



# Asset-Building Ideas for Mentors

Mentoring relationships can be found in all different walks of life among people of many different ages and at many different stages of life. Working adults sometimes have a more experienced co-worker or supervisor who serves as an adviser or teacher. Young children often have an older sibling, tutor, or friend who acts as a trusted guide and confidant. Many teenagers learn from and are supported by a youth worker, teacher, religious leader, or coach. All of these relationships can be called "mentoring" and all of them have the potential to build assets. While asset building is likely to happen naturally when a mentoring relationship develops, there are some things you can do to ensure that your mentoring relationship is an asset-building one:

- **Remember that the focus of mentoring is on forming a relationship** and being a positive adult role model. *What* you do matters less than the fact that you are spending time together and providing the person you mentor (your "mentee") with support and care.
- **If you are part of a formal mentoring program, understand and honor the boundaries set by the program.** Some, for example, expect the mentor not to discuss the mentee at length with family members. Others ask for at least a one-year commitment. If you are uncomfortable with the guidelines set by a particular program, talk with the leaders about why the boundaries are the way they are.
- **Have clear boundaries for what is appropriate and not appropriate in your relationship.** For example, it may be acceptable for you and your mentee to go on a one-day outing alone together but not to go somewhere overnight. If you are not sure what's OK and what's not, talk with the leaders of your mentoring program, your mentee's family, friends who also mentor, a religious leader, or another trusted person.
- **Show your mentee that he or she is a priority by keeping in touch or getting together on a regular basis** (such as monthly, biweekly, weekly, or daily). Even if you cannot be together very often, write letters, talk on the phone, or send e-mail.
- **Let your mentee know that you care about things that are important to her or him.** For example, if your mentee has a special friend or pet, ask regularly about how he or she is doing. If your mentee plays a sport, attend a game or match. If he or she sings or plays an instrument, ask for a personal recital once in a while.
- **Be flexible.** If your mentee has ideas about things to do or ways to do them, let her or him take the lead. You don't need a careful plan to build assets.
- **Meet and get to know your mentee's family.** Once you know them, they will likely have more trust in you and you will have a better understanding of your mentee's life experiences.
- **Get to know your mentee's interests and hobbies.** Help her or him find opportunities to get involved with organized activities or programs that use or develop those interests and hobbies. For example, if he or she likes writing poetry, look for creative writing classes or workshops through community education or youth programs.



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## Building Assets for Hard-to-Reach Kids

One of the fundamental principles of asset building is that *all* children and youth need assets. Yet most people and organizations have some young people with whom they interact regularly, some with whom they interact occasionally, and others with whom they have no contact at all. Unfortunately, kids who are disconnected from one part of the community are often disconnected from most parts of the community. These "hard-to-reach" kids may be the ones most in need of asset building. There are at least two keys to building assets for hard-to-reach kids; the first is reaching out to them and the second is providing them with asset-building opportunities and relationships. Here are some ideas on how to do each:



### REACHING OUT TO HARD-TO-REACH KIDS

- ☆ **Be truthful and sincere with young people;** tell them why you are reaching out to them and why you care.
- ☆ **Think about why some kids are hard to reach.** Are they staying away from you or are you staying away from them? If they are staying away from you, invite a few kids you trust to talk with you about how they think you could reach out to others. If you are choosing to work with young people with whom you are most familiar, challenge yourself to reach beyond what's comfortable for you.
- ☆ **Once you successfully reach out to and get to know a few young people, ask them to spread the word among their friends.** Train youth to be asset-building leaders and peer helpers.
- ☆ **Volunteer in an alternative school, GED program, or program for teenage parents.**
- ☆ **Go to places where young people hang out.** Get to know young people there.
- ☆ **Head to detention.** Volunteer to supervise a detention hall and befriend those who are there.
- ☆ **Publicize and offer free food** whenever you have some kind of youth activity. Food is often a good way to draw people in.
- ☆ **Volunteer at drop-in centers** and arrange to lead some constructive activities, such as a basketball game or a juggling seminar.

### BUILDING ASSETS FOR HARD-TO-REACH KIDS

- ☆ **Be authentic.** Don't try to be something you're not because you think hard-to-reach kids will like you more. They'll figure out that you are not being yourself and then they won't trust you.
- ☆ **Always make time for young people** when they need or want to talk or just be with someone. Make relationship building your first priority.