance more quickly if you sense you are losing youth’s attention.

- **Add interaction to the introduction and instructions:** Youth disengage when they are not actively involved. Be wary of get-to-know-you activities in which youth merely listen to their peers for extended periods of time. As you introduce yourself and deliver any instructional content, make it as interactive as possible; for instance, rather than simply lecture, ask youth questions or poll them periodically by having them raise their hands.

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• **Be enthusiastic**: An engaging presenter staves off disengagement. Show energy and passion for your topic.

• **Finish the instructions before passing out materials**: Having something in their hands can be distracting for youth. Once you start passing out materials, they often stop listening. Similarly, even having the materials set out in the middle of the table can be distracting. Give clear instructions about the project youth will be working on, *then* pass out materials (or have an ordered system for youth to get what they need).

**HANDS-ON ACTIVITY**

• **Plan an activity with the right level of challenge**: When an activity is too easy, youth become bored. When it is too hard, they get frustrated and disengaged – and then bored. Boredom often leads to being off-task and misbehaving. Take care to pick an activity with the right level of challenge. Experienced program staff can help you evaluate your activity, and the internet has a wealth of resources with age-appropriate activities.

• **Pick the right group size for the project**: The right group size is key to maintaining engagement. When there are too many youth in a group, not everyone can be active at once, and some youth disengage and get bored. In deciding group size, you also must evaluate how many groups you can support, both in your teaching capacity and in terms of the amount of equipment and supplies you have.

• **Test the activity in advance**: Potential pitfalls in an activity can only be discovered by trying it out. For instance, a project may require you to poke a hole in the bottom of a plastic cup, but you discover that that cracks it instead, ruining your project. A poorly conceived project can lead to frustration and boredom.

• **Minimize inactive time**: Youth get bored when they are not actively engaged. This can occur when a group finishes early, when they are waiting for a supply or assistance, or when they cannot work because something has gone wrong (for instance, they are doing internet-based work and the Wi-Fi goes down). Advanced planning for such scenarios allows you to minimize inactive time in
the first place and prepares you to redirect youth when the unexpected happens.

CLEAN-UP AND REFLECTION

• **Save time for clean-up and reflection:** A common mistake for new instructors is running out of time for clean-up and reflection. Keep your eye on the clock during the hands-on activity, and make sure to stop early enough to have time for these two important tasks.
Supporting Youth Learning

GROWTH MINDSET

STEM mentors can play an important role in helping youth develop the growth mindset that is necessary for future success. According to researcher Dr. Carol Dweck,\(^5\) a growth mindset is the internal belief that you can expand your skills and knowledge through effort, perseverance, and the right strategies. People with fixed mindsets, on the other hand, believe abilities are innate and predetermined. Youth with fixed mindsets limit their own learning because they avoid challenges, give up easily, see effort as pointless, and ignore constructive criticism.

As a STEM mentor, you can help youth develop a growth mindset through the following strategies:

- **Use encouragement rather than praise:** In her research,\(^6\) Dr. Dweck found that children who were encouraged after a success were more likely to attempt harder challenges than children who were praised. Encouragement recognizes effort and focuses on the process that led to the outcome. Praise focuses on the outcome and applauds the person. Praise drives youth to seek external validation and to avoid failure. Encouragement helps them develop internal motivation and focuses on the strategies that made them successful.

Here are some examples of encouraging phrases\(^7\) that can be used in lieu of praise:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encouragement</th>
<th>Praise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You worked really hard at that.</td>
<td>I like how you did that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It seems like you take pride in doing well.</td>
<td>I’m proud of you for getting that “A.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look how much effort you put into that project.</td>
<td>You are really awesome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can tell you have been practicing.</td>
<td>You are such a great artist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have made a lot of progress.</td>
<td>You are a natural.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^6\) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXrV0_3UyY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXrV0_3UyY)

\(^7\) These examples were assembled as part of the Youth Engagement, Motivation, and Development series under Oregon Mentors.
• **In the face of failure, focus on strategies:** Sometimes, failure results from poor strategies, not lack of effort. As Dr. Dweck said, “Students need to know that if they’re stuck; they don’t just need effort. You don’t want them redoubling their efforts with the same ineffective strategies. You want them to know when to ask for help and when to use resources that are available.”

