

**Volunteer Training – RRT**

**Handout**

Expectations & Relationship Building

You were all invited to participate in today’s session because you are all volunteer in one-on-one roles. Working one-on-one with participants requires building a relationship that is appropriate for your role.

What comes to mind when you hear the word relationship?

Let’s talk about your role. How it is different from relationships with family or friends?

**Stages of a Helping or Mentoring Relationship**:

**Beginning**

We are going to spend a bit of time here…because even if you are in a match that has been going on for more than a month, there may be opportunity to revisit some of these components.

How do you feel at the beginning of a match? How do you think your Mentee might feel?

What do you think are some of the key components of any relationship?

* Trust
* Communication
* Respect
* Empathy
* Patience
* Time – it doesn’t happen in one visit/meeting

Trust – to build trust you must show/demonstrate competence, connection, communication, honesty

You don’t have to know everything but you have to be honest about what you do and do not know. You have to demonstrate an interest in building connection.

Communication – open, honest

Let’s spend some time here to talk about effective communication and how we achieve that.

What challenges might we find with communication?

Respect – a positive feeling, showing that you value another person’s opinions

* If you respect someone, you don’t talk down to them or look down on their position, you show your belief in them

Empathy – ability to understand, to put yourself in the other person’s shoes, to feel for the other person using their frame of reference

Patience/Grace – We have to expect that building a relationship will take time. It will occur with consistent effort to build trust, communicate effectively and most importantly – listen, showing respect and empathy for your mentees.

**Common Pitfalls:**

* Making all of the decisions
* Going in with assumptions
* Missing meetings
* Not discussing expectations – how are we going to communicate, when are the best times to meet, where is the best place to meet
* Not taking the time to get to know one another

Why might these be common? You each have a description of your role as a mentor. There may be specific goals that your roles are set out to achieve. However, focusing just on those goals before building the relationship and including the participant or mentee may backfire.

#1 rule – take time to build the relationship first.

Has anyone experienced any of the above? Does anyone have anything to add to this phase? Problems that can arise? Anything you would like to share about how you typically start off when you first meet your participant or mentee?

**Building**

In this stage you and your mentee should feel comfortable with one another. Communication should be open. Norms/routines have been established

Now it is time to look deeper at setting goals and helping your mentee achieve them.

Common Pitfalls:

* Mentee becomes too dependent on your support
* They may wish to meet more or be contacting you more frequently
* Time to reinforce or set boundaries
* Mentors may feel overwhelmed if mentees are opening up about more areas of their lives – seek support from staff when mentee requests go beyond your scope as a mentor
* Mentors may feel underappreciated – by staff or by their mentees

**Closing/Transition**

* Some of our one-on-one volunteer matching roles have a limited time frame and closing or transitioning the relationship is an important part
* There can be feelings of significant loss for both the mentee and mentor
* Review and celebrate successes
* Discuss the transition – are there other community supports. Will you stay in touch? Are there ways to stay connected even on a more limited basis? (mentor/mentee potlucks?)
* Avoid discussing new concerns in the last few meetings – work on completing the goals already laid out

**Managing Expectations**

A common characteristic of volunteers who sign up for a helping or mentoring role is that they really want to help:

* Expect too much too soon – need to build the relationship first
* Get disappointed if their mentee doesn’t open up
* Not sharing the same goals – goal set together
* You don’t need to know everything – you can explore/look for answers together. Or you can set a goal to go off on your own and discuss what you have both discovered at your next meeting.
* Ask questions – avoid assumptions
* Having different expectations for the mentoring relationship can be a barrier to success and can be very unsatisfying. So be sure to check in with yourself before you meet with your participants – to be aware of where you are at the moment, any external factors that may be affecting you and what your own expectations of the meeting are.
* What do we have the right to expect? That mentees will meet at the agreed upon place and time or phone/email to cancel. We have the right to expect courtesy and respect from our mentees.

At initial meeting – what might we expect?

* Some shyness or awkwardness in communication
* Goals – to set some norms or expectations for meetings and communication – what is the best way to reach you? What days/time of day is best for getting together? Determine a regular location. Set the date/time/location for the next meeting.
* Try to find some common ground. Although you have goals of the program you are working in, you have to start first with building the relationship. So, hopefully you have been matched because of some commonalities and your coordinator has shared these with you

**It’s Just Not Working!**

It’s okay to admit that it’s not working

Reasons:

* Re-occurrences of the common pitfalls as mentioned in the beginning and building phases
* Meetings are missed
* Lack of communication
* Cannot find common ground
* Cannot agree upon goals
* Loss of focus – mentee not interested
* Feelings that you are just not making a difference
* It isn’t necessarily one person’s fault and it isn’t necessarily a failure – it may just be an opportunity for a different or more productive partnership
* A mentor ….
  + Listens and is supportive
  + Provides non-judgmental support
  + Gives guidance on issues raised by the mentee
  + Clarifies the goals of the mentee
  + Passes on knowledge and experience
* A mentor does not…
  + Tell their mentee what to do
  + Make assumptions or judgments about their mentee based on their mentees’ decisions and behaviours
  + Use their mentorship relationship for their own personal gain

