

The Mentoring Partnership
of Southwestern Pennsylvania

Peer Mentor Handbook



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Finding Support

As a peer mentor **you do not need to have all of the answers**. One of the most important skills you can learn from mentoring is how to ask for help. For some issues, you can find ways to respectfully and confidentially trouble-shoot with others you trust.

Remember – you can ask for help from:

- Teachers
- Program staff
- Other mentors
- Mentors in your life



While the information your mentee shares with you should generally be kept private, there are some situations that merit full-disclosure of information – as in **situations where your mentee is a risk to themselves or others**.

Handling Tough Issues

While together, you and your mentee may encounter some difficult issues such as:

- Substance use and abuse
- Abuse, violence, and bullying
- Mental health issues
- Peer pressure
- Puberty, sexuality, and relationships
- Death

With many of these issues, engaging in open and honest conversation about the problem is an important way to learn more and determine the best course of action. As a peer mentor, **your role is to direct your mentee to the appropriate resources**, whether that is a referral to a professional or sharing a good news article. When discussing these issues remember to remain calm and nonjudgmental.



Just because one of these issues comes up in conversation does not mean that your mentee is in imminent danger. For instance, if your mentee is curious about using illegal substances, talking about it encourages your mentee to ask questions and learn information about the risks of these activities.

Sometimes, just having a trustworthy friend to talk to about these issues can help enormously. Show your support by using active listening skills, affirming their feelings, and empathizing with their struggles. After having that moment of affirmation, you can move on to exploring options and pursuing the best solution.

Deciding to Report a Problem



If you decide that it is best to report the problem, tell your mentee immediately prior to the report and talk to them about why you made your decision. Make sure they know that you are on their side and that you want what's best for them. Offer to support them in any way that you are **able** to, but don't make promises you can't keep.

The following list can help you identify whether or not your mentee has a problem that should be discussed and/or reported.

Warning signs

- General warning signs
 - Loss of interest in school
 - Spending a lot of time alone
 - Severe mood swings
 - Sleeping a lot or very little
 - Eating a lot or very little
 - Turning away from adults for support
 - Increase in behavioral problems at school
 - Engaging in risky behaviors
- Substance abuse
 - Irrational, clumsy, or “spaced out” behavior
 - Lying
 - Secretiveness
- Abuse, violence, and bullying
 - Injuries that can't be accounted for
 - Physical defensiveness; getting jumpy or nervous
 - Sudden onset of compulsive or self-destructive behavior
- Mental health issues
 - Becoming withdrawn
 - Talking about death or dying
 - Prolonged sadness; expression of hopelessness
 - Prolonged nervousness or anxiety
 - Severe insecurity
 - Inexplicable and irrational behavior
 - Unhealthy coping mechanisms – sexual activity, drug use, self-harm, etc.

