

A background photograph of two young people sitting in a ball pit. On the left, a young woman with long brown hair is wearing a dark floral patterned top and blue jeans. On the right, a young man with dark skin is wearing a plaid shirt and dark pants. They are both smiling and reaching into the ball pit. The ball pit is filled with many colorful balls, including pink, yellow, blue, and green. The text is overlaid on a white, torn-edge rectangular box in the upper half of the image.

*Youth Rising Above*

# ***Successful Mentoring Relationships: An Introductory Guide for Youth Mentors***

In support of Youth Rising Above's  
GoTheDistance Mentorship Program

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**Training Opportunities:** Organizations/individuals wishing to conduct mentor training for their own youth mentorship programs, and intend to incorporate any part of this guide in their curriculum, are encouraged to contact Youth Rising Above to discuss the use of this guide. Youth Rising Above is available to conduct interactive, engaging and dynamic mentorship training for organizations or individuals seeking support for their mentors, or their mentorship program staff. Youth Rising Above can be reached at [info@youthrisingabove.org](mailto:info@youthrisingabove.org).

## About this Guide

There is so much to know about mentoring relationships with youth, more than we can comfortably fit within these pages. That being said, this guide is meant to compliment our in-person training session, regular check-ins, progress review meetings and external resources from within the sector. This guide is also designed in a way to serve as a recreational, but impactful read, catered specifically with an introductory framework in mind. You won't necessarily learn advanced strategies to engaging with youth through this guide, but we can be certain that it will peak your interest, create a desire to want to learn more, and ultimately aid in creating a successful mentoring relationship. Based on your feedback, and others in our community, we'll strive to consistently update this guide so it continues to be a practical, useful and informed resource to guide you along your mentoring relationships. Should you have any feedback about this guide, feel free to reach out to [jonathanj@youthrisingabove.org](mailto:jonathanj@youthrisingabove.org).



### **Developing a Successful Mentoring Relationship - A Guide for Youth Mentors**

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## Thank you for a making a difference and supporting our GoTheDistance program!

Thank you for committing to positively impacting the life of a young person through our GoTheDistance Mentorship Program! We have no doubt that with your skillset and experience, coupled with our support, your upcoming mentoring relationship will be truly life changing for everyone involved. Our team believes in the importance of collaborating with community members, like you, to deliver highly effective and successful programs to youth who are impacted by poverty, marginalized, oppressed and at-risk. We also understand the risks and harm that can be associated with mentorship programs should they be conducted in an ill-informed manner, along with the potential for ethical concerns when working with vulnerable populations. For this reason, we are committed to ensuring you are well-equipped and trained to deliver positive and enriching mentoring opportunities. This resource guide, coupled with the training opportunity you are about to receive are building blocks to ensuring the success of everyone involved in GoTheDistance. We encourage you to continue your learning journey, through both Youth Rising Above's internal resources and those provided by external community agencies. We're excited to support you throughout the next six months as we work together to inspire, empower and transform the next generation!

**Jonathan John**  
Executive Director & Founder  
Youth Rising Above

# ABOUT YOUTH RISING ABOVE

Youth Rising Above is a charitable organization that is committed to *inspiring, empowering and transforming* the next generation through innovative, engaging and dynamic programs that address underlying barriers to successful living, and impact positive social change.

## Our Mission

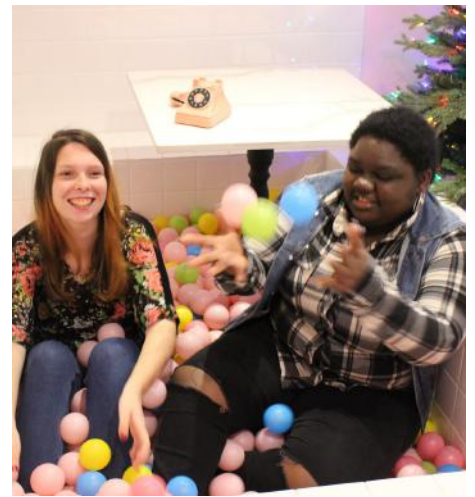
Provide marginalized youth with the opportunity to live wholesome, successful and enriching lives through engaging and dynamic programs, while stimulating positive social change.

## Our Vision

A safe and inspiring place where youth who are marginalized can participate in innovative, engaging and dynamic developmental opportunities which will positively shape their lives, while empowering them to contribute in meaningful ways to their communities.

## Our Motto

Our motto serves as a reflection of the phases of our service delivery. We start by first seeking to inspire youth towards positive personal development. Then, our efforts refocus towards empowering young people to believe that they have the potential to achieve remarkable feats. All of which leads to positive transformative change, both in the youth we serve, and in the communities they live in.