• **Avoid and challenge “I’m not a math person”:** Fixed mindsets are particularly prevalent around math abilities. Youth may say, “I’m not a math person” about themselves or may have heard a parent or other person say it, and this often makes them internalize a fixed mindset around math. Challenge this idea when it is articulated, and focus instead on how youth can grow their math abilities. Furthermore, avoid making such blanket statements yourself, be it about math or another subject.

• **When youth question their ability, add “yet”:** When a youth says that they are not good at something or cannot do it, add “yet.” “I’m not good with computers... yet.” “I can’t figure this out... yet.” “I’m not a math person... yet.” This reminds them that they can improve their abilities by adopting a growth mindset.

**INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING**

Inquiry-based learning is a teaching method that “empowers students to ask questions and find the answers for themselves.” Rather than passively receive information, they create and discover information for themselves. In these learning environments, adult facilitators serve as “a guide on the side” rather than “a sage on the stage,” that is, these are learner-centered rather than teacher-centered environments.

Pedaste et al. identified five phases of inquiry:

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9 This recommendation was shared as part of the Youth Engagement, Motivation, and Development series under Oregon Mentors.


1. **Orientation**: This can be interactive and usually occurs during the introduction to a project.

2. **Conceptualization**: In this phase, youth generate questions, and possibly a hypothesis, to explore during the next phase.

3. **Investigation**: Youth explore their questions or test their hypotheses by exploring, experimenting, and interpreting data.

4. **Conclusion**: This is the product of the youth’s inquiry process.

5. **Discussion**: Youth reflect on and share what they learned.

During the investigation stage, the natural instinct of many STEM mentors is to act as a “sage on the stage” and direct youth to particular conclusions rather than allow them to discover conclusions themselves. These three tips can help you assist youth more effectively:

- **Ask purposeful questions**: Purposeful questions complement inquiry-based learning by using open-ended questions to help youth probe their own understanding and collaborate with their peers. If youth are testing water filter designs, you could ask, “What was it that trapped the most debris?” or “Why do you think the red food coloring was left behind in the dirty water?” You can then ask youth to expand their thinking with questions like “What is your evidence?” or “Why do you think that?”\(^{12}\)

- **Resist telling youth how to solve the problem**: When youth are stuck, the natural instinct of many STEM mentors is to tell youth how they would solve the problem. This takes the learning opportunity and autonomy away from youth (plus, sometimes the adult’s idea is not as effective as the one the youth would have come up with on their own). Instead of sharing your solutions, ask purposeful questions to help the youth solve it themselves: “Why do you think it

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is that the gravel is getting through your filter?” “How can you fix [the problem the youth identified]?"

- **Follow the “hands off” rule:** As a STEM mentor, keep your hands off youth’s projects as they are building them. When you are touching their project, it is generally because you are trying to have youth test your solutions rather than asking them purposeful questions to generate ideas for themselves. Furthermore, as Megan Davis of Techbridge explains, youth usually react to adults touching their projects in one of two ways: “Great, you do it and fix it for me” or “Hey! She just messed up my project! I wasn’t even doing that!”

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## Stages of Youth Development

