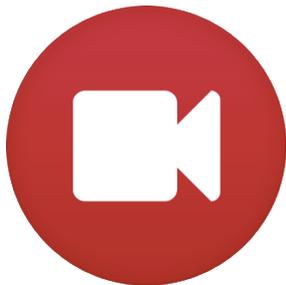




# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:

## How do I build a good relationship with my scholar?

**INTRO.** The stages<sup>2</sup> (p. 33-34) of building a mentor relationship with your scholar will likely include 1) acquainting yourselves, 2) outlining goals, 3) achieving goals, and 4) redefining the relationship. Here we summarize various attitudes, skills, and activities that go into building and growing a relationship with your scholar.



*Video 1: Mentor in Real Life<sup>1</sup>*

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“ I love my mentor! Being a scholar gave me the opportunity to bond with my mentor, who helped prepare me for college and whom I still consider my mentor today. ” – PSP Alum

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## I. CONNECT: HOW DO I CONNECT WITH MY SCHOLAR?

**CONSIDER.** Our initial training highlights the many roles of a mentor. Take a minute and consider the following as we begin to build meaningful relationships:

**How do you identify yourself within the many roles a mentor plays?**

**How does that impact what your relationship with your scholar looks and sounds like?**

**How long did it take for you to trust and feel connected to your mentor as a youth?**

**Did that trust remain, why or why not?**

## A. How do I build and grow trust?

**DO! BUILD TRUST.** When you choose to trust someone you are choosing to be vulnerable, to take a risk. Not all of us do that easily, especially if that trust has been broken in the past. You need to get to know each other and share values, interests, backgrounds, and hopes and dreams. Don't forget, trust and comfort builds over time.

***First*, start with your WHYs<sup>3</sup>.** “Can your scholar tell you care about them?” It is important that your actions and words are authentic and your presence is really about and for the scholar. It is about **BENEVOLENCE**. Know what your “WHY” is for being there. Share that and show it in action.

***Second*, trust is partly situational.** Your scholar may or may not have certain expectations of what you will provide as a mentor. “What role or roles does my scholar hope I will play?” That role may look a bit different than what you thought it would be. You are there to help them achieve ‘Core Program Goals’ and personal goals, but each of their needs for getting there may differ. Reflect on needs, strengths and challenges as you begin learning about them. You might not have expertise aligned with all of your scholar’s needs, but you can genuinely show that you care about them and will do what you can to help them meet those needs. Below is a basic example of how you go about reaching the same goal given varying scholar needs and expertise:

SCHOLAR A	SCHOLAR B
<b>Scenario:</b> Want to help your scholar participate and show leadership in at least one community service project (A Core Program GOAL!)	
Maria is passionate about a lot of things. She has trouble focusing and making decisions. She wants to do so much she has a hard time getting started. She already plays a sport and is on Student Council.	Anitza isn't involved in any extra-curricular activities yet, but is doing well in school. She doesn't really know what her interests include or where to begin.
<b><i>What are some of the things you might do to help meet your scholar's need in this situation?</i></b>	
<b><i>You might:</i></b> Create a list together of all the areas she is interested in that are related to community service. Then, explore different local organizations and prioritize a couple based on what service projects are available. Help her think through how she might meet more of her interests outside of school or when she goes to college.	<b><i>You might:</i></b> Explore her interests by researching some various organizations, watching YouTube videos about different cause areas, or using a resource from the ‘Personal Goals and Growth’ guide. Help or encourage her to engage in an activity or cultural experience that might support clarity around likes/dislikes. After she has some ideas, help her get involved in something at school.
<b><i>How else might your expertise, strengths, or skills help meet those needs?</i></b>	
<b><i>For ex: You have been an educator for 10+ years.</i></b>	<b><i>For ex: You work a lot with nonprofits in the area.</i></b>

<p>You may not have had a lot of time to focus on multiple areas of interest outside of school BUT you are an expert in planning and prioritizing! Help Maria use a strategy to prioritize her interests, and share how you find ways to incorporate your other interests [or responsibilities] with limited time.</p>	<p>Connect Anitza directly to some of the nonprofits you work with to meet with someone to hear more about their work. Do a site visit, or if there is an event you know about, ask if you and your scholar can join for a bit to check out the organization’s work.</p>
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**Third**, pay special attention to those values that you share in common with your scholar. Be consistent. Be honest and sincere. Being reliable is an important piece of the trust puzzle. Some of your scholars are learning how to trust, as they have been let down by adults in the past. Trust will come, but it can be a gradual process. Trust increases confidence. Confidence enables scholars to take more risks, seek you out when they are struggling, and celebrate with you when they are successful.

