

# Classroom Mentoring

**FOCUS**



**ON THE FUTURE**

*Empowering Students to See  
Their Own Potential*

**Resource Guide**

# Classroom Mentoring Program 2009-2010



"Children long for somebody...  
to accept them,  
to love them,  
to praise them,  
to be proud of them.

Let us bring the child back to the center of our care and concern. This is the only way the world can survive because our children are the only hope for the future." Mother Teresa

A Collaborative Effort of the Bay County School District,  
Panama City Beach Chamber's Education Partnership,  
Tyndall Air Force Base and Navy's Coastal Systems Station



**"Be the change you wish to see in the world."  
-Gandhi**

Dear Mentors,

Thank you for becoming a Classroom Mentor. As a business person in our community, you represent the real world to our youths. You can offer a powerful source of inspiration and motivation by being part of the educational process. We all have a story of how we made it from high school to where we are today. You can share those stories and yourselves with a classroom of high school students, be there every month, holding up the idea of success, helping students start to see their potential and their own road map to SUCCESS.

As you use this guide for your time in the classroom, may you find the conversation starters and activities helpful in building rapport with your group of teens. The purpose of the classroom mentoring program is to give high school students the opportunity to learn and see new possibilities for their own future. As Superintendent Bill Husfelt says, "We want them to see what they can be." Your dedication to this mentoring program allows some students a new perspective and outlook on life, one they may have never seen before!

We want to truly thank you for taking the time to work with a classroom! We hope your participation will not only make a difference in the lives of high school students, but in your life as well. As a Classroom Mentor, you may develop new leadership and teaching skills while experiencing the value the business community can bring to our educational system. Being actively involved in mentoring today's youths, will also help you gain insight into ways we can further provide and support the current school system in the role of preparing today's students for the workforce of tomorrow.

The PC Beach Chamber's Education Partnership Committee- 2009

## CLASSROOM MENTORING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In order for the students to trust the adult coming into their classroom, it is important to build rapport. What is rapport? : **the ability to enter someone else's world**, to make that person feel that you understand him / her and you have a common bond. So, how can you gain rapport with teens? You can do it by discovering things you have in common. We call this process mirroring and matching.

The Search Institute has been studying young people who are thriving for the past five years. Young people who are not just surviving, not just getting by, but who are truly doing well—aware of and using their interests, talents, and abilities; achieving their goals; living up to and beyond their potential.

We've discovered three distinct things that seem to be present in young people's lives, and almost guarantee that they will thrive:

- 1. Young people know their “sparks,” the special interests and abilities they are passionate about**
- 2. They pursue their sparks and use them to contribute to a better world**
- 3. Their parents and other adults support, encourage, and help them with their sparks.**

This resource is intended to be a guide to help you empower young people to learn to thrive, by addressing all three of these important factors in one simple way: by talking with them!

What do we mean by “simply talking with young people”? Well, what we mean is having real, person-to-person conversations with them, talks that

- help them discover their own abilities and possibilities,
- guide them to try new things and take next steps,
- reveal your own struggles and dreams and lessons learned,

so that youths can learn from these talks. Real adult-to-child conversations, not just pal-to-pal chats.

Are you interested? We hope so, because we believe *how* you talk with teens can make a huge difference in their future success, fulfillment, and contribution to the world.

In the rest of this guide, you'll find easy-to-use information about the skills you can practice, the ways you can set up good situations for talks, and the kinds of questions and ideas that help make these conversations work. As you work your way through, you'll find all kinds of ways to help teens find and nurture their sparks, and you may just find that your own sparks are rekindled in the process!

## Things to know and skills to practice

Have you already been having thriving conversations with the young people in your life? Are you just getting started? Do you want to become more intentional, more effective as a young person's mentor, role model, cheerleader, or coach? Take a look at the skills below—you likely have a number of them already, but perhaps there are a few you could hone up on, deepen your knowledge of, or apply differently.

### Listening First

The focus is talking “with,” not talking “to.” And since adults spend much of their time talking “to,” we sometimes have to stop our selves and listen first. Ask open-ended questions. Give a little silence that opens the space for young people to find their own voices. And that ties to the next point . . .

### Creating a Feeling of Safety

In order for many people to talk about their innermost self, their dreams, their passions, they need to feel safe. That may mean knowing they won't be made fun of or put down. It may mean talking after spending quite a bit of time together doing other kinds of activities and getting to know each other well.

Practice making it safe for young people to talk with you. Keep their word confidential, if they ask you to (unless, of course, it entails harm to them or others). Respond with respect, interest, and positive ideas. Try having talks in different kinds of situations and see which situations seem to feel “safest” to the young person you want to talk with.

