



Kansas Effective Practices Instructional Toolkit

Road Map: Using the Toolkit Frequently Asked Questions – Finding A Mentor

How do I find a mentor for a gifted student?

The first step in finding a mentor is to have the student evaluate what he/she hopes to gain from a mentoring experience. The most productive mentoring relationships are those that are focused on a specific outcome, such as the completion of a project. Once students know what they want to learn, they should put together a query package that contains a short biography, a description of the project they wish to pursue along with a summary of what they already know about the particular topic.

To identify mentor candidates, use your own circle of friends and their contacts, other parents of gifted students, local schools, local universities, museums and science centers, businesses and agencies, professional associations, local arts groups, and organizations such as the American Association of Retired Persons. State Governors' Schools and magnet high schools for gifted students are also potential sources of information on mentors and mentorship programs. Tele-mentoring is another option to consider. The [National Mentoring Partnership](#) may be a useful resource.

Other organizations that seek to match mentors with protégés include the [National Mentoring Partnership](#), [iMentor](#), [the Mentoring Group](#), [the International Telementor Program](#), and [UConn Mentor Connection](#).

Questions to Ask Students

1. Does the student want a mentor? Or does the student simply want enrichment in the form of exposure to a particular subject or career field?
2. What type of mentor does the student need?
3. Is the student prepared to spend a significant amount of time with the mentor?
4. Does the student understand the purpose, benefits, and limitations of the mentor relationship?

Guidelines for Educators and Parents

1. Identify what (not whom) a youngster needs. The student may want to learn a particular skill or subject or want someone to offer help in trying out a whole new lifestyle.
2. Decide with the youngster whether he or she really wants a mentor. Some might just want a pal, advisor, or exposure to a career field, rather than a mentor relationship that entails close, prolonged contact and personal growth.
3. Identify a few mentor candidates. If access to local resources is limited, long-distance mentors are an option. WHO'S WHO directories and the ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ASSOCIATIONS are rich sources of potential mentors.
4. Interview the mentors. Find out whether they have enough time and interest to be real role models, whether their style of teaching would be compatible with the youngster's learning style, and whether they are excited about their work and want to share their skills. Be explicit about the student's abilities and needs and about the potential benefits the mentor might derive from working with the young person.
5. Prepare the youngster for the mentorship. Make sure the youngster understands the purpose of the relationship, its benefits and limitations, and the rights and responsibilities that go along with it. Make sure you understand these things as well.
6. Monitor the mentor relationship. If, after giving the mentorship a fair chance, you feel that the youngster is not identifying with the mentor, that self-esteem and self-confidence are not being fostered, that common goals are not developing, or that expectations on either side are unrealistic, it might be wise to renegotiate the experience with the youngster and the mentor. In extreme cases seek a new mentor.

Questions to Ask Mentors

1. Does the mentor understand and like working with gifted youngsters and adolescents?
2. Is the mentor's teaching style compatible with the student's learning style?
3. Is the mentor willing to be a real role model, sharing the excitement and joy of learning?
4. Is the mentor optimistic, with a "sense of tomorrow"?