### 6-8 Year Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They are mastering physical skills</td>
<td>• Their craft projects could end up messy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They have better control of large muscles</td>
<td>• Their activities need to be active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than small muscles</td>
<td>• Plan activities that practice both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>small muscles and large ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work on skills that can be completed successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by beginners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They are learning how to be friends</td>
<td>• Small group activities are best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and may have several best friends at one</td>
<td>• Break them into groups to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>encourage them to interact with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They are becoming more aware of peers and</td>
<td>different children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their opinions</td>
<td>• They need a lot of praise as they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They are family-oriented</td>
<td>are seeking adult approval</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They see fairness as being nice to others</td>
<td>• Focus on cooperative games in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so others will be nice to them</td>
<td>which every child wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They seek parental/adult approval</td>
<td>• Find ways to have more successes than failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They tend to behave in ways to</td>
<td>• Be available to discuss fears and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoid punishment</td>
<td>other issues important to them, no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>matter how small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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14 Adapted from https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/6_to_8_year_old_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- They base their thinking in reality and accuracy</td>
<td>- Reading to a child in this age group is effective and enjoyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They are learning to sort things into categories</td>
<td>- Help them predict answers to their questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They are beginning to develop a sense of cause and effect</td>
<td>- Be flexible – provide a variety of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Role playing and skits are a popular way to learn and interact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9–11 Year Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Their large muscle development, strength, balance, and coordination increase steadily</td>
<td>- Plan activities that allow them to move about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They are very active with lots of energy</td>
<td>- Vary activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Girls tend to mature faster than boys</td>
<td>- Avoid competitions between genders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Small muscle coordination increases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- They generally see adults as authority</td>
<td>- Clarify and enforce reasonable limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They follow rules out of respect for authority</td>
<td>- Plan plenty of time to be with individuals from their same gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They are loyal to groups, clubs, etc.</td>
<td>- Group activities are important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They enjoy code languages and passwords</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They identify with individuals of the same gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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15 Adapted from https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/9_to_11_year_old_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
• They approach solving problems by negotiating, compromising with peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They admire and imitate older youth</td>
<td>• Provide correction quietly one-on-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They are developing decision-making skills</td>
<td>• Give positive feedback and look for successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They are beginning to question authority</td>
<td>• Avoid generalized praise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They need involvement with caring adults</td>
<td>• Be present at group activities – visible but in the background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They find comparisons with others difficult to process</td>
<td>• Provide the safety net of an adult that will maintain boundaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They accept parent/family beliefs</td>
<td>• They still very much enjoy “hands-on” activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They admire and imitate older youth</td>
<td>• Help youth form groups with common interests or hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They are beginning to question authority</td>
<td>• Vary activities offered to engage rapidly changing interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They need involvement with caring adults</td>
<td>• They find comparisons with others difficult to process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 12–14 Year Olds

### Physical Development
- They experience rapid changes in physical appearance
- Changes in their appearance can occur at different rates, causing great concern

### Considerations for Mentors
- Plan activities that are not weighted toward physical powers
- Be patient with grooming behaviors that may seem excessive

### Social Development
- They are interested in activities involving individuals of the opposite sex
- They look more to peers than parents
- They seek acceptance and trust
- They tend to reject solutions from adults in favor of their own
- They question authority and family values

### Considerations for Mentors
- Provide activities to be with the opposite sex in healthy ways
- Encourage involvement in teen councils and planning boards
- Find time to talk with them individually to help them work through problems or discuss issues

### Emotional Development
- They compare themselves to others
- They see themselves as always center stage
- They are concerned about social graces, friends, being liked, etc.
- They strive for independence, yet want and need adult approval
- They seek privacy

### Considerations for Mentors
- Plan activities that do not compare one youth with another
- Avoid singling them out in front of others
- Provide opportunities to learn skills

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16 Adapted from https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/12_to_14_year-olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • They find justice and equality to be important issues  
• They are developing skills in logic  
• They can solve problems that have more than one variable  
• They are ready for in-depth, long-term experiences  
• They want to explore the world beyond their own community | • Provide opportunities to ask and question ways of doing things  
• Plan activities that require some length of time to complete  
• Ask questions to encourage predicting and problem solving  
• Let them serve as assistants  
• Offer more complex games |

15–17 Year Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • They are concerned about body image  
• They tend to have a realistic view of limits to which their body can be tested | • Provide experiences around body image, etiquette, grooming, etc.  
• Avoid comments that criticize or compare stature, size, or shape |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • They tend to romanticize  
• They make commitments  
• They desire respect  
• They want adult leadership roles  
• They can commit to follow-through | • Provide activities to explore job market, careers, etc.  
• Provide opportunities for them to plan their own program  
• Provide opportunities to talk about their own beliefs  
• Involve them as spokespersons for issues, programs, etc. |

17 Adapted from https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/15_to_17_year_olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They are beginning to accept and enjoy their own uniqueness but still seek approval from peer groups</td>
<td>• Plan activities that allow teens to try different roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They look for confidence of others in their decisions</td>
<td>• Be willing to be wrong; they will not put you on a pedestal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They can see self from the viewpoint of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They take fewer risks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They can initiate and carry out their own tasks without the supervision of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They search for career possibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual Development</th>
<th>Considerations for Mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• They are mastering abstract thinking</td>
<td>• Involve them in carrying out plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They enjoy demonstrating acquired knowledge</td>
<td>• Involve them in advisory groups, decision-making groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They can consider many perspectives of a given issue</td>
<td>• Offer vocational/career exploration activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They will lose patience with meaningless activity</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Behavior Management Strategies

**Be consistent:** Enforce rules and follow routines, such as transitions, consistently. Be true to your word; if you threaten a consequence, follow through with it, and if you give a time warning (e.g., “three minutes left”), stick to that time limit. Consistency creates a sense of safety for youth. Furthermore, if you are not consistent, youth try to see what they can “get away with.”