### Allowing for Individuality

It's a cliché to compare the uniqueness of human beings to the uniqueness of each snowflake—but clichés emerge from widely known truths. In regard to thriving, it is certainly true that each of us has his or her own personal best, his or her own ways of fulfilling their special potential. But there are some particular kinds of individuality to be sure to keep in mind when you're working to be a mentor for a young person, including age, temperament and personality, and group dynamics.

- **Age.** Remember that young people have different abilities at different ages. The youngest teens may well reveal that they have passions and talents, but be unable to focus on them for very long. And the difference in planning, decision making, and problem solving between a 13-year-old and a 16-year-old can be huge. Have high expectations for kids of any age, but make sure they are age-appropriate.
- **Temperament and personality.** Is the girl or boy you're working with a highly sensitive person (HSP)? Is he or she outgoing or shy? Talkative or reserved? The kind of person who laughs long and loud or who chuckles quietly? Does he or she shake off disappointments or take them to heart? Does he or she prefer things to move in logical, predictable directions, or does he or she like to just jump in and see what happens? A performer or a behind-the-scenes person?

All these kinds of differences in temperament or personality in young people may make a difference in how you approach and talk with her or him. One child may get so excited and think so far ahead of where he is, he might need help to rein in his imagination and focus on next steps. Another might be a little insecure about her talent and need more encouragement to be bold and confident.

- **Stages of development.** Numerous aspects of a young person's development—cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and more—need to be accessed for a young person to thrive. Yet few, if any,

people develop at the same rate in all aspects. So a young person may be a straight-A student in academics, yet lag behind some of her peers in emotional self-regulation. Another might be very astute in observing and understanding others' feelings, but not yet have developed strong skills in focus and concentration.

Part of your “work” as a thriving guide may be to notice a young person’s strengths and challenges, and look for ways to help her or him raise the levels of any developmental areas that need it.

Practice observing the young person you want to help thrive—what kind of person is he or she? What styles of interaction seem to be most effective?

Practice observing yourself, too! Are you more demanding of others than yourself, or less? Do you treat all young people as equals, or do you find yourself sometimes acting from assumptions or stereotypes? How often do you say “You should...” compared to “What do you think”? Broadening the range of your interaction and speaking styles and making sure you are phrasing things in positive, empowering ways will increase your effectiveness with young people in all your spheres of influence.

### **Affirming the different pathways to thriving**

Some people seem to know what they want to be, what their spark is, from the time they are very young. Others discover their passion during elementary, middle, or high school. Many really “find themselves” in the exciting intellectual atmosphere of higher education. Others seem to continue searching, even give up searching for awhile, then later in life suddenly emerge as a writer or an artist or a teacher. In fact, the existence of the common term “late bloomer” testifies to the relative commonness of the latter experience.

Finding your spark and moving from surviving to thriving can take a number of pathways, so it’s important to not try to force a particular trajectory on any particular young person. Instead, do your best to discover the young person’s natural pace and rhythm. Sometimes he or she may need to time to think about the possibilities, or a nudge to start looking for new ones.

### **Walking a fine line sometimes**

Helping a young person thrive is more of an art than a science. Sometimes a subtle change in tone or emphasis can make all the difference in whether good advice is accepted or rejected. This calls for skill on the part of the adult in observing his or her own behavior, body language, and manner of talking.

Practice being aware of the sometimes fine line between empty praise and helpful encouragement and notice whether you’re going beyond support to doing some of the work for them. Be intentional about whether someone needs just a nudge, or to be pressed a bit, or really responds to being pushed. And most of all, keep an eye on the creative tension between realism and idealism. When a young person says his spark is to become an astronaut, yet he doesn’t seem to have an affinity for science, ask yourself what’s really going on. Is that really his spark? Is he actually responding to or eager for the sense of adventure and exploration that an astronaut represents? Do you need to help him find another activity that satisfies that urge for some healthy risk-taking? Or do you need to find him some tutoring in science subjects?

### **Converting a dream into steps to take**

Young people often need help to see how current classes and chores and tasks have anything to do with their ultimate dream. It’s up to you as the adult to help them begin to break a big goal into achievable steps.

When a young person says she wants to be the president someday, help her see the value in signing up for debate and drama now by pointing out that the skills she learns in those classes will be called on whenever she makes a speech in the future.

### **Modeling strong moral values**

It's not enough for a young person to have talent and a supportive adult or two. Two matters of character are vital to thriving as well: 1) developing the motivation, dedication, confidence, and discipline to excel at his or her spark, and 2) using that spark to give back to or contribute to the world.

When the supportive adults around a young person, including parents, extended family, teachers, clergy, coaches, and mentors, present a united front on important values, a young person is more likely to begin to claim those values as his or her own. And when those same adults live out those values through their own lives, that role modeling goes even farther than repeated reminders about "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again".

Show them the options for their future—with enthusiasm!

Focus on the Future Mentoring Program

**(Adapted from the Search Institute Sparks by Peter Benson, PhD)**