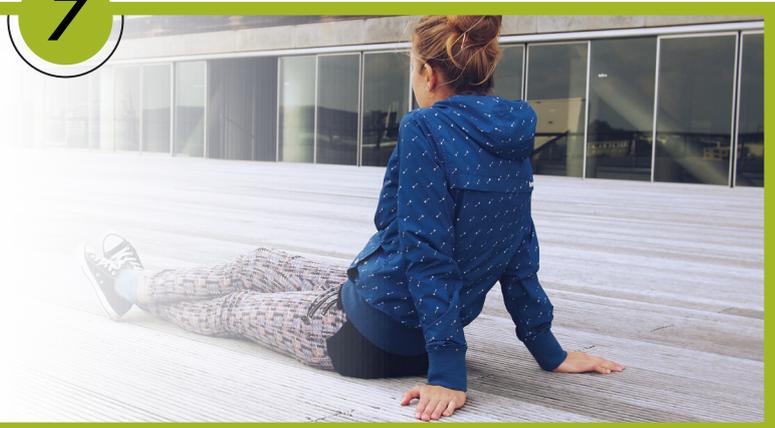


# HOW TO MANAGE BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES WITH YOUR MENTEE



Childhood and adolescence are a time of rapid physical, mental and emotional change. These rapid changes paired with external pressures from peers, media, family can leave some young people feeling unconfident, confused or angry. Adding to the difficulty of this period is the natural desire to test boundaries and to claim the privileges and rights of growing up.

For some young people the effect of all these changes is too much to handle and it can lead to varying levels of negative behaviour – withdrawal, self-harm, verbal/physical aggression, truancy, unsafe sexual experimentation, alcohol, tobacco or drug use, excessive risk-taking or criminal activity.

In a mentoring role, your responsibility is not to act as a disciplinarian or to solve these behavioural issues. You are there to listen, support and share your thoughts and experiences with your mentee. This fact sheet offers some strategies for helping your mentee through behavioural issues and discusses your responsibilities for reporting information where your mentee's safety or health is at risk, or where a crime has taken place.

## HOW DOES LISTENING HELP?

Often our first instinct when we are listening to someone in trouble is to tell them what to do. In certain stages of youth development, however, their negative behaviour can be a rebellion against being told what to do – so listening and sharing experiences becomes a far more effective strategy to help your mentee.

- *By listening and refraining from judging your mentee you are increasing the likelihood they will keep talking to at least one adult in their lives which could make all the difference to the choices they ultimately make.*

- Adolescents often face increasingly grown-up responsibilities in their personal relationships, education and work commitments. In their relationships with adults they are often looking for more equality and to be listened to and spoken to as a mature person.
- If you are actively listening to your mentee you will have the opportunity to understand what is really upsetting them and driving them to act out. If they confide in you or you can figure it out from things they have said – or things they have avoided talking about – you can share thoughts and experiences that might help them figure out new ways to cope.
- Everyone is busy and although listening doesn't seem like 'taking action', a mentor may be the only adult in a young person's life that is taking the time to sit down with them and let them talk.

## CHANGING WORLD

**TIP**

It can be tempting to think we know how it is to be a teenager. Although it is a good idea to try to remember the emotions and changes of adolescence, to help understand what a mentee is experiencing, it is important to acknowledge changes to the world they live in.

The internet, social networking sites and mobile phones mean they are constantly in touch with their peers and associated peer pressures even when they are at home. Alcohol and drugs are arguably more readily accessible and many surveys have shown sexual activity is beginning in increasingly younger age groups. Try to keep these changes in mind when you are listening to your mentee talk.

## TALK ABOUT CONSEQUENCES

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Without telling your mentee what to do – or why they are wrong to think or act the way they do – you can encourage them to think about the consequences of their actions. You can help them think about the short and long-term impact of their actions both for themselves and for the people they care about. The idea is not to frighten or lecture your mentee but to help them think through the outcomes that could follow from their behaviour.

Depending on their behaviour, some of the personal consequences could be:

- losing their trust and/or freedom
- losing their health/life
- losing their friends
- losing their place on a sports team
- losing their choice of job or career
- losing their option to go to university
- having to change schools
- damaging their brain
- becoming a parent before they are ready
- losing their freedom/gaining a criminal record
- being banned from entering other countries
- being stopped from leaving a country, including New Zealand.

Depending on their behaviour, some of the consequences for family and friends could be:

- younger siblings may follow the behaviour and be at risk of hurting themselves
- financial loss or hardship
- being forced to move home or work
- having to see their child/friend hurt
- having to see their child/friend in jail
- stress and anxiety
- losing their partner or child or friend.

## ENCOURAGE YOUR MENTEE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT IN LIFE

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The flipside of thinking about consequences is talking about aspirations with your mentee. If they are not in the habit of talking about what they want in life it may take a while for them to open up but

*focusing on their aspirations can be a powerful motivator for change*

once they have them in mind.

To help them get started:

- Ask them what they want to achieve or have by the end of the school term or year.
- Ask them if there are people around them who have jobs/sporting achievements/qualifications/relationships/possessions that they would like to have and encourage them to explain what about those things appeals.
- Ask them what they see as the hurdles to their aspirations and what first steps they can take towards them.
- Talk to them about making a plan to help them realise one of their aspirations – help them break it into manageable stages so they are motivated by a sense of achievement along the way.

## WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

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Mentors are not expected to correct behaviour or to deal with criminal or serious health and safety issues alone.

Seek professional help for your mentee if you learn they are:

- being hurt by someone – being sexually, emotionally or physically abused by someone.
- being threatened with violence.
- in desperate need of help for something that you cannot provide e.g. a safe place to stay, sexual abuse counselling, help to deal with suicidal thoughts or treatment for a drink/drug problem.

You are required to contact the appropriate authorities, including the police, if you learn your mentee is:

- sexually, emotionally or physically abusing someone
- involved in criminal activities.

You will also need to talk to someone if you feel your own personal safety is at risk from your mentee, either due to their behaviour or threats they have made.

*Refer to Fact Sheet 8 for more information.*