**Follow program rules and behavior strategies:** Support consistency across the program by using program rules and behavior strategies with youth. In particular, programs often have a preferred way of silently signaling for quiet, such as holding two fingers up in the air.

**Stand next to misbehaving youth:** Standing next to a misbehaving youth naturally tends to diminish misbehavior because you make them aware of your presence without interrupting the activity or causing a scene. The effect can be amplified by putting your hand on their desk or table. Since misbehavior can be driven by the desire for attention, this strategy is effective because it addresses the behavior without drawing more attention to the misbehaving youth. If the behavior continues, quietly address it with the youth in a way that does not draw further attention from the rest of the group.

**Prioritize engagement:** Youth misbehave when they are bored. If you are leading the group, be intentional about keeping youth actively engaged. Strategies for doing so are provided in the **Leading an Activity** section.

**Narrate the positive:** Describe the behavior you are looking for (“We need everyone in their seats with their mouths closed and eyes up here so we can get started”), then narrate the good behavior out loud as you see it (“I see Jamal has his eyes up here. ... Thank you, Jessica, for sitting quietly.”) This ensures youth understand the behavior
you are looking for, and the positive comment motivates other youth to demonstrate good behavior.\textsuperscript{18}

**Build relationships:** Youth are more likely to take direction from you when they trust and respect you. Be intentional about building relationships with them and showing you care.

**Support the lead instructor:** As a mentor, you may just assist with a group of youth while a staff person leads it. Even in this auxiliary role, you can still help with behavior management. If a youth tries to converse with you when they should be focused on the instructor, use silent signals to redirect their attention. If you see a youth misbehaving across the room, move next to the youth to use your proximity to calm their behavior.

POLICIES FOR YOUTH WORK

As a STEM professional, you may not be aware of the expectations incumbent upon those who work with youth. While your program coordinator should be your first resource regarding appropriate conduct, the following policies are reflective of best practices in youth programming:

- **Ethical Principles in Mentoring:** These principles outline the ethical requirements for a mentoring relationship that is healthy for youth.

- **Appropriate Conduct with Youth:** These rules promote youth safety by defining appropriate conduct relating to topics such as safe touch, transportation, and intoxicating substances.

- **Social Media and Photography:** These best practices promote youth safety and professionalism.
Ethical Principles in Mentoring

The ethical principles defined here combine to establish the premise that mentoring relationships should first and foremost do no harm. These principles\textsuperscript{19} were developed in collaboration with the code of ethics of the American Psychological Association (APA), mental health professionals, and formal mentoring program administrators.

1. **Promote the welfare and safety of the young person.**
   - Act in the interest of the youth.
   - Do not misuse your power.
   - Respect the boundaries of your mentor role. You are not a social worker or an ATM.
   - Follow best practices for keeping youth safe.\textsuperscript{20}

2. **Be trustworthy and responsible**
   - Respect your mentoring commitment. Premature termination of a mentoring relationship adversely affects youth.\textsuperscript{21}
   - If you must terminate your mentoring commitment prematurely, work with the program coordinator to responsibly transition out.

3. **Act with integrity**
   - Do not create false expectations.
   - Avoid causing minor disappointments, such as being late.
   - Respect the program’s rules.

4. **Promote justice for young people**
   - Be conscious of implicit biases (racial, cultural, etc.) you may have, and avoid discriminatory behavior.

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\textsuperscript{20} Sample policies (best practices) on appropriate touch, communication with youth, and other subjects are provided in this toolkit. Your program coordinator can clarify the program’s policies on youth safety.

5. Respect the young person’s rights and dignity

- Honor the self-determination rights of youth and their families.
- Respect youth’s personal information.
Appropriate Conduct with Youth

Sample Conduct Guidelines

CONTACT WITH YOUTH

Youth and mentors will not interact outside of the school, summer program, or after-school setting. The only exception to this is events and field trips organized by the program where volunteers are acting in their official capacity. Youth and mentors are never permitted to spend time together at a private residence. Youth and mentors are never permitted stay overnight together. Mentors should not be asked to mentor other siblings or bring other youth to group mentoring meetings.

Do not exchange personal information, including your phone number, with any students. Do not communicate with any student through social media. All communication with students must be conducted through [program name] events or activities. Please notify your program coordinator if a student initiates contact with you outside of the program.

