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# Four Keys to Start a Mentoring Relationship


1. Listen Attentively
2. Ask Inviting Questions
3. Summarize Content and Feeling
4. Use Strategic Self-Disclosures

## 1. Listen Attentively

One of the greatest gifts someone can give to a young person is to patiently listen in a deeply caring manner. We may seek out a good listener for ourselves when we have experiences we want to share. Unfortunately, good listeners are difficult to find in today's fast-paced world. Some people don't even take time to carefully and patiently listen to the feelings of their own family members.

Young people become excited when someone encourages them to talk about their interests, concerns, and views of events. For young people to develop positive beliefs about their self-worth, they need a person to show a special interest in them. This means having someone in their lives who will take the time periodically to be an encouraging listener.

As you begin your relationship with your Pilot, you should work especially hard to be a good listener. Attentive listening begins by displaying open and inviting body language to the adolescent. As your Pilot talks to you:

 **Don't** cross your arms, lean too far back, fidget with something in your hands, or look away very often from your Pilot's face.

 **Do** sit with an open, calm posture. Laugh with him/her and keep a facial expression that shows genuine interest in what he/she is saying or doing.

## **Tips for Handling Resistance**

- 1. Do More and Talk Less.** Back off from asking too many questions and invite your Pilot to do some activities with you. For example, take a walk, play catch, or play a game. Chapter 4 will provide you with several other involving activities which you can do with your Pilot.
- 2. Follow the Pilot's Lead.** As much as possible, let your Pilot determine what you will be doing or talking about during your time together. Use more of a learner/follower approach rather than a leader/teacher approach, especially in the beginning of the relationship. Later, after the relationship builds, your Pilot will be more receptive to your taking the lead sometimes.
- 3. Be Persistent.** Don't give up. Some Co-Pilots who became discouraged and thought of quitting the relationship, discovered that their sheer determination finally paid off. Persistence is one way you can show your Pilot you are more genuinely caring than other "helpers" he/she has known.
- 4. Try Yielding.** If working with your Pilot feels like trying to open a locked door, try "yielding." This is a term used in some martial art styles that describes a creative backing-off approach as a way to weaken an opponent's attack. You can try this backing-off from your Pilot's resisting behaviors by acknowledging your feelings of discouragement. Invite your Pilot to reveal his/her real feelings about working with you. If your Pilot discloses any feelings to you, listen to them carefully. This strategy may provide the "break through" opportunity for which you have been hoping. It can provide a new beginning in your relationship.
- 5. Seek Assistance.** If all else fails, explore the situation with your Program Coordinator and/or Co-Pilot Support Group.

## **Tips for Handling Other Challenges**

### *When your Pilot:*

- **Is easily distracted during your conversations.**  
*Tip:* Check with the Pilot's counselor, teachers, and/or parents to find out if this is typical behavior for the adolescent. Provide feedback to your Pilot about this behavior. Then, ask what might be the reasons behind the behavior. Explore together what each of you might do differently to help improve the situation.
- **Resists ending your meetings.**  
*Tip:* Together, work out some way to cue the teen that there are five minutes remaining in your meeting. This could be done by using a hand signal or by telling him/her directly that the meeting is almost over. If the resistance continues, inform your Program Coordinator and/or your Co-Pilot Support Group.
- **Seems unappreciative of your efforts.**  
*Tip:* Pilots should not be expected to express much appreciation for anything you do with them. Most teenagers eventually come to deeply value their mentors. But, some young people do not feel comfortable with, or know how to express these feelings.
- **Expresses intense emotions.**  
*Tip:* Some adolescents and adults are uncomfortable when someone shows emotions. When your Pilot tells or shows you about his/her feelings, always become focused and be a good listener. It is important to show caring, accepting, and a desire to understand the teen's views. Try to avoid reassuring statements like "It's going to be okay" or "Tomorrow, you'll feel better about things." These statements are often interpreted as discounting their feelings about the situation. Also, avoid giving quick advice. Most young people, when they express intense emotions, don't want to be told what they should do. What they want most is someone who is a caring, patient listener.