## OUR CORE VALUES

All our organization's efforts, including the programs we offer, the literature we create and the people we collaborate with reflect five key values. These values shape our organization and are integral in ensuring positive impact for our young people. We expect all mentors involved with our program to reflect these five values throughout their mentoring relationship.



### LOVE

We seek to always express unconditional love to all youth regardless of their circumstances.



### ENCOURAGE

We seek to encourage youth through life's challenges, en route towards personal wellness.



### SUPPORT

We seek to provide a diverse array of supports to ensure youth are equipped to achieve personal wellness.



### CHALLENGE

We seek to positively and safely challenge youth in hopes to build resiliency and overall growth.



### TRANSFORM

We seek to instil positive transformational change in the lives of young people, who in turn will help transform their communities and the world.

## OUR PROGRAM PILLARS:

Professional & Experiential Learning ~ Health & Wellness ~ Early Engagement ~ Thought Leadership & Public Awareness

# OUR MENTEE'S

## WHO ARE THE YOUTH WE SUPPORT

We believe that every young person has value in our community.

At Youth Rising Above (YRA), we believe and embody a strength-based approach to youth engagement. Through our past program experiences, we know our youth are intellectual, resourceful, resilient, passionate and eager young adults who have the potential to achieve remarkable feats within their community. Though, we also know, despite the efforts within our communities, that we live in a society that is divisive, impacted by social class, and oppressive to the most marginalized demographics. As a result of this, YRA is as an organization mandated to support young people who are marginalized, oppressed, or at-risk of encountering impediments to successful living.

Youth Rising Above serves youth ages 16-24 years old who are situated in the GTA and surrounding regions. A vast majority of the youth engaged with our programs are referred to us by other youth at-risk serving agencies, including housing support organizations, shelters, school boards, the legal systems, hospitals and more. Youth who are not referred to our programs by a program partner, self-identify with one of the following barriers:



- Persons of Colour (POC)
- Black youth
- Indigenous youth
- Youth with a disability
- Youth involved in the legal system
- Youth who are experiencing, or at-risk of, homelessness
- Youth of low socio-economic status
- Newcomers/refugees
- Youth with limited to no education
- Youth who use illicit substances
- Youth who identify with the LGBTQ2S+ community

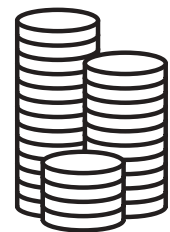
# SOCIAL ISSUES IMPACTING YOUTH

There are many reasons why the youth we serve experience life challenges that may leave them marginalized or oppressed; as cited by The Homeless Hub, these include:

**Structural Factors:** Structural factors are economic and societal issues that affect opportunities and social environments for individuals. Key factors can include the lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports and/or the experience of discrimination. Shifts in the economy both nationally and locally can create challenges for people to earn an adequate income, pay for food and for housing.



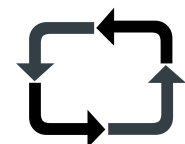
**Poverty:** Many young people who become homeless come from families living in poverty. This doesn't necessarily mean that the families are not caring and supportive. However, we do know that living in poverty can have an impact on educational and health outcomes and on one's ability to get a job. In addition, as teenagers get older, it may be more difficult for families to continue to support them financially. Many young people become homeless not because they are chased from home, but because their poverty means they can no longer stay there. Young people then look to live with friends, or go to new places to seek new economic opportunities. However, if the jobs are not there, they may become homeless.



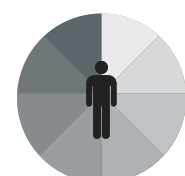
**Housing:** A critical shortage of housing that is affordable, safe and stable directly contributes to homelessness. The millions of Canadian families and individuals living in "core need" (paying more than 50% of their income on housing) are at serious risk of homelessness, as are families and individuals spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Arguably, the most impactful factor is the lack of affordable housing nationwide; however, discrimination can impede access to employment, housing, justice and helpful services. Racial and sexual minorities are at greater risk of such discrimination.



**System Failures:** Systems failures occur when other systems of care and support fail, requiring vulnerable people to turn to the homelessness sector, when other mainstream services could have prevented this need. Examples of systems failures include difficult transitions from child welfare, inadequate discharge planning for people leaving hospitals, corrections and mental health and addictions facilities and a lack of support for immigrants and refugees.



**Personal Circumstances:** Individual and relational factors apply to the personal circumstances of a person experiencing homelessness, and may include: traumatic events (e.g. house fire or job loss), personal crisis (e.g. family break-up or domestic violence), mental health and addictions challenges (including brain injury and fetal alcohol syndrome), which can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and physical health problems or





# SOCIAL ISSUES IMPACTING YOUTH

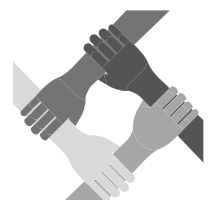
disabilities. Relational problems can include family violence and abuse, addictions, and mental health problems of other family members and extreme poverty.

**Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse:** Most homeless youth come from homes characterized by high levels of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse and neglect, compared to youth with homes (Gaetz, O'Grady and Vaillancourt 1999; Janus, Burgess and McCormack 1987; Janus, Archembault, Brown and Welsh 1995; Kufeldt and Nimmo 1987; Whitbeck and Simons, 1993; Whitbeck and Hoyt 1999). Rotheram-Boris, Mahler, Koopman and Langabeer (1996) estimate that street youth are five times more likely to report being victims of sexual abuse as children. For young people who have experienced such abuse, there is an increased likelihood of negative developmental outcomes including low self-esteem, an impaired ability to form affective and trusting relationships with adults, higher rates of depression and suicide attempts, running away or being kicked out of the home (Beitchman, Zucker, Hood, daCosta, Ackman & Cassavia, 1991; Tyler et al. 2000; Whitbeck et al. 1997).

**Involvement with Child Welfare System:** A considerable amount of research demonstrates the relationship between youth homelessness and previous involvement with the child welfare system (Serge, Eberle, Goldberg, et al., 2002; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Raising the Roof, 2009). This includes foster care, group homes, interventions by the Children's Aid Society. While involvement in the child welfare system doesn't necessarily cause homelessness (in fact, many interventions may prevent homelessness), such involvement does reflect the degree to which young people come from troubled families. In addition, we do know that depending on the jurisdiction, many teenagers may lose the support of the child welfare system as they get older, or if they opt out.

**Discrimination:** When young people experience racial discrimination, this limits their access to employment, their educational success, and their ability to access the services they need. All of these factors can lead to extreme poverty, and when combined with other challenges (in the home, with the legal system), can lead to homelessness.

**Homophobia:** Research consistently shows that between 20-30 percent of homeless youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (Saewyc, et al., 2008; de Castell & Jenson, 2004), which suggests that homophobia is a leading cause of homelessness. In Canada, many young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered continue to experience discrimination in their homes, neighbourhoods, at school and in their communities. This discrimination, which is often coupled with violence, may make staying at home intolerable, and hence, many young people in this situation hit the streets.





# MENTORSHIP

## WHAT IS IT ANYWAY?

**Mentorship:** At YRA, we believe mentorship is a partnership between two people who connect over a specific set of skills or knowledge, and share values and goals in a mutually respectful way which leads to a more enriched life, one that breaks down barriers and creates opportunity for success.

### WHAT MENTORSHIP AT YRA IS:

- ✓ Equal & Empathetic
- ✓ Mutual Partnership
- ✓ Strength Based
- ✓ Friendly

### WHAT MENTORSHIP AT YRA IS NOT:

- ✗ Life Coaching
- ✗ Counselling/Therapy
- ✗ Life Planner
- ✗ Friend



## Effective Strategies for Building Rapport

You could be the best mentor out there, with a ton of great experience, resources and knowledge to share, but none of this matters if you are unable to build rapport with your mentee. Throughout our everyday lives, we don't often think about how rapport impacts our relationships or how our interpersonal skills influence how well someone interacts with us. This is absolutely essential when working with vulnerable youth populations. We encourage you to consider some of the following strategies when interacting with your mentees. This guide only covers some foundational knowledge we believe is important to begin exploring rapport building in youth relationships; we know you'll receive more insight as you continue along your mentoring relationship.

**Praise & Recognition:** For someone who is likely marginalized and oppressed throughout their daily lives, praise and recognition from a mentor can go a long way. Our youth may often look at their life circumstances from a deficit approach, goals they haven't achieved, relationships they haven't developed, qualities they lack, etc. In fact, youth may be so preoccupied with these perceived deficits, that they may not have the capacity to realize the positive aspects that may be occurring in their lives - and that's where you come in! We encourage you to support your mentee navigate through the challenges they may be experiencing in their life, so they are able to realize their value and self-worth. This can be achieved through small things, e.g. praising them for something they achieved, like showing up early, coming prepared, or remembering a conversation from a previous session. If they tell you about something great that happened to them since they last met you, try drawing those feelings out and ruminating over them. Use words that truly convey your joy about hearing this, "that's really great", or "that's so awesome, I'm happy for you". High-fiving or "fist bumping" a youth (if you know this is something they're fine with), may seem like a small gesture, but to someone who likely looks up to you, can go a long way!

