Profile of the Successful Tutor/Mentor - The Students Perspective

What do the students expect from their tutors/mentors? The following list was developed by the students in the Cabrini Connections Tutor/Mentor program:

- Teach us techniques to deal with life
- Help us with problems
- Let us know what’s right and wrong
- Expose us to future choices (education, career)
- Help us with homework
- Make sure we have work to do
- Find something educational when we have no homework
- Be a leader
- Be responsible
- Be on time
- Be a positive role model
- Don’t let us give up
- Don’t give up on us
- Be a friend
- Ask us how our day went

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How to be an Effective Tutor or Mentor

Top Twenty Tutor Tips

1. Put your student first. During the tutoring session concentrate on his/her needs and problems. Be flexible. If your student wants to review some material or talk about a problem, drop your plans for the session and focus on the immediate needs.

2. Be your students friend, but not a buddy. A “friend” is a person who looks out for your best interest. Therefore, a friend never allows you to do less than your best. A friend does not allow you to shirk responsibilities.

3. Approach your student on a basis of mutual respect. Your student may have had many experiences you have not and has knowledge you do not have. Show respect for these experiences and do not belittle him/her for knowledge no known or skills not yet acquired.

4. Take time to get to know your student. Some young people are very open and others are not. Spend some time assessing your student’s strengths and weaknesses. That way, you can build success into every session. Remember that self esteem building is very important.

5. Set realistic goals and make reaching them fun. Establish a starting point for success. Accommodate your student’s attention span into your lesson. Break your activities up into manageable chunks.

6. Set rules form the very beginning. Be firm and consistent in enforcing those rules. Don’t be afraid to say no or correct inappropriate behavior. When young adults know you are serious, they will respect you and you can be much more productive.

7. Minimize distractions. i.e Sit in an area away from other students if necessary.

8. Give your relationship time to establish itself. You may get resistance at first but, with patience and persistence, he/she will eventually warm to you.

9. Set up a structure for your session. Young adults respond well to structure because they know what to expect. Mix work and fun.

10. Be dependable. Your student quickly learns to count on you and your absence is a big disappointment. If you make a promise, be prepared to keep it.

11. You may have to try several different ways of explaining a concept or solving a problem before the student will understand. be patient and creative. Don’t give up!

12. It is important to praise your student. At times it can be awkward but young people thrive on it.

13. Reassure your student when he becomes frustrated or insecure about his ability. You can instill that “I can” mentality.

14. Foster independence. It is tempting to do the work for the student but that defeats he purpose. demonstrate the procedure and then leave the student to work alone and use you as a resource in case of trouble.

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Give your student the gift of time. many young people always feel pressured or rushed. They are denied the time they need to really think through a problem to answer it correctly so they say the first thing that comes into their mind. You can offer them that time that teachers often can’t.

Be prepared for the session because often students don’t bring homework.

Be careful when using sarcasm. Young adults may not understand it. They may sometimes interpret it as a putdown rather than a joke.

Never discuss the student in from of him or her, unless it is to give praise. Also never share in any gossip with your student about another student or volunteer.

Be observant. You may be the identifier of a problem that needs additional attention, whether it be academic, behavioral etc.

Believe that what you are doing makes a difference. Sometimes you may feel frustrated and unappreciated, which can lead to burnout, poor attendance and even dropping out. This is where faith comes in. Leaders who have been working with inner city children for more than twenty years, know that what we do works, but not for everyone, and not as fast as we all might hope.

It Works! But you’ve got to have faith.

These guidelines come from a program that is very similar in design to one reviewed by The Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University. Their study shows what it takes to succeed with inner-city kids, an proves that if you do it right, you can succeed. Here is an excerpt from that report:

In the fall of 1989, if you were a 14 year old from a welfare family, attending a public high school in an impoverished neighborhood, the odds for success were stacked against you - unless you were one of the 100 youngsters offered a quantum opportunity to build a new future.

The Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP) is an innovative four-year, year-round, pilot program that provided learning opportunities and summer jobs to small groups of youth from families receiving public assistance.

The program combines an creatively applies strategies that work:
• QOP assumes that these kids can make it and are worth the investment
• QOP recognizes that multi-year, year-round, multi-faceted investments are needed in education, personal development, and community service.
• QOP incorporates significant and sustained adult mentoring, counseling, and tough love.
• QOP offers financial incentives to young people and staff.

Through this four-year pilot program and rigorous evaluation, The Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University, learned that it is possible to make a quantum difference in the lives of these youths. They learned that it takes a critical mass of service, support, nurturing, incentives, creativity, caring, compassion, and especially patience. And, hey learned that the impacts on young people gain strength over time. The real key to this program is the philosophy and the persistence of the staff involved, and their dogged determination to enable and encourage these young people to succeed.

This is an important lesson for policy makers and many volunteers, who customarily seek immediate feedback about program success or failure. Premature examination would have labeled this program failure.

What are the net impacts of this program? It works. These young people will stick with the program, especially if the adults stick with them. In one pilot site, after four years of the program operation, 24 of the original 25 youth were still actively involved!

If it works for QOP, it will work for you and the program you’re working with, if you apply these ideas and constantly benchmark the work you are doing with work being done in similar programs in other places.

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