SAFE TOUCH

Safe touch is a [program name] policy that is designed to protect the physical and emotional boundaries of both youth and adult participants. It is important to remember that as mentoring relationships occur between youth and adults, certain physical interactions are inappropriate. When reviewing safe touch with participants, consider family and cultural expectations around touch, and remember that you are acting in a professional – not personal – capacity.

Safe/appropriate touch is appropriate physical contact initiated by youth with adults or other youth such as:

- A side hug
- A high five or fancy handshake

Unsafe/inappropriate touch is:

- Physical contact initiated by the mentor beyond a handshake or high-five
- Full-frontal hugs or other types of touch not listed under “appropriate touch”
• Any form of touch that violates laws against sexual contact between adults and children

TRANSPORTATION

Volunteer mentors are not permitted to provide transportation to youth participants. There are no exceptions to this policy. While participating in this program, volunteers and youth should never spend time together in a personal vehicle. Transportation for youth to/from programming or special events will be provided by the program.

SELF-DISCLOSURE

Due to the nature of mentoring, it is expected that some personal information will be shared between youth and adults. The program expects that more personal information be shared from youth to the mentor and that less personal information will be shared from the mentor to youth.

While there are no specific topics that are prohibited from being discussed, the following guidelines will help to limit any detrimental over-sharing from the mentor to youth:

• Only share personal information that is relevant to the team experience and that you are comfortable sharing.

• Only share personal information when it serves as a benefit to youth and hold back from sharing any personal information that is being shared for the benefit of the individual sharing.

• Limit the amount of information shared regarding sensitive topics such as personal relationships, drugs, alcohol, sex, money, and a history of trauma or abuse. It is acceptable to say to youth that certain topics are too personal to discuss.

If ever in doubt on whether you should share personal information, it is best to hold back. It can always be shared later if it would be more appropriate at a different time. Conversely, once the information is shared, you cannot take it back. Please consult the program coordinator with any questions on self-disclosure.
USE OF ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND WEAPONS

It is the policy of [program name] to prohibit the use or possession of drugs, alcohol, and weapons during the program or any program-sponsored activities (including all mentoring activities). Any suspected violations should be reported to the program coordinator.

Alcoholic beverages, marijuana, and tobacco: No participant, staff person, or volunteer in [program name], regardless of age, will possess or consume any alcoholic beverages or marijuana while actively engaged or prior to actively engaging in mentoring activities, nor shall any participant, staff person, or volunteer endorse the use of alcohol or marijuana. Tobacco will not be used or endorsed in the presence of youth.

Drugs: No participant, staff person, or volunteer in [program name] will manufacture, possess, distribute, or use any illegal substance while engaged in mentoring or otherwise.

Weapons, firearms, and other dangerous materials: The possession or use of firearms, firecrackers, explosives, toxic or dangerous chemicals, knives, or other lethal weapons, equipment, or material while participating in mentoring activities is strictly prohibited.

Any violation of this policy will result in the immediate suspension and/or termination of involvement in this program. In addition, violations of this policy may result in notification being given to legal authorities that may result in arrest or legal action and may be punishable by fine and/or imprisonment.

UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

It is the policy of [program name] that unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated on the part of mentors or youth while participating in the program. A number of behaviors are regarded as incompatible with [program name] goals, values, and program standards and therefore are considered unacceptable and prohibited while participants are engaged in mentoring activities. These behaviors include:

- Unwelcome physical contact, such as inappropriate touching, patting, pinching, punching, and physical assault
• Unwelcome physical, verbal, visual, or behavioral mannerisms or conduct that denigrates or shows hostility toward any individual
• Demeaning or exploitative behavior of either a sexual or nonsexual nature, including threats of such behavior
• Display of demeaning, suggestive, or pornographic material
• Known sexual abuse or neglect of a child
• Denigration, public or private, of any youth’s parent/guardian or family member
• Intentional violation of any local, state, or federal law
• Driving under the influence of alcohol or any other mind-altering substance
• Possession of illegal substances

Any unacceptable behavior, as specified but not limited to the above, will result in a warning and/or disciplinary action including suspension or termination from participation in the mentoring program. Other behaviors, while not illegal, serve to disrupt and limit the success of the mentoring relationship. Therefore, the following guidelines must be adhered to during all mentoring activities:

Use appropriate, respectful language while talking to youth, co-mentors, or any person you speak with during a mentoring activity.