**Youth-led Discussions:** Sometimes it's easy to think that as a mentor, we're the sole person in a mentoring relationship who possess all the knowledge and experience that a young person needs. But, youth are likely more



# Effective Strategies for Building Rapport

intellectual, resilient and experienced than we think, incorporate these strengths into your discussion. Let the youth take the lead on the conversation or direction of the relationship. Start off by asking open-ended questions like "how was your day", "did you do anything exciting this week", or "is there something you're looking forward to this weekend". Whatever their answer may be, try to build off of that to steer your discussion. For example, if they say they're looking forward to hanging out with friends on the weekend, help them recognize the value and emotional feeling that community plays in their life (strength-based feedback), which could possibly lead to a discussion on networking and relationship-building for employment. It works better for everyone if mentors don't come in with a planned agenda, but rather incorporate flexibility and provide an opportunity for the youth to lead the discussion. If the youth chooses not to share anything, consider asking some more prompting open-ended questions, or consider sharing something that happened in your life you think they may find interesting, and link it back to something that's relevant to them, which sometimes can be done with questions like "what do you think about that" or "have you ever had an experience like that".

**Active Listening:** Listening is a skill that many people often struggle with. Especially in a society that is very time consuming, demanding and capitalistic. It's difficult to stop, clear your mind, and just listen. Silence itself may be hard to process for some people, which may result in us immediately trying to fill it with conversation or noise. Lots of things can get in the way of effective listening, like distractions, answer-driven approaches, mind-reading and so much more. We encourage

our mentors to check-in with themselves before entering a mentoring session. Do a quick inventory of the big and busy things in your life that may get in the way of actively listening. After you acknowledge them, park them aside for a second. Do your best to clear your mind, and fully immerse yourself in the conversation with your mentee.

**Mutual Interests:** There's nothing better than feeling connected in a mentoring relationship. Mentees can easily feel appreciated, recognized and valued when a mentor can relate to something in their life. Try asking open-ended questions to your mentee in order to determine what their interests are. If you find something that you can relate to, even in the slightest bit, recognize and validate that. Express an interest in this topic, ask substantial questions about it, ask about their feelings, what they like about it, etc. When you can, be sure to be reciprocal and share some of your own feelings/thoughts around topics of mutual interest.

**Interpersonal Communication Skills:** A lot of *what* you have to say is impacted by *how* you say it. To make sure your words are received in the way you intend them, we encourage you to consider how your tone of voice, volume, body language, attitude and motivation may affect them. If you consider these factors as you communicate with your mentee, we have no doubt you'll have a positive worthwhile conversation.

**Shared Experiences:** A pillar of empathizing, shared experiences are a way for mentees to feel understood. When sharing experiences, it is important to affirm your mentee's feelings and then invite them to decide whether they would like for you to share your experience and how you might have overcome a similar obstacle. It's also crucial to not equate your experience to theirs; you could say something to the effect of "while I can't completely understand the pain you've felt, I can empathize with you as I have been in situations that have evoked similar feelings."

# The Value of Equal & Empathetic Relationships

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We believe in the value and positive impact of mentoring relationships that occur in an equal and emphatic manner. One of the most harmful and ineffective ways of mentoring is through a “rescuer” or “saviour” mentality, believing that mentors are the only ones with the knowledge, and youth mentees are dependent on the mentor sharing this info with them. Instead, when mentors communicate with mentees in ways that place an emphasis on equality, reducing power imbalances, being open to different perspectives and coming from a place of truly understanding the emotions and feelings of the youth’s perspectives, we know this can lead to tremendous positive results.

One way to ensure an equal and empathetic relationship is through recognizing power imbalances, privileges, unconscious bias and how this all interacts and impacts a mentoring relationship:

**Power Imbalances:** Try to take a quick assessment of what you think might get in the way of creating an equal and empathetic relationship, and seek to mitigate that. Are there things that make you seem to have more power, influence, or sway in the relationship? These may seem like minor items to you, but can have significant influence on rapport building with your mentee.



**Facial Expressions/Body Posture:** When your mentee is talking, does your facial expression signify that you are interested, welcoming of their conversation and inclusive to what they are sharing? Are you smiling, are you maintaining reasonable eye contact (though this may differ with cultures)? Are you nodding your head to show you're listening? A smile can make a world of a difference when someone is sharing their life with you. Your body posture/positioning can also create power imbalances. Are you standing while your mentee is seated, or are you seated in a chair that elevates you slightly?



**Physical Appearance:** Think about your dress, attire, and physical hygiene. Does your clothing reflect a higher socio-economic class, or does it match that of the young person you're supporting? Are you dressed in business attire when your mentee is in casual wear? Your personal hygiene and grooming also reflects that you value your self-worth and can inspire that in your mentee.



**Energy Level:** Complimenting your mentee's energy level will reduce any intimidation they feel by you and help them feel more comfortable in the relationship. Recognize how they express themselves and ensure your attitude or mood compliments this appropriately. Are you overly excited when they're bummed out? Are your non-verbal mannerisms, like gestures, overwhelming them? All of this plays a big part in appropriately building rapport with your mentee.