**DO! NURTURE TRUST.** This is done through your behaviors and through HOW you communicate (coming up next!). To nurture trust you can:

BE DEPENDABLE	
DO DEPENDABLE	<p><b>Respect their voice and perspectives</b></p> <p>Ex: Ask your scholar’s opinions. Demonstrate that you value your scholar’s ideas and perspectives by actively listening. When you are discussing sensitive topics, be aware of what and how you communicate.</p>
	<p><b>Do what you say you will do in a timely manner</b></p> <p>Ex: Respond to emails, texts, or phone calls from your scholar in a timely manner. If you are unavailable or don’t have answer to a question they have, shoot them a quick message letting them know you will be in touch soon!</p>
	<p><b>Keep confidences</b></p> <p>Ex: Let your scholars know that what they share is between the two of you. Also communicate, however, that you will keep what they tell you confidential, unless it involves their health or safety.</p>
<p><b>Have their back</b></p> <p>Ex: Here is a mentor talking about understanding his scholar’s point of view from <i>Making the Grade</i>: “If he told me there was a teacher picking on him, I would try to listen to his story first and make him know that I believe his story. That’s important with kids, especially adolescents... what happens is, if you say right away, “oh, you know, it’s probably because you did this” or “you might have done that”, then they don’t think that you’re on their side anymore and they put up a wall up. They don’t want to tell you another thing. But, if you give them the idea that you’re in their corner, and even if you don’t agree with what they did, you’re still in their corner, they’ll understand they can keep telling you things”.<sup>6</sup></p>	
<p><b>Be patient and help them learn from mistakes</b></p> <p>Ex: Allow your scholar to figure out for themselves if there is an activity or college that they don’t like. Exercise judgement on when to provide advice and when to allow them to learn through engagement. Give them a chance to show they can be responsible.</p>	
<p><b>Be open and helpful</b></p> <p>Ex: Provide them space to figure things out but don’t leave them totally alone. Help with homework when appropriate, support thoughts beyond college, and be a listening ear if that is what they need in that moment. Share your stories and perspectives on what you care about in life, and be open as they do the same.</p>	

**TIP:** Check out this [video](#)<sup>4</sup> on what trust is and how to build it; or this video called ‘Trust is a [SKILL](#)’<sup>5</sup>. **Need to REBUILD trust?** Focus on keeping your word, being honest, and giving without any strings attached. Check out [Search Institute’s](#)<sup>7</sup> list and, if needed, review [Principles of Effective Mentoring](#)<sup>8</sup> ‘Do’s and ‘Don’ts’ (pgs. 5-22).

## **B. How do I engage my scholar?**

**CONSIDER.** The mentor/scholar relationship is about knowing and meeting your scholar ‘where they are at’ and supporting them in getting to where they want to be. Through your relationship, you can motivate them to realize their potential and give them the tools they may otherwise not have to do so. Engaging them is also about realistic expectations and comparing those to their needs and relational expectations.

***First***, think about the moment you will meet your scholars for the first time.

**How do you think they will feel? What do you imagine each of them will be thinking?**

**What do you expect will change for your scholars as a result of your relationship?  
How will life be and/or feel different?**

***Next***, after you do the ‘Get to Know’ activity below, ask yourself these questions again, but from your scholar’s perspective.

**DO! GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.** Get to know your scholar’s interests, background and goals for this mentorship. Let your scholar get to know you too!

**Let’s get acquainted.** The below will help facilitate relationship development. Know though, that there is no formula! Every mentor and scholar relationship is different.

