

What If. . .

What if we don't hit it off right away?

It's not easy to trust a stranger, especially if you're a young person who's had a lot of bad experiences with adults in the past. It may take a while to build up trust. Don't interpret caution as a rejection. A young person may not show it, and he or she may not even know it fully, but your help is definitely wanted. Think of the child's feelings first and your feelings second. Be patient, be kind, be consistent. It will pay off in the long run.

What if something serious comes up?

While most mentoring relationships develop and flourish without serious problems, things do happen. Mentors have an important role, but that role does not include medical or psychological treatment, or family counseling. There are support systems in place for real emergencies. Contact your mentoring program coordinator for information. The most you are expected to do—or should do—is to help guide your mentee to the appropriate source of professional help.

What if we don't have anything in common?

Many first-time mentors worry that differences in age, race, religion, education, or gender will be insurmountable barriers. Actually, most experienced mentors report that mentoring a young person from a different background broadened their own horizons and deepened their understanding of other people and cultures. So get curious. Ask lots of questions. Listen hard. Learn about the differences you have and the commonalities you share.

What if for some reason I can't mentor anymore?

This is a very serious concern. Mentoring is a deep commitment. It will do far more harm than good to enter a young person's life, build up trust, and then abandon the relationship. Revisit the commitment you made when you decided to be a mentor—you should have made a commitment for *at least* one year. Please do your very best to honor your commitment. However, things do happen. Be honest and open about the reason and work together with your mentoring program coordinator to make the transition for your mentee as smooth as possible.

What if I do something wrong?

If you are there for your young friend no matter what; if you listen and really hear what's being said; and if you do your best to counsel and not to judge, you will have done everything right. Some young people are more ready than others for a mentor. Some young people may test their mentor's commitment. Try not to take such behavior personally. Just keep trying your best and keep doing the right things. Gauge your success by your actions, not your mentee's.