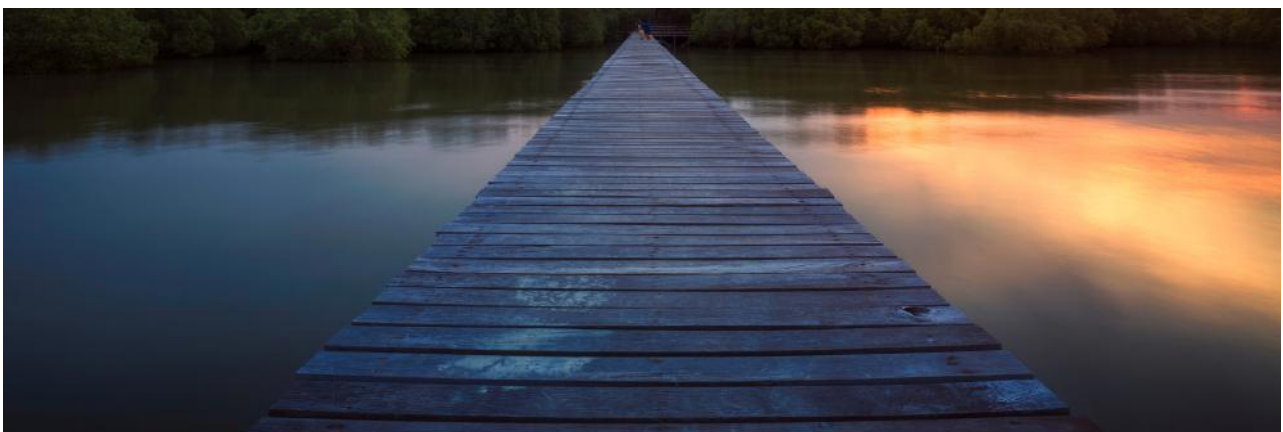
# Recognizing Privileges and Unconscious Bias

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We all have various life experiences, trajectories and journeys that we've encountered. These experiences have undoubtedly shaped our lives, how we engage with our communities, our approach to civic engagement, our perspectives, our decisions and so much more. Many life experiences can put us in a place of privilege, which may not always be congruent to the life experience of marginalized populations. The types of occupations we have, the communities we live in, the networks we belong to, the lifestyle choices we make and so much more. All of this also impacts the decisions we make and how we interact with people. We may treat someone in a particular way without really thinking about how their life experiences have impacted them, but they do; we call this an **unconscious bias**. When we're not aware of our unconscious bias, this could lead to detrimental impacts on the populations we are supporting. We may unknowingly and unintentionally further marginalize a young person, exclude them, ignore their personal needs, disregard any trauma they may have encountered and ultimately support them in ways that are ineffective and harmful.

One way to recognize our power, privileges and unconscious bias is to conduct a self-assessment. You can either complete this on your own, or consult with diverse people in your own networks that you have mutual respect and trust with, and ask them for their thoughts as you answer these questions:

1. What are some life experiences that you have encountered that your mentee may not have?
2. What are the supports and resources that you have in your life that your mentee may not?
3. Do you believe that your mentee has the same access to positive life-impacting resources that you may have?





# The Strength-Based Approach

A strength-based approach is absolutely essential and incredibly valuable in mentoring relationships. Strength-based approaches view the strengths, assets and capacities of people, rather than a deficit approach of focusing on a problem or concern they may be experiencing. Though the problem is never minimized, through the strength-based approach, the problem and the person are separated; helping marginalized populations recognize the value and strengths they possess despite the challenging circumstances they may find themselves in. For example, instead of focusing on what's causing "anxiety" for someone, we want to focus on what causes "happiness/joy" for someone instead, and find a way to relate that to addressing the feeling of anxiety. One inspires hope and possibility, and the other inspires pessimism and low expectations.

Strength-based language is:

- respectful
- non-judgmental
- clear and understandable
- free of jargon
- creates comfort
- consistent with our body language
- sincere in inspiring hope and opportunity
- puts people first, i.e. "person experiencing homelessness" vs. "homeless person"
- free of paternalistic language

We encourage you to consistently strive to ensure your language and word choice communicates hope and strength, and focuses on the incredible value and self-worth that every young person has - and in turn, we know it will create resiliency and strength for each youth as they navigate their lives.





# The Ethics Behind Youth Mentorship

While youth mentorship programs can be extremely beneficial and rewarding for young people, if not delivered in an ethical manner, they can also be quite harmful. It is important that as mentors, we strive to embody ethical practices in our interactions with young people in order to ensure their positive well-being and development. Some of the strategies below will help you ensure an ethical relationship between your mentee and you:

**Foster wellness in the mentee you are supporting:** The safety and well-being of our mentees is of utmost importance in everything we do, and must always form the basis of all mentorship activities with young people. Safety includes ensuring that the voice and input of mentees are incorporated in, and is the driving force, of a mentor-mentee relationship. Safety also includes preventing and eliminating any form of abuse, harassment or general unwanted behaviour from anyone involved in the mentoring relationship, this includes recognizing and mitigating power imbalances including those stemming from an unconscious bias or mentor privileges. Youth Rising Above seeks to mitigate and prevent any harmful conditions for mentees by screening all mentors, conducting mandatory training sessions and monitoring ongoing process, including implementing reporting mechanisms for both the mentor and mentee to report unwanted behaviour.