- Prepare before-hand.
- Do ice breaker activities in the beginning.
- Swap stories. Be careful to not make the meeting about you and don’t ask personal questions.
- Ask your scholars if they have had a mentor before. What do you they hope for in a mentor?
- Gauge what types of activities they like.
- Review how you will communicate (Via email? Text/phone?) and expectations for getting in touch or canceling.
- Choose a comfortable environment.
- Establish confidentiality and expectations.

**TIP: First meeting?** Not to worry! Here is a [SAMPLE](#)<sup>9</sup> (p. 29) first session. Check out a few of these “Getting to Know You” ice breakers: ‘Interest Worksheet 2’<sup>10</sup> (p. 65) and ‘Youth Survey!’<sup>11</sup> (A-11, A-21).

**TIP:** The foundations of your relationship begin on DAY 1. Your first meeting should include introductions, learning how to pronounce your scholar’s name, determining what method is used to communicate and expectations around cancellation notifications, an ice breaker activity to get to know one another, sharing your story, getting your scholars input for next month’s gathering, and ending on a positive note.

**CONSIDER.** Think back to when you were a kid. Visualize yourself at the same age as your scholar.

**What do you look for in a friend? What makes a good friend?**

**What did you do for fun? If you had a mentor, what did you do for fun with them?**

**BE! A FRIEND.** At the beginning of your relationships emphasize friendship and building that bond rather than worrying about checking items off your goal list. Remember, be a friend, not a parent or authority figure. Some of the things effective mentors do:

WHAT	HOW
<b>Provide encouragement</b>	<p><b>Convey assurance and acceptance.</b></p> <p>Ex: If you find out about a bad grade, ask how you can help. Recognize what the scholar has done well and let them know they can do this too. Offer concrete assistance such as helping with a report, help them understand the directions, or prompt them to figure out how they can make an assignment better by asking questions like “how can we be more specific?” or “what is another way to go about writing that?”, etc.</p>
<b>Honor commitments</b>	<p><b>Commit to maintaining the relationship and navigating through rough spots.</b></p> <p>Ex: Scholar is in the ‘testing’ phase and seems like they aren’t making significant progress. You stick by them, continue to initiate contact and take the lead on communication until your scholar gets back to a more collaborative stage.</p>
<b>Be reliable and considerate</b>	<p><b>Keep your word and be consistent.</b></p> <p>Ex: Show up on time. If you are running late, call or text ahead of time to inform your scholar.</p>
<b>Accept your scholar as is</b>	<p><b>Be non-judgmental in your responses; respect their choices.</b></p> <p>Ex: Reassure your scholars that you will be there for them. An example situation from a mentor: “He does confide in me quite a bit. More than I thought he would because there’s a lot of challenges. One time we were talking at my house while playing basketball. He was having a good time and then I think in the middle, things seemed to sort of go downhill for him. He had gotten in a fight that time and was suspended. I think he realized that he may have done something that would make</p>

	me think less of him. I told him that I was in this relationship for a long time, and he just broke out and smiled. I think he felt, “I really goofed, now this guy isn’t going to like me”, and I just happened to say the right thing. I really meant it—and I didn’t know how to get that across so I just told him, “I’m interested to see you when you’re 25 years old or something”; and he’s 15 right now. That to him meant a lifetime probably.” <sup>12</sup>
<b>Have realistic goals and expectations</b>	<b>The rewards of mentoring are often subtle and occur slowly.</b>  Ex: Remember that you were a teen once and with that can come additional challenges as you develop and change. Developing a trusting relationship will take time so don’t approach the relationship with specific goals aimed at changing your scholar. Focus on overall development, building a relationship vs performance, and encouragement and acknowledgement over preaching and artificial influence.
<b>Give advice sparingly</b>	<b>Focus on a developmental, cooperative and a youth-driven relationship whenever possible.</b>  Ex: If advice is given, keep it friendly and focused on identifying solutions. Guide them towards making their own decisions. Listen and let scholars control the direction of the conversation. Keep activities youth-centered and collaborative.
<b>Be vulnerable and authentic</b>	<b>Strategically use disclosure to increase the bond and strengthen trust.</b>  Ex: A scholar opens up to you about a situation that resonates with something from your life. Share appropriate information that will build connections, while being sensitive to the fact that your scholar’s feelings and actions may differ from your own. Be you! Never pretend to be or have gone through something you have not.

