

CHAPTER 4: Program Rules

Chapter Subjects

- Participation Agreement
- Rules of Confidentiality
- Talk to Your Mentee About Confidentiality
- Boundary Issues
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- Discussing Delicate Issues
- Termination and Reassignment of the Match

Participation Agreements

Before being matched, both the Mentor and the Mentee will be asked to sign individual Participation Agreements. Participation Agreements serve to outline the expectations for Mentors and Mentees the mentoring program.

Sample Mentor Participation Agreement

As a Mentor in the REACH Georgia Mentoring Program, I will:

- Commit to meet with my mentee once a week for approximately 30 minutes to one hour for at least the duration of the school year.
- During meetings with my Mentee, I will try to develop a relationship of trust and respect.
- Attempt to be supportive, encouraging, and positive at all times as I interact with my Mentee.
- Agree that if I must miss a scheduled meeting with my Mentee, I will notify the school 24 hours in advance, or as soon as possible in case of an emergency. I will contact program staff about making the session up.
- Agree that if I am unable to fulfill my duties as a Mentor, I will contact program staff so that a replacement will be found.
- Complete the initial Mentor training, and make up any trainings or meetings that I may miss due to emergencies or other commitments.



- Agree to not give my Mentee or his/her family member gifts, or receive gifts from them.
- Agree to adhere to the program's "touching policies," to "confidentiality and child abuse reporting policies and procedures," as described in this manual.
- Agree to abide by the program's policies on "boundary issues," as outlined in this manual.
- Agree to contact program staff should I experience any difficulties in the match.

Mentee Agreements. The program also requires the Mentees to sign an agreement/application similar to the one the mentors will sign.

Rules of Confidentiality

As a Mentor, you are required to keep confidential the conversations that the Mentee shares with you. This includes the Mentee's family members. These young people typically will not open up unless they can trust you not to tell others. It is important that you maintain this trust, unless program staff determines that a specific issue must be divulged to outside professionals.

Because of safety and related issues, there are several exceptions where a Mentor should not maintain confidentiality:

Exception 1 -- Talking to program personnel: Mentors can talk to program personnel about anything going on with the Mentee.

Exception 2 -- Group Work: In support groups or trainings, Mentors can also talk about their relationship with their Mentee. (If you couldn't talk about what's going on, it wouldn't make sense to come together.) Our program maintains a "group confidentiality". If you hear something during a group about another Mentee, you must hold this material in confidence.

Exception 3 --Child abuse, Neglect, Endangerment / Child Abuse Reporting: If you hear or *suspect* that a child is being or has been abused neglected, or endangered, you must tell program staff immediately. As a Mentor, you are not asked to make the difficult decision of whether to report an incident to Child Protective Services or other authorities, but program staff is required to do so as they are "mandated reporters." The key here is *suspicion*. If you *suspect* that anything might be going on, you must report to staff immediately.

What constitutes possible abuse, neglect, and endangerment?



Physical Abuse: Any striking of a child where it leaves marks, bruises, welts, etc. In addition, any intentional and cruel exposure to water, heat, or any other unusual or painful punishments.

Physical Neglect and Endangerment: This is where the child's basic needs are not being met. Basic needs include food, shelter, hygiene, safety and health care. Physical neglect may include leaving young children either alone, or leaving them with other young children.

Sexual Abuse: Any sexual conduct / relationship where a minor is being manipulated and exploited is reportable. In addition, please note that sexual intercourse (even consensual) between an adult (18 or older) and a minor (under the age of 18) is a violation of various penal codes, and depending on the ages, it may be considered "statutory rape." Statutory rape defined as sexual intercourse between an adult and a child under the age of 14. Consent of the minor is never a defense.

Emotional Abuse: This type of abuse may include a lack of care and attention, humiliation, terror, intimidation and character assassination. Domestic violence may be a form of emotional abuse. Violence is terrifying loud and it leaves physical damage on bodies and property, and it can leave caregivers unable to tend to their children. If you are considering not reporting domestic violence, remember that violence is not an isolated event.

How About Abuse in the Past, or in the Future? Suspected abuse must be reported past, present or future. For example, someone may have abused the Mentee in the past who is not currently around this individual, but they may be abusing other children elsewhere. In addition, if you hear or suspect that anyone might be harmed in the future, this is also reportable.

How About Danger to Someone Besides My Mentee? Suspicion is also reportable even if it doesn't concern your Mentee directly. Example: If your Mentee says, "My brother has a gun and he is thinking about robbing the 7-11!"--This is reportable.

How a Report is Made: Again, we ask you to report any *suspicion* to program staff and they will help to decide if the incident is reportable. As a volunteer, you aren't required by law to make a report, but program staff is. Although program staff will take the lead on making a report, if the incident is serious a Child Protective Services worker may want to ask you details on the incident. Staff has paperwork and reporting procedures, as required by law.