**Maintaining appropriate boundaries:** Mentoring relationships can span various contexts and circumstances, and as a result can be extremely worthwhile for mentees, but can also pose a greater risk as various environments intersect. Boundaries around physical space and touch are extremely important. While things like handshakes, fist bumps and hugs may be acceptable, it is important that these be reviewed on a case-by-case basis early in the mentoring relationship. Mentors must also refrain from entering into any professional, personal or romantic relationships with the mentees. These lines may be blurry, given the experiences and advantages that mentors bring as they incorporate their personal experience towards the growth of a mentoring relationship. Mentors should always ensure that their relationship doesn't transition into a transactional one and any interactions are solely for the purposes of maintaining an ethical and safe mentoring relationship.



**Maintaining ethics is a requirement for a successful and healthy mentoring relationship.**

*Mentors bear the greater responsibility for ensuring a safe relationship*



**Model consistent, genuine and authentic relationships that reflect trust:**

One way to build rapport in a relationship is through building trust. Through their journeys navigating care, mentees may have encountered numerous relationships in which trust wasn't valued or maintained, which may lead to aversive behaviour in establishing new relationships with someone in a position of power (mentors). Trust - when supporting someone who is in a vulnerable position - is absolutely essential in creating a healthy mentoring relationship. Trust can include things like keeping your word; maintaining your commitment throughout the 6 month journey; following through on promises to share resources, following up on items, etc. Similarly, integrity in a mentoring relationship is equally important. We encourage mentors to model positive behaviours throughout any environment they may find themselves navigating with their mentee. This helps create an authentic and genuine relationship, and will likely lead to more meaningful results. For example, if you suggest to a mentee the value of ongoing professional development, it would be impactful if you modelled this in your own practice as well. Modelling integrity in your own life circumstances will help create a more impactful experience for your mentee.



**Inspire self-worth and advocate for social justice:** We believe in the inherent value of every young person regardless of the circumstances that they may find themselves in. As a result of this, we feel it is important to continue advocating for equitable and accessible services for all young people across our city. As a mentor, we encourage you to continue exploring opportunities that will further advance and promote the well-being of youth while consistently striving to address social injustices they experience.

**Continuous learning and improvement:** Our youth, and the society they are living in, are evolving at a rapid rate, and if we want to remain effective youth workers and mentors, it's important that we stay up to date on trends, social issues, best practices and more. There are many resources available to help you continue developing your skills as a youth mentor. Check out the end of this guide for more info or connect with our Mentorship Program Coordinator for more resources.



**Trauma-informed approach:** It's highly likely that youth who are vulnerable or marginalized have experienced trauma in their lives; trauma from individuals, communities, systems and structures. This trauma can stem from the environments they're in and the people in their lives, but can also stem from factors such as being a racialized individual, political environments, or trauma that occurred in earlier generations. It is important that as mentors, sometimes navigating difficult conversations, that we consider these experiences (and the potential of these experiences if we're not fully sure), so that we don't re-stigmatize or re-trigger. Operating through a trauma-informed lens also means we carefully consider the words we use, the self-care, coping strategies or community resources we share and how our own privileges and unconscious bias can cause harm. For example, consider a transgendered mentee, suggesting they consider a social group that does not have LGBTQ inclusive practices as a form of self-care, would not be a trauma informed approach.



# Confidentiality, Dignity and Duty to Report

One of the best ways to maintain rapport with young people is to create an environment of trust, as mentioned earlier. Being a mentor, and likely someone to look up to, youth may choose to confide in you things that they may not feel comfortable sharing with friends, families, or other authority figures in their life. If a young person knows they can share their thoughts with you while you still maintain their confidentiality, they will likely want to continue communicating, ultimately leading to a more impactful mentoring relationship and a safe space for them.

It is also important to not share information that is divulged in a mentoring session with those outside of the mentor-mentee relationship. You are welcome to seek support from program staff when exploring how to best support a mentee, but it is not always necessary to reveal details or identifying information to get a point across. Similarly, when incorporating your own personal lived experience in your conversations with a mentee, ensure that you don't divulge the names or identifying information of others in your life, in order to model confidentiality regardless of who/what the topic of communication is. Sharing the name of another person to your mentee, may cause them to question how their own identity being protected.