**LEARN MORE:** [READ](#)<sup>13</sup> specific things mentors said and did at EDNW, pgs. 5-22. [READ MORE](#)<sup>14</sup> here about building trust and how communication plays a role (discussed more below!).

**TIP:** Less successful mentors often have behaviors like those you can [read here](#)<sup>32</sup> (p. 49).

**DO! HAVE FUN.** Spending time with your scholar and doing things that they like to do helps show your scholar you care about them. They will recognize the attention you give them and your willingness to join them in having fun! Key things to remember:

- 1. Focus on spending time together.** Your time is a gift in and of itself and means a lot to scholars!
- 2. Engage in new experiences.** These are a core element of our program and key to engaging youth, especially those that rarely, if ever, have the chance to do something different and new. Use the ‘Core Program Guide’ to support cultural, social, and educational outings.

- 3. Do things they would like to do.** Ask your scholar what types of things they would like to do. Do the above, but be open to other fun activities. Have some backup ideas especially in the beginning of your relationship in case you get an “I don’t know”. Think about their likes and dislikes, past experiences, and future goals, and go from there if you need to.
- 4. Let kids be kids.** Your scholar’s age and life experiences will shape what fun means. A lot of times our kids don’t get to be free from the seriousness of school or home life. Allow them to feel relaxed, be themselves, and take some time off.

**LEARN MORE:** Get more details [HERE](#)<sup>15</sup> (p. 9-11). [SAMPLE](#)<sup>16</sup> (A-22) [Activities](#)<sup>17</sup> [HERE](#)<sup>18</sup> (p. 59).

**TIP:** Focus on having fun in the beginning especially. It will make it easier to move into more academic things if you take time for fun as well! We all need some time for play right?!? Also, your scholar could be reluctant to make suggestions and/or aren’t sure what possibilities exist. [This](#)<sup>19</sup> will help you with this challenge.

**CONSIDER.** Like other relationships, you will continuously be building the one with your scholar. However, in this case, it is primarily your responsibility. You will go through [stages](#)<sup>20</sup>; you will have awesome moments that will leave you excited and hopeful and you will encounter challenges. How you communicate, discussed next, will help create the encouraging moments and mitigate the challenges. It is good to reflect throughout the initial building stage. Such as:

**How well do I understand my scholar’s overall expectations for our mentoring relationship?**

**How are our personalities and interests similar? Different? (i.e. introvert/extroverted; low-key, animated; reflective, spontaneous; gentle, straight-forward, etc.)**

**After you’ve spent more time with your scholar – now, how would you describe your role as a mentor? How has that changed from your original expectations? How did you, or will you, adjust?**

**Do you have any tendencies that might make it more difficult for you to develop a strong friendship with your scholar? (For ex: do you like to talk a lot more than you like to listen?) What will you do to overcome those tendencies?**

**LEARN MORE:** This entire [RESOURCE](#)<sup>21</sup> helps you get started, communicate, and move from a good to great relationship with your scholar.

## II. COMMUNICATE: HOW DO I COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY?

### A. How do I create open dialogue?

**DO! CREATE AVENUES.** Create avenues for open-ended conversation and two-way communication. You can support ongoing conversation and help your scholar feel comfortable using some of the following strategies:<sup>22</sup>

1. Use “What” and “How” to ask questions so your scholar has to say more than “Yea” or “Nah”.

You might ask something like: “What do you like to do with your friends? How would your friends describe you?” Instead of asking, “How was school today?” ask, “What did you do in school?” Or “What was your favorite part of/at \_\_\_\_\_”.

2. Ask follow-up questions. Understand what is being said and/or felt.

“Did you mean that ...” “What I heard you say is ...”

3. Show genuine interest.

4. Respond without judgement or disapproval. Be more neutral.

“That is one way of looking at it. What might another one be?” “What might your friends or teacher or parents think?”

