

Mentoring an adolescent isn't necessarily more difficult than mentoring a younger child, but it is different. That means that your training for these mentors and for mentors whose matches are entering the teens will need to reflect the uniqueness of this period of life. But fear not, there are resources available throughout Virginia and the United States. The information below will help you find and access them.

How Do I Begin?

Every mentor needs to know the basics of strong mentoring, including beginning the relationship, building trust, testing the relationship, increasing independence, and moving on. In addition, mentors of adolescents need a general understanding of adolescent development and how teens are influenced by family, peers, community, school, relationships with adults outside the family, and other factors.

Who Can Help?

For resources on training mentors to work with adolescents, you may want to do a little research. Here are organizations that offer training and or training resources that may be relevant:

- The *National Mentoring Center* (www.nwrel.org/mentoring/publications.html) offers a wide variety of publications and training materials for programs and mentoring professionals. All publications are available for download on their Website and may be reproduced and incorporated into other materials as long as appropriate citation is included.
- The *National Mentoring Partnership* (www.mentoring.org) has a wide range of resources to support mentoring programs, including *How to Build a Successful Mentoring Program Using the Elements of Effective Practice*, a comprehensive tool kit containing tools, templates and advice for implementing quality programs, and the *Research Corner*, where you will find the latest research on mentoring theory, practice and programs. Potential mentors will also benefit from information about mentor roles and stories of mentor-mentee pairs.
- *Search Institute* (www.search-institute.org) offers training in building Developmental Assets. Teaching mentors about the assets and what they can do to help youth get them is a great way to help them see the power and potential they have to make a difference.
- Virginia Mentoring Partnership (www.vamentoring.org) offers technical assistance and training support to help start and sustain quality mentoring initiatives, and to prepare both mentors and mentees to make the most of their mentoring relationships. VMP provides mentor and mentee training and training curricula, and offers consultations services and resource development for mentor programs as well.

Try It!

Networking with colleagues in other organizations isn't usually a top priority for busy, dedicated program providers. But sometimes one call, email, or visit saves hours of time and effort. This week, reach out to one person who works with mentors of adolescents. Ask about their training: issues they address, resources they use, frequently asked questions, and so on.

At the very least you'll have checked in with someone who can empathize with the professional challenges you face!

What Can You Do Right Now?

You may not be in a position to revamp your entire training system, but every little step you take makes a difference. You can start by using this simple activity developed by the National Training Institute for Community Youth in Washington, D.C.

Activity: *Walk About, Talk About*

1. Have half your group form a circle facing outward. The other half of the group should form a circle around the others so that each person is facing a partner.
2. Let participants know that they will be asked to introduce themselves to their partners and to talk about a specific topic that you will provide. After each topic they will rotate and repeat the process with new partners and a new topic.
3. Allow two or three minutes of discussion per topic. Then yell “switch,” or use some other attention getter to let people know it’s time to find new partners.

Topic 1—Talk about something you were good at when you were a youth (after this topic have the inner circle rotate four people to the left).

Topic 2—Talk about how it felt to do that thing you were good at. How did you know you were good at it? (Then have the outside circle rotate five people to the left, as long as this leads them to new partners.)

Topic 3—How did you learn to do that thing? Was there someone who taught you? Was there some place you went? Who took you there? Who else was there?

- Participants can sit down after the last topic. Then debrief by asking for volunteers to talk about the thing they were good at and whether there were adults who helped them. If so, what do they remember about those people?
- Close by describing how as youth the adults in our lives had power to help us be and feel successful. They could also make us feel incompetent or like failures. We can learn from these experiences, positive or negative, and draw on them as we form our mentoring relationships with young people.

Makes You Think

The following list of “requests” from adults was written by a 16-year-old and published in the “New Zealand Herald” as well as in *The Spirit of Mentoring: A Manual for Adult Volunteers* (Robin Cox, 2005).

- **Responsibility:** Give us a chance to prove to you that we can be responsible.
- **Respect:** Treat us like you’d like to be treated.
- **Trust:** Don’t judge us just because we are teenagers.... Not all of us are bad.
- **Give Us a Chance:** To make mistakes, learn from experience, and to explain our opinion or our side of the story.
- **Care:** Let us know you care.
- **Support:** We need support; we need to be reassured we are doing the right thing.
- **Understanding:** Listen to what we have to say and understand that we have stresses and problems too. Although they may seem insignificant to you, they are big to us. Being a teenager is not easy: understand this.
- **Balance:** Don’t leave us totally alone. We need you to catch us if we fall.
- **Give us praise:** When we do things that are good or make the right decisions.
- **Freedom:** It may be hard but let us go. We have to leave our own footprints and make our own decisions and mistakes. Part of growing up is finding out who we are, what we value and what we need as a person. Only we alone can make that journey.

