

## Effective Mentoring – Podcast Transcript

### **Opening:**

Hi, I'm Celeste Janssen, the Program Director here at Oregon Mentors. I am here today in partnership with the Oregon Student Assistance Commission, also called OSAC for short. Today I am going to talk to you about how to be an effective mentor.

### **Body:**

In your role as an ASPIRE volunteer, you'll be advising and mentoring teens regarding life after high school. In these roles, you are able to build positive supportive relationships with youth over a period of several months or longer. Because mentoring is about relationship building, mentors and youth succeed when they have time to know each other, have fun together, and when they treat each other with mutual respect.

A large body of research has revealed some key lessons that should be used to guide to develop a successful mentoring experience.

The first lesson to keep in mind is that relationships take time to develop. Many mentors find the first stage of the mentoring relationship to be frustrating, and often wonder if they are making an impact. Adjust your expectations, and remember to just be consistent – be there time after time. Because mentoring youth is about long term rewards, you can measure your initial success in terms of your commitment.

The next stage of the mentoring relationship is usually reached only after several months of working together, and at this time the relationship has a rhythm and uniqueness. I like to think of it as the “kodak moment” stage. This is an excellent time for you two to celebrate the work you are doing together. The final stage is closure, and your ASPIRE coordinator will prepare you for closure with your student as the school year ends.

A second lesson learned from research concerns the approach you'll be using when working with youth. In a small qualitative study, researchers Morrow and Styles studied the way mentors approached and communicated with youth. They found two broad categories: developmental and prescriptive. The difference between the two groups is staggering: over nine months, 68% of prescriptive matches failed, while only 9% of developmental matches dissolved.

Prescriptive mentors approached matches with pre-determined agendas for changing youth in a relatively short period of time. In these matches, the mentors set the pace, goals, ground rules, and activities. Mentors rarely considered the youth's preferences or abilities, and mentors were reluctant to adjust their high expectation. Many youth chose to avoid contact with their mentor and withdraw from the relationship. It is not surprising that these matches often spiraled downhill to a place where both mentors and youth felt tensions and frustrations.

Developmental mentors approached their matches totally differently. In these matches, adults chose to focus on providing a comfort zone in which they could address a broad range of developmental tasks (like building emotional well-being, skills, and new experiences). These mentors were flexible and created a true partnership with the youth. An important point is that developmental mentors intentionally incorporated youth into decision-making. That means decisions on deadlines, activities, and more.

A third important lesson revealed through research comes from brain science. Many adults that don't regularly work with youth approach teenagers as if they were adults and expect the communication to be very adult like. While working with teens in the ASPIRE program, you'll likely run into scenarios where you can't understand why the teen is disregarding deadlines, and not acting in his or her long-term best interest. When this happens to you, remember this: The last part of the brain to develop in humans is the pre-frontal cortex, and it doesn't finish developing until the mid-twenties. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for long term decision making and planning. The teenager that you are working with doesn't see long term consequences like an adult can. Hypothetical situations or long-term scenarios might not seem relevant, but teens appreciate the use of clear examples with real life scenarios to help illustrate how their decisions today may affect their lives in the future. Remember; in slowly and deliberately working with a teen, you are helping that youth literally build new pathways in his or her brain.

Finally, the research shows that it is important to talk to your ASPIRE coordinator about how your match is progressing. Researchers John Harris and Mike Nakkula asked a group of mentors what they thought their kids thought about them, and then they asked the kids what they actually thought. The researchers found that there was actually no correlation between the answers! What we see most often is that mentors think their time has little impact on youth, when in reality, the youth appreciated and were very satisfied with the mentoring relationship. A good feedback loop between you and your ASPIRE coordinator and the teen, can help make sure the student is getting what they need from the program, and you are feeling recognized and valued.

Outside of research, your colleagues in the ASPIRE program can also provide you with valuable tips on how to be effective as a mentor. Ask around to glean best practice guidance from mentors that have good relationships with teens.

I've found that some youth communicate easier with an adult when side by side rather than face to face. Using humor is also an important skill.

**Conclusion:**

One final thing to keep in mind is this that as a mentor, your job is to help teach youth to learn to carry their baggage better. If you find yourself picking up the youth's baggage yourself, you're not providing them with a learning opportunity. Your role instead is to be a gentle and supportive companion.

I hope that today's information will help you make sure that your time invested with teens is meaningful and relevant.

**Closing:**

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