

Ten Ways

TO PRACTICE SAFE MENTORING



Relationships play a key role in how people connect with their community of faith and grow in their personal walk with Christ. Through our relationships with others we feel seen, heard, valued, and loved. Mentoring is an intentional way to encourage intergenerational relationships—connecting youth and young adults with spiritually mature members of the faith community. It can be a holy and sacred opportunity to pour into young people by supporting, discipling, and guiding them in ways that will help them flourish and deepen their understanding of who they are in Christ. For this to happen effectively, all parties must feel safe in the relationship. Here are ten ways to practice safe mentoring:

1. APPOINT A PROGRAM DIRECTOR

A program director oversees and ensures healthy mentoring relationships for everyone involved, creating a culture of care and safety. This includes making sure that the mentee and their parents are given clear support and expectations for the mentoring relationship, and that the policy and requirements for each mentor and mentee are being followed.

2. TRAIN MENTORS IN THE MENTORING POLICY

A well-crafted mentoring policy protects mentors and mentees alike. It outlines safe practices and protocols regarding in-person meetings, electronic communications, transportation, and other practical matters. Because of the nature of the relationship and the imbalance of power present between the mentor and mentee, a wise mentor will follow best practices and protocols to ensure the emotional safety of the relationship. Adherence is an act of care for the mentee.

3. TEACH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Healthy boundaries allow for a safe connection between the mentor and the mentee. Program directors should ensure that mentors know how to maintain appropriate emotional, spiritual, and physical boundaries in order to create a safe space. This provides an opportunity to model healthy, life-long boundaries that prioritize honesty, kindness, and safety in all relationships. The mentor is always responsible for maintaining safe boundaries for both parties.

4. SIGN AND UPHOLD THE CODE OF CONDUCT

A Code of Conduct clarifies the behavior expected of a mentor from the outset of the relationship. By signing, mentors indicate their commitment to conduct themselves to the best of their ability in a way worthy of the task to which they have been called. A mentor must understand that they hold a position of power and trust with respect to the mentee, and they commit to steward that power in a way that promotes the well-being of the mentee.

5. LOG MENTORING INTERACTIONS

All one-to-one mentoring meetings should take place in public spaces where others are present. The program director should create a recording mechanism, logging all meetings that take place. This provides transparency for the program director, parents, and other mentors to have access to accurate records of mentoring engagements.

6. PRACTICE CARE WHILE COMMUNICATING ELECTRONICALLY

In a digital age, clear guidelines for electronic communications are necessary. Mentors and mentees are encouraged to establish expectations around electronic communication in ways that foster the relationship while safeguarding healthy boundaries. One-to-one messages sent via text, email, or chat should be logged just as one-to-one meetings are.

7. PRACTICE APPROPRIATE TRANSPORTATION

A mentor should not be alone in a vehicle with any youth in the program. If no other alternative is possible, the following steps should be taken: (1) the mentor will acquire the consent of the parents/guardians of the mentee; (2) the mentor will communicate with the program director when the one-to-one transportation begins and ends.

8. SPEAK UP IF SOMETHING SEEMS OFF OR WRONG

Be wise and alert. If you see something that seems off or wrong in a mentoring relationship, take the initiative to speak up and contact the program director. Don't assume that someone else will eventually say something. Speaking up is an act of love and care for both the mentee and the mentor.

9. MAINTAIN TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Information shared in a mentoring relationship must be held in confidence by the mentor. Mentees may come with many questions about God, themselves, and the world. It is important that they feel heard and safe to share in confidence. If a mentor feels it is important to share something they have heard, they should ask for permission from the mentee first. The exception to confidentiality enters in if a minor discloses a matter of abuse or neglect.

10. REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE

If a mentee who is a minor discloses that they are being victimized by abuse, or if a mentor suspects that abuse or neglect is happening, the mentor must report the abuse to appropriate law enforcement such as Child Protective Services, or to an appropriate child welfare authority of a U.S. state or Canadian province. Support is available through the program director, a safe church leader, or a safe church ministry consultant with Thrive. All mentors are mandatory reporters.

This resource has been developed by Thrive. If you have questions or would like support in ministry, please email thrive@crcna.org.