In addition to maintaining confidentiality; mentors must also do their part in maintaining the dignity of their mentees, especially when their mentee may not be present. For example, if you're reaching out to program staff for advice on how to best support a mentee looking to navigate their mental health challenges, it is absolutely essential that you communicate about them in a way that is respectful, positive and constructive. Mentees want to know that you will respect them when they're present, and when they're not.



**Safety can't exist  
without ethics**

*"One of the best ways to  
maintain rapport with  
young people, is to  
create an environment  
of trust"*



**While many topics brought up in a mentoring relationship should be kept confidential, there are some that come with a duty to report for the mentor. According to the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, if you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is/has/is at risk of experiencing emotional, physical or sexual harm (including self-harm), neglect, abandonment, or is in need of protection, this must be reported to authorities (the Children's Aid Society) immediately. This law overrides any other statutes including the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA). While reporting concerns for those who are ages 16 years or older is not mandatory, we strongly encourage you to communicate with program staff to ensure the wellbeing of everyone involved.**

If you feel that your mentee is at risk of harming others, it is important to de-escalate the situation to the best of your ability, so that they reach a calmer state of mind. Once you have done so, please ensure that you immediately report this to program staff as this is a definite cause of concern as well. Yours and your mentee's safety are both a priority.

We understand that finding out that your mentee may need protection can be a traumatic experience, especially in the moment when you may not have direct access to program staff. Should this occur, we encourage you to remain calm, ask questions to determine if your mentee is safe, if they have safety resources in place, or what type of support they may be looking for, if you're unsure of what to do, reach out a program staff immediately. Together, with your support, we can ensure that every mentee that comes through our program is safe, well-protected, and positively supported throughout their youth and young-adult journeys.







## CONFLICT CAN BE A GOOD THING... IF ADDRESSED APPROPRIATELY.

Conflict can be beneficial. If dealt with appropriately, it can help build rapport and trust, strengthen a bond, help discover new characteristics, and deepen the relationship. However, if dealt with inappropriately, this could result in a mentee closing off to a mentor, feeling unsafe or threatened, ultimately not wanting to continue the relationship, and potentially creating a fear of future mentors. One way to appropriately deal with conflict is to *recognize that it happens* and that *it's natural in the beginning*. When you recognize or encounter a conflict, take a moment to pause, take a deep breath, and **listen**. Remember, as a mentor, you are automatically perceived as someone with power and privilege. Take a moment to try and discover the underlying cause of the conflict. **Emotions** released during a conflict may just be indicative of something deeper being experienced. Don't pry, but rather,

## RESOLUTION

simply ask yourself open-ended questions about their emotions, such as "what are they feeling", "why are they feeling this way". Consider **asking them to describe what's happening for them** at that moment. When you begin to unravel pieces of the conflict, try to find a mutual point of understanding where you can begin to explore further. While this is all happening, continue to be aware of your **body language**. Are your arms crossed? Do you have a disgruntled or annoyed facial expression? Are you maintaining reasonable eye contact? The words you use while exploring conflict won't matter if your body language isn't congruent. Try to come from a place of **understanding** and **empathy**. Your mentee may be experiencing something you don't understand, but is still completely valid for them. Have an optimistic mindset as you explore these feelings further. If your mentee feels supported, things will likely work out well!





## THE GROW MODEL ENRICHES GOAL-SETTING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.

As your mentoring relationship progresses, you'll find that your mentee has goals that they want to achieve within the specific areas that you'll be mentoring them in. It's important to not be prescriptive and instead have a strength-based, flexible, and welcoming approach; the idea is to inspire and motivate your mentees to achieve their goals and any skepticism or rigid structures may be a setback for them. A model that works well is the GROW Model (Whitmore, 1992), which is separated into the four stages of Goal, Reality, Options, and Will. This model is integral to goal-setting because it allows space for the mentee to assess their reality in the moment and keeps their motivation high at all times, even during periods when it feels like they are taking one step forward and two steps back. The beauty of this model is that you can either follow it in order or visit any stage at any time.

## GOAL-SETTING

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Even if you find that there aren't any specific goals that the mentee has, it's always a good idea to bring up the below questions within the context of your conversations; it will encourage self-reflection and self-directed learning. It's also imperative that you don't focus on reaching an "end goal", but rather on the progress that your mentee is making and acknowledging the small victories that are made throughout.

Remember to be non-judgemental with your mentees goals. They may have passions or desires that don't necessarily meet your own life expectations, this is ok! Your mentees likely have a different upbringing than you and so their goals may be reflective of that. Focus on the underlying emotions and path that will help them achieve their own goals, at the end of the mentoring relationship, you can celebrate this!

## GOAL.

The **Goal** stage involves asking your mentee if there is anything they would like to achieve and what their motivations are behind their goals. If you mentee has experienced significant trauma or oppression in their life, they may not have a goal overtly known, you can still play a part in helping them discover this.