What if I Ask Staff to Report, and S/he Fails to Do So? This is unlikely to happen, but if you feel that the program staff is not reporting something that you feel is reportable, the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) encourages you to make a report to the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). In order to make a report to DFCS, you may consider one of the following protocols:



1. Call Centralized Intake at 1.855.422.4453. A report can be made 24 hours a day seven days a week.
2. E-mail the Mandated Reporter attached to cpsintake@dhr.state.ga.us . You will receive an auto-reply stating that the CPS report has been received.
3. Fax the Mandated Report to 229-317-9663. Faxed reports convert to a PDF (Adobe) format and are automatically forwarded to the cpsintake@dhr.state.ga.us e-mail box.

Of course, if anyone is in immediate danger, you should call 911.

What if I Don't Want to Report Because of Embarrassment, Potential Trouble with Parents, or Because I Might Lose the Trust of the Mentee? We empathize with you because reporting is harder than just letting things slide by. But we implore you; children's' safety must take precedent over any concerns. Many times the act of reporting can help to break the cycle of abuse, neglect or endangerment that might otherwise continue on for years and years.

Talk to Your Mentee about Confidentiality

During early meetings, you should make this or a similar statement to your Mentee (the program will do the same during the Mentee training):

***Anything you tell me will be between you and me, except
if I hear that you or anyone else has been hurt, or is in danger.
Then I need to tell someone in the program.***

You should also clarify that anything they tell you regarding past abuse (their own or other minor's) is reportable.

Boundary Issues

Establishing good boundaries is necessary when working with this population as they are often very needy. Setting boundaries lets them know what behaviors are acceptable in the relationship and helps to create a safe place for sharing information. Boundaries clarify the limits of the mentor-youth relationship and can protect both mentors and mentees from exploitation and harm.

REACH Coordinator Resources



Loaning Money, Gift Giving - Providing gifts or money to your Mentee is not allowed. Alert program staff if you discover your Mentee needs items like clothing, schools supplies or funding for a sport, etc. The gift of your time is much more valuable than any purchased item.

Phone Contact - Mentors and mentees should discuss and decide what times to call each other are okay, as well as frequency of calls.

Physical Contact - You or your Mentee may want to initiate touching or hugging. A pat on the back, touch on the shoulder, or quick “side hug” is generally acceptable. Excessive body contact including, *but not limited to* hand holding, lap sitting, etc., is inappropriate.

Depth of Sharing - We cover this in “communication skills” but as a reminder, the depth you choose to share your personal life with the Mentee is also a boundary issue. If you feel uncomfortable about sharing, hold back.

Absences

It is very important that once you are matched with your mentee, you develop a regular meeting schedule. As your relationship grows, your mentee will look forward to your meetings and may be disappointed when you have to cancel. Illnesses, vacations, and unexpected problems cannot be avoided and may interfere with your scheduled visits. The following are recommended practices for dealing with absences.

Planned Absences (vacations, appointments, etc.) Let your mentee know as far in advance as possible that you will be unavailable on certain dates. Remind your mentee of that date as it approaches. Let your mentee know when you plan to return and schedule your next meeting with your mentee. You must also inform staff of your planned absences and intended date of return.

Unexpected Absences (illness, accident, car trouble, etc.) Call the agency or your coordinator as soon as possible to inform them of your difficulty. If possible, contact your mentee before the scheduled visit to let him/her know of your inability to meet. Remember to tell the mentee why you cannot meet. Let the mentee know that you will contact him/her soon about your next meeting together.

Emergencies

In the event on an emergency:

- Always call the program coordinator.
- If it relates to your mentee, call the parent or guardian and/or call emergency medical personnel (if appropriate).
- Complete agency incident report.

Grievance Procedures

Your agency will have its own process for handling grievances. If you have a grievance or complaint, you may want to handle it as follows:

- First, try to talk about your problem with the project coordinator.
- If, after sharing your concerns with the coordinator, you are still dissatisfied, make an appointment to talk to the coordinator's supervisor. If you still feel your grievance or complaint is not resolved, then consult the agency's personnel department.

Terminating, and Reassignment of the Match

We ask that, upon experiencing normal difficulties (such as lack of chemistry), Mentee and Mentor give the match some time to work things out. We are trying to teach the value of relationships, and it is not a good lesson to end the match because of minor difficulties that have a chance of working themselves out.

But, if after a period of time (and after discussing with program staff) these difficulties continue to exist, Mentees or Mentors may request a new match. Program staff will consider each case and make a determination on whether to reassign the Mentor and Mentee.

We have found that it is best to have a "cooling off period" before rematching, so that both parties will have time to experience proper closure.

Please also note that Mentees and Mentors should contact program staff *anytime* that they feel uncomfortable or uneasy about the match.