

HANDOUT

The Mentoring Relationship Cycle

Mentors have an easier time getting through trouble spots in their mentoring relationships if they understand the basics of the typical match “life cycle.” All matches go through a similar set of ups and downs and you will have an easier time working with your mentee and getting appropriate support from staff if you know what to expect.

The four main stages of mentoring relationships are:

1. The beginning
2. Challenging and testing
3. “Real” mentoring
4. Transition (toward closure)

The first two stages are critical as they lay the foundation for what the relationship will eventually become. If mentors are to be successful, they need to work through the difficulties presented early on so that the match gets to a place of trust and mutuality where “real” mentoring can take place. The chart on the next page offers examples of what these stages feel like for mentors and tips for communicating effectively throughout each stage’s ups and downs.

This information on the relationship cycle was **not** derived from the P/PV study of Big Brothers Big Sisters. The mentor relationship cycle material was adapted, with permission, from:

- Mentoring Resource Center. (2006). Overcoming relationship pitfalls. *Mentoring Fact Sheet*, 10.
- Rummell, C. (2006). Effective communication in the mentor/mentee relationship cycle. In A. Cannata (Ed.) *Ongoing training for mentors: 12 interactive sessions for U.S. Department of Education mentoring programs* (pp. 17–22). Folsom, CA: Mentoring Resource Center.

HANDOUT

Stages of a Mentoring Relationship

Stage	Characteristics	Effective Communication
<p>Beginning of the Match</p> <p>The beginning of any relationship is often awkward, and mentoring relationships are no exception. Your first few months will focus on getting to know each other, exploring similar interests, discussing expectations, and starting to form norms and bonds that will shape the rest of your first year together. During this phase mentors should work with their mentees to set parameters for the match, such as when to meet and for how long, what kinds of activities will take place, and how to contact each other.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Getting to know each other ■ The first impressions ■ Trying to see the positive in the relationship ■ Bonding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask open-ended questions ■ Use body language that is open and not guarded ■ Active listening ■ Demonstrate empathy ■ Avoid “prescriptive” communication ■ Use prompts ■ Speak with language that you feel comfortable with ■ Don’t be afraid of silence
<p>Challenging and Testing</p> <p>Once the mentoring relationship is off the ground, it is normal for your mentee to start testing boundaries of the relationship. Though you’ve spent time affirming that you appreciate and enjoy your mentee, he may still want to see how far your commitment really goes. Because mentees often come from situations in which adults can’t always be relied on, trusting another adult is difficult for them, and they may even try to sabotage the relationship by “acting out.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mentee challenges ■ Testing phase ■ Rethinking first impressions ■ Difficult feelings or emotions may surface 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be consistent in your communication, even if it is difficult ■ Demonstrate respect ■ Build in problem-solving techniques in your open-ended questions ■ Raise sensitive issues at the beginning of your interactions ■ Make sure to separate behaviors from who the mentee is ■ Disclosure of personal feelings and experiences when appropriate
<p>“Real” Mentoring</p> <p>In this stage, the mentoring relationship has reached full maturity. Trust and closeness have been established and the match is comfortable having fun and relating to one another. It is during this phase that mentors can use the trust they have built to move their mentees along the developmental pathway—asking them to think about goals or try new things. There may still be testing or behavioral issues, but they do not jeopardize the relationship itself. Mentors that reach this stage must be prepared to maintain this hard-won status—this is where the real impact of mentoring happens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Preparing for closure ■ Relationship may become deeper or mentee may start pulling away ■ Reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Find common language to sum up your feelings ■ Provide feedback that describes growth that you observed ■ Be prepared to listen and affirm fears that your mentee may have

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Stage	Characteristics	Effective Communication
<p>Transition (toward closure)</p> <p>The transition toward closure can be a difficult time for both mentors and youth. There may be many strong feelings about the match ending and it is important to not let the process of ending the match negate the many positives it provided to everyone involved. As the end of your match approaches, work closely with your match supervisor to end on a high note and make sure that the transition leaves the youth feeling positive and fulfilled about the experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Preparing for closure■ Relationship may become deeper or mentee may start pulling away■ Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Find common language to sum up your feelings■ Provide feedback that describes growth that you observed■ Be prepared to listen and affirm fears that your mentee may have