- Is there anything in particular that you would like to achieve?
- Why do you want to achieve this? What's the purpose?
- Are you looking at the bigger picture?
- Does this goal align with your values? Will it help you grow?
- Would achieving this goal make you feel proud?
- Can you leverage existing strengths and skills to achieve this goal? If so, which ones? Is there a new skill you'd like to develop?
- How will achieving this goal affect you in the long term?

## OPTIONS.

The **Options** stage is excellent for assessing different factors and other ways for achieving goals. This is a time for intense self-reflection on the mentee's part, but also for you to think of resources that may help them.

- What current idea do you have for achieving your goal?
- In the past, what actions worked for you?
- Is there an option that appeals to you the most, right now?
- Is there anyone who you think could help you to achieve your goal?
- What are the necessary resources and information you would need, and how would you retrieve these?
- If time wasn't a factor, how would you want to achieve this?

## REALITY.

The **Reality** stage focuses on the mentee's present situation, and the barriers that may be involved in achieving their goal – things that youth who are marginalized or at-risk face in many capacities. This is really where you would bring in a strength-based approach, because you will be focusing on helping the mentee find their strengths to achieve their goals.

- What is happening now? What is your current situation?
- How do you feel about this situation? What is the impact of the situation on you, right now?
- How far do you feel you are away from your ideal situation?
- What do you think are the internal/external factors getting in the way of achieving this goal?
- What existing strengths could help in achieving goals while keeping your current situation in mind?
- Do you have any resources to assist you? If so, what are they?

## WILL.

The **Will** stage is when the mentee will decide what they need to do to achieve their goal(s). You will play a role here in helping them create an action plan, using the ideas that were discussed with the mentee. You'll be instilling a "go-getter" attitude. If the mentee is comfortable with this, ask them if they would like to set deadlines to make their goals measurable.

- What are the actions that you need to do to achieve your goal?
- Do you have a timeline in mind, for when you'd like to achieve this?
- How would you like to monitor your progress?



# WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END?

Mentoring relationships can end for a variety of reasons, but we want to ensure that it concludes in the most appropriate way. After connecting with you on a regular basis for a lengthy period of time, your mentee will likely develop a strong bond with you, and will see you as a positive influence in their life. Ending this relationship suddenly and inappropriately can be harmful and ineffective. Here are some strategies you can incorporate in a mentoring relationship when it comes to an end:

**Highlight the value the relationship has had for you.** Share your feelings and emotions, share what you have learned or enjoyed. Your willingness to be genuine and authentic will likely lead to reciprocal comments from your mentee and help them feel valued, despite the relationship coming to an end.

**Ask for their input.** Find out how they felt in the mentoring relationship. Give them an opportunity to voice their

thoughts. Do they have unanswered question. You'll likely learn a lot from your mentee during this adjournment stage.

**Summarize what you talked about it.** Did you share significant coping strategies or resources, did your mentee make progress or achieve any of the goals in their action plan, highlight this! They may not remember everything you talked about in the past 6 months, a summary will be valuable.

**Talk about next steps.** How can your mentee advance in their life? Are their opportunities or programs you can recommend to them? Consider how your mentee can build off the past 6 months and apply this knowledge to a new venture (maybe become a mentor themselves) that will further propel them on the path of success. Ensure they leave with a plan, and steps they can take if they need additional resources

**Praise them one more time!**



# GOOD LUCK YOU'VE GOT THIS!

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We can't wait for you to dive into your mentoring relationship! The journey ahead will be filled with opportunities to grow, challenges, successes and so much more, but most importantly we know that the impact of mentoring will be invaluable, both to you and your mentee. We encourage you to embrace this relationship with an open-mind, informed through the resources we will provide you with, and propelled through an empathetic and inclusive attitude. Strive to see the incredible inherent value that the young person you're about to meet possesses, and help them realize this too through your loving and supportive approach. Don't worry about focusing on the end goal, relish in the here-and-now with your mentee; build on the relationship, exchange information, discuss ideas, explore paths and foster comfort and safety; all of which will undoubtedly lead to positive growth for everyone involved. We encourage you to continue exploring new approaches to mentoring, seek out new information, and stay connected so we can continue to support you along the way!

## HELPFUL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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| Toronto Police Non-emergency Crisis Line     | 416-808-2222   |
| Kids Help Phone 24/7 Help Line               | 1-800-668-6868   |
| Toronto Distress Centre                      | 416-408-HELP   |
| City of Toronto Assessment & Referral Centre | 416-392-0090   |
| 211 Community Resource Directory             | <a href="http://www.211.ca">www.211.ca</a>                 |
| Black Youth Helpline                         | <a href="http://www.blackyouth.ca">www.blackyouth.ca</a>   |
| Indigenous Helpline                          | 1-855-242-3310   |
| Homeless Hub (professional development)      | <a href="http://www.homelesshub.ca">www.homelesshub.ca</a> |

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