**CONSIDER.** In the beginning it might help to come prepared with some things you want to know more about that the scholar can elaborate on answer beyond a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. As you spend time together, it will become more natural. It always helps to ask follow-up questions.

**What are two to three questions you could ask that cannot be answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’?**

**BE! AN ACTIVE LISTENER.** Actively take-in and seek to understand your scholar’s words. What does active listening sound and look like? What are qualities of good listeners? Here are specific strategies<sup>24</sup>:

- ✓ Care about what your scholar is saying.
- ✓ Express empathy and be authentic in your responses.
- ✓ Be consistent. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- ✓ Help your scholar feel comfortable and clarify thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ Make eye contact.
- ✓ Be aware of your body language and your scholar’s facial expressions, gestures, etc.

**TIP:** The [‘I Hear You’](#)<sup>25</sup> Handout (p. 50) includes tips and tricks for being a better listener and things not to do! You can also see tips on communication [PITFALLS](#)<sup>26</sup> such as interrupting and jumping to conclusions.

## B. How do I manage conflicts?

**DO! WALK IN THEIR SHOES.** Always try and put yourself in your scholars’ shoes. Your relationship may start off feeling very one-sided. You are putting in the effort. What about them? But remember, you are a great tool for embodying reliability, understanding, and the act of giving. To help you do this and manage conflict you can:

- ✓ Practice flexibility and openness
- ✓ Give without expecting in return
- ✓ Provide opportunities for scholars to meet up with other scholars
- ✓ Use positive reinforcement
- ✓ Avoid negative talk
- ✓ See solutions and opportunities where there are challenges
- ✓ Empower scholars to make good decisions (do not decide for them)
- ✓ Support one another

**TIP:** Don’t forget to define communication methods. Help your scholar feel that they have access to you, however, don’t be afraid to set [BOUNDARIES](#)<sup>23</sup> (p. 54-56) too.

**PRACTICE.** If you want, get someone to role play with you! Otherwise, for the following, jot down notes or draw a cartoon of what you envision the scenario below looking like if **a) the mentor displays poor communication skills and b) mentor displays effective listening skills.** How would you use what we have reviewed so far, especially as it relates to communication, to manage this challenge below? Below are some example scenarios and responses.

SCENARIO 1	SCENARIO 2	SCENARIO 3
Your scholar, who is 14 years old, has told you she wants to be a lawyer when she grows up. She is very smart but has never achieved highly in school. You know that, recently, she has not even been going to school regularly. When you see your scholar’s progress report, you learn that truancy has become a serious problem. Later, when you bring it up with your scholar, she gets mad and says, “I’m not learning anything worthwhile. School is boring.” <sup>27</sup>	Your scholar is 12 years old. During the first two months of your relationship, things seemed to be going well between you. But then she didn’t show up for your last two meetings. You phoned again and set up another meeting, this time arranging to pick her up in your car. She is home when you arrive there, and she gives you a big smile when she sees you. But you’re upset about the missed meetings and feel you have to talk about it. <sup>28</sup>	Your scholar is 13 years old. You have been meeting for two months. He is always polite but is also always very quiet. Today, when you meet, he is even quieter than usual and he seems uninterested in doing anything. Suddenly, he blurts out, “I can’t stand it anymore. My teachers are picking on me. My mother ignores me. My brother’s beating up on me. I’m going to run away from home.” <sup>29</sup>

### POTENTIAL RESPONSES: Effective Listening Skills

If you can relate to similar feelings, share those. "I remember feeling like school is boring. It was hard for me to see how some of the things I was learning are relevant to my life. What kinds of things are your learning about?"

There may be something else going on with your scholar which is causing the truancy. Don't pry, but let them know you are here to listen if they want to talk more about what is causing that. If your scholar opens up to you, listen and empathize. Ex: "I can imagine that has to be tough and make it hard to want to show up to school, especially when you aren't enjoying it".

