

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE YOUR MENTEE IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES



A young person that is engaged with their family, friends and with the wider community around them can feel secure about who they are and where they belong. Feeling secure helps young people become more confident about making their own choices and less likely to succumb to poor decisions on the basis of peer pressure.

In many ways adolescence is the perfect time for young people to build strong connections with their community, because it is a time when they are driven to connect with and fit into the world around them. Mentors can work with their mentees to channel this desire to connect into really positive associations and activities but they should also be aware that the need to “fit in” opens up their mentee to negative influences and role-models.

HOW TO HELP YOUR MENTEE CONNECT

As a mentor one of the best things you can do to help your mentee achieve their potential and cope with life’s challenges is to build their connections with people around them.

There are four key areas to think about when you are looking to help your mentee strengthen their existing connections and to build new ones:

- Communities
- Family
- Peers/Friends
- School

They should have strong connections in each of these areas – Judge Andrew Becroft, a past Youth Court Judge, has described the four areas of connection as “being like the four legs of a chair”.

Home, friends, school and community – each leg is of equal importance. Remove one of these and you have at best a very wobbly chair and the strong likelihood of it falling over.

FEELING CONNECTED

For a young person feeling connected to others is paramount in their lives. They are actively looking for opportunities to be “part of something”

– maybe a group of people that they feel understand them or that are seen to be cool, a group to hide behind or a group to exercise their leadership within.

There are a range of reasons why young people have this yearning for connection – one reason is that in adolescence they begin to explore their identity and they become acutely aware of their similarities and differences which can make them feel insecure or alone. Teenagers are often also beginning to test family ties and if they are not completely satisfied these are “unbreakable” they may look for strong, new attachments outside the family unit.

On the upside the desire to connect can lead them to find great opportunities within their communities and pave the way for new friendships. The downside is without guidance this longing to belong can result in young people falling in with dangerous influencers such as gangs or yielding to peer pressure to take drugs, drink or have sex before they are ready.

A young person that has strong, healthy connections with the community around them is likely to make better, more informed choices when faced with decisions that could have an impact on their future happiness and wellbeing.

TO GET STARTED:

Talk to your mentee about their interests and what they would like to get more involved with in their school and community. If they have trouble coming up with answers you can prompt them by asking them:

- what activities in their life do they currently enjoy doing
- what they would like to spend more time doing (or less)
- who they would like to spend more time with (or less)
- if there is anything they used to do with family/friends/their community that they have stopped doing but would like to go back to
- if there is something they have never done before but would like to try
- what their favourite school subject is
- what their favourite sport is
- what music, instruments or type of dance they enjoy.

Once you have answered these questions with your mentee you can spend time building a list of places they can visit and activities they could try out to connect with people in the areas they are interested in.

Some good places to research what activities are available in their local community include:

- the internet
- classified ads in local newspapers
- local youth groups
- through contacts at their local church, school and sports club
- noticeboards in the local library, gym or supermarket
- through family and friends
- Central and Local Government websites.

Encourage your mentee to set a goal for making a new connection within their community (although they might not call it that). Their goal might be – to take up one new regular activity that they enjoy and that involves people in their local community in the next three months.

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The six principles of “youth development” emphasize the importance of strong connections – they also highlight the need for people working with youth to really understand the individual’s strengths and their needs.

1. Youth development is shaped by the ‘big picture’

Mentors who understand their mentee’s needs and aspirations within the broader social, economic and cultural contexts of the environment in which they have grown up, will have a better chance of helping them to succeed.

2. Youth development is about young people being connected

Healthy development is supported when young people have positive connections within a broad range of social environments, including family and whānau, peers, community, school, training, tertiary education, and work. Mentors should encourage their students to make these connections and give them guidance on how to do it.

3. Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach

Research has shown that youth are more likely to succeed and develop the skills they need for life when the people around them help to build on their strengths and concentrate on what they have going for them rather than focusing on their weaknesses or risks they face.

4. Youth development happens through quality relationships

Mentors can help young people succeed by building a supportive, trusting relationship with them. This helps young people to understand what factors contribute to quality relationships and to model that in their own interactions with other people.

5. Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate

Mentors who encourage their mentee to engage with the world around them will give the young person the opportunity to learn that they can have greater control over their life when they fully participate.

6. Youth development needs good information

There are lots of books, research programmes and organisations who can offer mentors valuable information on how to support the healthy development of young people.



WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

- www.myd.govt.nz
- www.myd.govt.nz/working-with-young-people