Wear appropriate clothing; this includes keeping undergarments cover and not wearing anything revealing.

Respect guidelines and boundaries that youth request from the other members of the mentoring team. 22

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Social Media and Photography

Sample Social Media Policy\textsuperscript{23}

This sample policy was adapted from one compiled by staff at the Institute for Youth Success using knowledge and examples from the field. Please refer to your governing board and/or legal counsel for support interpreting your organization’s social media policy. This sample document can be modified to fit the context of your specific youth program. This policy has been adapted from Friends for Youth Mentoring Institute.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

[Program name] recognizes many benefits of online communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We believe that these information-sharing tools can help us raise awareness about our organization and the importance of quality youth and adult partnerships. For these reasons, [program name] utilizes platforms including social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), news-sharing sites (program and community blogs), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, etc.), and other online communication platforms (webinars, podcasts, etc.) to communicate with our program participants, board members, community partners, and others.

While we recognize the inherent benefits of online communication platforms, we also understand that online communication can have negative, damaging or unintended effects when boundaries of public and private information sharing are blurred. For these reasons, we have developed a social media policy to protect program participants and organizational integrity.

Our program will rely on social media tools for marketing, outreach, event planning and networking; however, to protect the healthy boundaries of youth and adult mentoring relationships, **youth and adult volunteers are not permitted to engage in social media platforms with one another while participating in this program.**

If a program board member, employee, volunteer, youth participants or affiliate elects to participate in social media platforms on their personal time, we hold that this is the choice and sole responsibility of the individual. As program representatives, we request that participants, affiliates, and employees understand and adhere to the following Social Media CARE guidelines when interacting with the program through online communication platforms.

**Community – Appropriate – Responsibility – Exercise Common Sense (CARE)**

**Community – Honor It!**

Online communication platforms are an incredible resource for connecting and building community. Honoring community connection means using these mediums as ways to build support, positive interaction, and shared understanding. Because people bring unique experiences, attitudes, and beliefs to the realm of online interaction just as they do in person, some online dialogue may illustrate differences of opinion. When this happens, remember to articulate yourself clearly and responsibly by presenting information logically, not overreacting, and objectively clarifying misunderstandings or errors as necessary.

**Appropriate – Be It!**

If you choose to dialogue via an online communication platform on a personal level while “linked” or connected to this program, be considerate, fair, and appropriate with your posts. This means considering if the information you are sharing is something that you feel comfortable with this program and other individuals viewing before you post. Remember, all information shared through online communication platforms becomes public domain the instant it is posted. When sharing in your personal networks, remain professional at all times when discussing the program.

**Responsibility – Use It!**

You are responsible for the information you share through online communication platforms. Exercise responsibility for your communication by demonstrating accuracy, honesty, and integrity. When you make a mistake, acknowledge and correct it immediately. Think twice before posting. Always consider if you are comfortable with the information being connected back to you by anyone. **Honor**
**confidentiality and do not disclose an individual’s personal information.** If you are expressing your personal opinion while referencing this program, be sure to indicate that you are expressing a personal belief, opinion, or attitude and not the expressed opinion of the organization with which you are affiliated.

**Exercise Common Sense and Good Judgment – Show It!**

If you are unsure if you should post information using online communication platforms, err on the side of caution and use discretion. Understand that if you choose to connect with your program via online communication platforms, you are expected to share this information with the program. Recognize that [program name] will monitor social networking sites to protect program participants and organizational integrity. Failure to follow the program’s Social Media CARE guidelines may be cause for dismissal from the program.

If a program participant, employee or affiliate is concerned about their ability to follow this social media policy and these CARE guidelines, this program requires that they do not communicate electronically in a way that connects them to this program. This policy is established to protect participants and the integrity of this organization and to support healthy youth and adult relationships. [Program name] will select a staff member to manage and represent all program information via online communication platforms. This individual is responsible for managing all log-in information, marketing, and adherence to above guidelines.

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

**Do not take or share photos or videos of program youth without explicit permission from the program coordinator.** Some parents/guardians have elected not to sign media releases due to safety, religious, or personal preference reasons. Additionally, some parents/guardians may be uncomfortable with photos or videos of their child being shared outside of official program channels. Furthermore, before taking or sharing photos or videos of any adult in the program, ask for permission from that adult.