

APPROACHES TO PROVIDING SUPPORT



Finding the right balance to Provide Support can sometimes be tricky. Some people offer to “help” and then “take over.” Or they don’t offer help, waiting to see if the person can do it by themselves, and that person ends up quitting completely out of utter discouragement. But when you get the balance right, they know they “did it,” and you know they can do it the next time, probably with less help from you.

Talk It Through

Young people appreciated when their mentors helped them think about tough situations they needed to navigate by talking it through together. As one mentor in our study said, “I’ve found that she responds really well when we’re open about problems she has. We talk about it, we internalize it, and we talk about the different aspects.” Youth also noted that it was useful when mentors shared how they navigated difficult situations: “They could tell you what you’re gonna expect, like what they’ve been through.”

Source: A Search Institute study of developmental relationships between mentors and mentees in a national mentoring program.

- 1. Scaffold support:** Try following the “I do, we do, you do” process to support youth learning something new. That process is: First, model it for them. Then do it together. Then, empower them to try on their own. (Bonus: Ask them to teach it to someone else.)
- 2. Provide or connect youth to resources:** Make sure all young people have the material things they need to be successful, whether it’s a snack, a pencil, or financial support. Think about ways you can directly provide resources to young people, or connect them with people or places where they can access the resources they need.
- 3. Remove internal roadblocks:** Help young people recognize and counteract ways that they might get in their own way when they feel frustrated, like negative self-talk, giving up, or shutting down. Help them find a new way to look at a difficult situation when they feel discouraged.
- 4. Keep eyes on the prize:** When a young person seems to get “off track” and isn’t reaching their goals, take time to talk to them and remind them of what they set out to achieve. Let them know you want to see them get back on track and know they can do it.
- 5. Validate feelings:** When young people are working hard on a task (especially - though not only - when they are struggling with it), ask them how they are feeling and validate or, if validation isn’t appropriate, acknowledge their feelings.

- 6. Problem solve:** Talk through difficult situations or tasks with the young person. Help them identify what their options are, and what the consequences of different choices might be. Help them identify which aspects they can handle on their own and which aspects might require support from you or someone else.
- 7. Prep for tough stuff:** Support a young person navigating a conflict by creating a strategy together for approaching a difficult conversation. Use role play to help them practice their strategy and what they want to say. Many young people need help learning how to ask for help.
- 8. Keep an open door:** Proactively let young people know that they can come and talk to you whenever they want or need to talk.
- 9. Advocate for equity:** Stand in solidarity with people experiencing prejudice and discrimination and invite others to do the same. When you notice a young person experiencing discrimination, let them know you see them. Speak up against the discrimination and make space for them to speak up as well - empower them by giving them choice in how you respond.
- 10. Use indirect praise:** When a young person has made important progress on a difficult task or challenge, mention that progress to their family or other staff and invite them to join you in encouraging the young person to continue moving ahead.



Blend Elements:

Provide Support & Share Power

Providing support without sharing power can sometimes lead to an adult pushing their own agenda without listening to the voice of the young person. As one youth leader explained, “There’s a fine line between giving advice and telling people what to do.” A parent explained that when sharing power and providing support, “There’s just a balance of guiding and stepping back.”

The balance between providing support and sharing power can lie in the ability of the adult to do this “dance” and become attuned to what the young person needs. As one young person shared, it’s “nice to know that the person that I’m asking for advice isn’t trying to tell me exactly what to do, but they’re helping and asking more, rather than saying, ‘You should, you should.’”

Basic Supports

Young people impacted by the child welfare system shared that they need to have their basic needs met in order to be well. One young person described this as being “healthy and without need.” For many young people in the child welfare system, support for basic needs includes financial stability, access to food, adequate housing, employment, and transportation. These supports are the groundwork for young people to engage in relationships and communities.

Source: A Search Institute study of how young people and parenting adults impacted by the child welfare system experience well-being.