

## Guidelines for Difficult Situations

Regardless of the real-life situations that mentors will encounter, there are a few guidelines that apply in most cases. Several suggestions are offered below to guide mentors as they interact with mentees in difficult situations.

- **Face the problem.** Ignoring it won't make it go away. If a problem is really a problem, it's best to deal with it early before it gets bigger.
- **Think beforehand about what you want to accomplish in dealing with a sensitive issue.** For example, do you want only to know whether or not the student is aware of a behavior and its effect, or do you want to import your viewpoint? Do you want to change the student's behavior? Knowing your purpose helps keep things focused.
- **Bring things up early in a visit.** Don't wait until the end of the visit or for an "opportune time" to present itself. There is probably never a good time to bring up a hard topic and so it's best to get to it right away.
- **Separate the behavior from the person.** Speak objectively about the behavior and positively about the person. For example, "I like your energy, but when you do \_\_\_\_ it puts me in an awkward position."
- **Don't overdo humor, teasing, or jokes.** A teenager will not always grasp issues presented in a half-joking but serious manner. The best guideline is to stay serious but supportive, don't tease or joke, and save humor for lighter times.
- **Discuss sensitive issues in a quiet place, if possible.** A quiet space in the hallway, classroom or a conference room might be a good place to meet. You may even want to take a walk to talk.
- **Reinforce at a later time something positive about your student.** Emphasize that the issue was about behavior and nothing personal.
- **Help your mentee see that the problem is only a part of his or her overall personality.** Identify the mentee's strength that could help him or her to address the problem; then, follow up with encouragement. "I've heard you talk about the excellent advice you give your friends when they are making poor decisions. When your teacher gives you good advice about your assignments, though, you see him as critical and unsupportive. I wonder how you might see your teacher as someone who has your best interest at heart, in the same way that you have your friends' best interests at heart."
- **Consult your local TeamMates School Facilitator for support and guidance.**

*Adapted from: A Training Guide for Mentors, Smink*