Encourage and reinforce how awesome it is that she has the goal of being a lawyer and that she has all the potential in the world to do that. If your scholar seems calm you could ask more about what she thinks is required to reach that goal. For ex: "What do you think you would tell a friend to do?" "What is important to know and do?" Also, and most importantly, ask if you there is anything you can do to help. "No matter what you decide, I am going to be here." "I can imagine that day when I catch up with you in college seeing all of the amazing things you are doing".

Start by asking if everything is ok with her. Give her the benefit of the doubt.

Don't be afraid though to share that you are asking because you were [worried] since she hadn't shown up to your meetings.

Remind her that she should feel free to text, call, email (whatever communication source you have decided on) to let you know if she isn't going to make it. You will be understanding, but it is helpful to have a heads up.

Depending on the situation – her reasoning for missing – ask if it would be helpful to text her the night before to remind her about your meeting, or have a calendar at the house.

Acknowledge what he said and let him know you believe his story. "Tell me more about what is happening at school."

Give them a chance to express how those things make them feel. If you can relate, share, but try to focus your time on listening more than talking. If your scholar seems hesitant, remind them "I care about you and I am here to help."

You might ask him if he has ever talked to his mom about feeling ignored? Given his personality, he may not have and he might say it will make him uncomfortable to do so. Express understanding of sharing your feelings, especially with those we care about. Provide a connection if you have one to relate to that.

"I hate that all of that makes you feel like you want to runaway. That has to be really tough to deal with. What do you do to stay strong and deal with all that? Is there a way we could help make this better?"

"What about doing something fun and then if you feel like talking more later we will?" Let him know you are in his corner. He might need some time to step away from all that and be a kid.

**LEARN MORE:** Remember, each situation and scholar is different. The above are examples but your response will depend on your scholar's personality and responses, your experiences, and more! More [SCENARIOS](#) (p. 44-45)<sup>30</sup>. You can also practice how to handle [BOUNDARY](#)<sup>31</sup> (p. 56) scenarios. Use the various sections throughout this guide to help you!

**TIP:** Communication will look different at different stages<sup>33</sup> (p. 20) of the relationship. For example: there may be more emphasis on respect and building in problem solving techniques during the ‘Testing’ phase. You can come back to this TABLE<sup>34</sup> (p. 21) to review where your mentoring relationship is, reflect on the challenges you are having, and think about how to link strategies for effective communication within that stage.



*Video 2: Ten Characteristics of Successful Mentors*<sup>35</sup>

**HIGHLIGHTS and ‘AHA’ MOMENTS. How can you apply two of the things you learned?**

As we close, below are some questions to consider to help you grow as you continue to build a great relationship with your scholar.

1. Is my verbal and non-verbal communication effective?
2. How do I hope my scholars respond to me? Am I prepared for a different response?
3. Do I give them time to respond or ask questions?
4. Am I willing to set aside my ‘mentor agenda’ to listen and respond to that of my scholar?
5. What assumptions am I making during our conversations, or about my scholar?

# END NOTES.

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- <sup>11</sup> Going the Distance, (2005).
- <sup>12, 13</sup> Building Relationships, (2008).
- <sup>14</sup> Community Toolbox, Youth Mentoring Relationships. 2016. <<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/youth-mentoring/build-mentor-relationships/main>>.
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- <sup>16</sup> Going the Distance, (2005).
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- <sup>23</sup> “Training New Mentors”, (2007).
- <sup>24</sup> Community Toolbox, 2016.
- <sup>25</sup> “Training New Mentors”, (2007).
- <sup>26</sup> Community Toolbox, 2016.
- <sup>27, 28, 29</sup> Education Northwest, Mentor Training, “Keeping the Relationships Going”. <<http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/Mod10.pdf>>.
- <sup>30, 31, 32</sup> “Training New Mentors”, (2007).

<sup>33, 34</sup> Mentor Resource Center, "Ongoing Training for Mentors", (2006).  
<<http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/ongoing-training-for-mentors.pdf>>.

<sup>35</sup> BBBS Caymans, Mentoring Youth 10 Characteristics of Successful Mentors, (2012).  
<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02lye3H\\_LHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02lye3H_LHg)>.