**Stages of a Mentoring/Helping Relationship**

***Beginning***

**Your Role:**

* Review your role
* Discuss confidentiality
* Create a welcoming and safe environment
* Discuss how, when and where you will meet and how you will communicate between meetings
* Avoid judgement
* Find common ground (interests, hobbies, career paths) on which to build the relationship
* Ask, listen and learn about the needs and expectations of the mentee/participant

**Common Pitfalls:**

* Making all of the decisions
* Going in with assumptions
* Missing meetings
* Not discussing expectations – how are we going to communicate, when are the best times to meet, where is the best place to meet
* Not taking the time to get to know one another

***Building***

**Your Role:**

* Help mentee/participant develop goals and plans to achieve them
* Check on progress of goals throughout meetings
* Provide support and encouragement
* Help mentee/participant find the resources they require (possibly with help of staff)
* Continue to maintain the relationship through trust, communication, respect, empathy and patience.

**Common Pitfalls:**

* Mentee becomes too dependent on your support
* They may wish to meet more or be contacting you more frequently
* Time to reinforce or set boundaries
* Mentors may feel overwhelmed if mentees are opening up about more areas of their lives – seek support from staff when mentee requests go beyond your scope as a mentor
* Mentors may feel underappreciated – by staff or by their mentees

***Closing/Transitioning***

**Your Role:**

* The end of a mentoring/helping relationship can be felt as a significant loss
* Review progress and successes
* Discuss other community resources, networks and supports if applicable
* Discuss whether you will keep in touch

**Common Pitfalls:**

* Not communicating about the end or transition of the relationship
* Leaving with a feeling of unfinished business

**Self-Care**

**It is very important to process feelings and emotions during an interaction.**

1. **Common Internal sources of stress:**

* Worry about individual
* Self-doubt about handling
* Frustration from non-productivity
* Helplessness because no appropriate resources
* Wanting to rescue, change, persuade, or control the individual’s thoughts, behaviours or decisions

1. **What can I do when these feelings arise?**

* Debrief with staff in person or by calling
  + Whenever your buttons have been pushed from an individual (i.e. frustrated, worried)
  + After any intense or emotional interaction
  + After interacting with an individual
  + Forgetting it or just thinking about it is not good enough
  + A conscious releasing activity is necessary for actually letting it go!

1. **Why Debrief?**

* To maintain your mental/emotional stability and well-being by releasing emotional stress and tension. To prevent “burnout”, for mutual support, and to model mental health.
* As a learning process for more effective work
* To be emotionally prepared to have another interaction; remaining alert and retaining the maximum level of effectiveness for each interaction
* For objectivity and detachment

1. **Debriefing Process**

* Before your next individual and/or before you leave (on paper, or verbally with staff) do the following:
  + Identify your emotions and physical symptoms
  + What is it about the individual/interaction that is upsetting you?
  + Identify your internal sources of stress
  + What can you control or change at this moment?
  + How do you feel about how you handled the interaction:
    - What did you do that was helpful?
    - What would you have done differently?
    - What did you forget?

**Recognizing Burnout**

It is important that you remain of healthy and stable mind and body in order to have interactions. Recognition of burn out is important for both volunteers and staff in order to remain consistent, effective, and professional.

**Signs of Burnout**

* Increased irritability and agitation with individuals
* Over reaction to interactive situations (i.e. cutting the individual off)
* Prolonged venting in debriefing
* Difficulty detaching emotionally from individuals/interactions (taking an individual’s behaviours personally)
* Impatience, intolerance, or exaggerated judgement towards individuals, (personal disdain for a particular individual or type of interaction)
* Unable to find empathy for individuals
* Complacency (i.e. not caring anymore if you made mistakes)
* Reluctance to have interactions with individuals
* Delinquency and chronic lateness in meeting individuals
* Harbouring of negative, cynical, or discontented feelings towards the work that’s being done

**Options to consider if you recognize Burnout**

* If you experience 3 or more of these symptoms, take one of the following courses of action:
* Balance your lifestyle
* Build positive social supports
* Gain control where you can
* Quit doing something
* Control thoughts that you are indispensable
* Employ personal strategies to avoid or cope with burnout
* Use stress-management techniques
* Do what you love
* If these don’t work:
* Tell staff your concerns and arrange for a temporary Leave of Absence
* If there are stressors involving the work or operations that can be addressed, approach staff
* If stressors from outside sources are affecting your work, arrange for Leave of Absence until they’re resolved
* Tell staff your concerns and arrange for refresher training

**SETTING BOUNDARIES**

**What to do:**

* State clearly what your boundaries are and your reasons for them.
* Clarify your role and the role of the service for the caller.
* Be direct.
* Be clear and to the point.
* Don’t apologize.
* Be professional.
* Refer to policy limitations.
* Be honest about your feelings.
* State consequences.
* Offer a choice.