

SAFETY ISSUES and CONFIDENTIALITY¹

Confidentiality is an extremely important part of ensuring the integrity of programs. In order to respect the privacy of families it is important not to repeat any information that your mentee shares with you unless you are concerned about their safety. You may tell people the first name of your mentee and you can tell people that you played a new game together or that you baked cookies together or played basketball outside. This type of information is not necessarily confidential. However, anything else that your mentee shares with you about their feelings, changes in their family or other personal information must not be shared. If it sounds like gossip, then it probably is.

However, it is also crucial that you are an advocate for the health and safety of your mentee. Sensitive issues that come up between a mentor and mentee require different levels of response and intervention. These issues have been grouped below as delicate topics, issues of concern and crises requiring intervention. However, any of these issues may move up or down this continuum depending on the seriousness of the actions involved.

Delicate Topics

Generally speaking, delicate topics should be discussed only when initiated by the mentee. These topics can be touchy and strongly affect the relationship. Confidentiality takes on greater importance with these topics. Although mentors should be adequately trained to deal with these

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Issues of Concern

Issues of concern are those that may have lifelong implications for the mentee, and therefore *the mentor needs to report them to the agency*. However, these issues do not necessarily require direct intervention. Because these issues may be part of ongoing situations and conditions that

General Guidelinesⁱⁱ

Put the mentee at ease . . .

- Stay calm.
- Use body language to communicate attentiveness (e.g., maintain eye contact, sit at same level).
- Avoid judgmental statements such as “Why would you do something like that?” or “I think you know better.”
- Be honest if you are getting emotional or upset.
- Let mentee know that you are glad he or she came to you.
- Reassure mentee that he or she has confidentiality to bring up topics.
- Use tact, but be honest.
- Allow mentee to talk at his or her own pace—don’t force an issue.
- Do not pry—allow mentee to bring up topics he or she is comfortable with.
- Do not collaborate with mentee’s family to provide discipline.

Honor the mentee’s right to self-determination . . .

- Focus on the mentee’s feelings and needs rather than jumping to problem solving.
- When issue has been talked about, ask, “What do you think you would like to do

Family Issuesⁱⁱⁱ

- **Let your mentee know you are there for her**, no matter what.
- **Point out the positive things that are happening in his family.** When a family member shows love or caring, be sure your mentee notices.
- **Assure your mentee that she is a good person with gifts and talents to contribute.** Tell her about specific times when you have observed her being a good daughter, sibling, grandchild, or friend.
- **Help your mentee separate the person he is in conflict with from that person's behavior.** Mom may be a fun, caring person who made a big mistake. Help him focus his frustration with family members on behaviors, not on the person herself.
- **Talk about why parents and caregivers enforce boundaries on young people.** A curfew that seems unfair may in place because parents and caregivers want to protect their child.
- **Continue to have high expectations for your mentee's behavior and achievement.** Don't allow family situations to come up as a barrier or an excuse.
- **Help your mentee strategize the many ways she could confront a difficult family situation**, weighing the pros and cons of each approach.
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