



Guide for Mentors

Providing emerging adults with lasting support, so they can thrive on their journey to independence

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Section I: Mentoring Basics

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6



1. Who we Serve

A significant amount of youth in the child welfare system will never be placed in a permanent home, and will exit the foster care system with few supports and opportunities. These are the young people that are highly vulnerable and specifically targeted for human trafficking, gangs, credit fraud, substance abuse, and other high risk behaviors.

A majority of older adolescents have the desire to attach to a positive adult role model to offer them guidance, but are unsure of who to trust.

- 65% of youth leaving foster care need immediate housing upon release.
- 46% of former foster youth complete high school (compared to 84% of the general population).
- 1/3 of former foster youth have incomes at, or below, \$6,000 per year, which is substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual.
- The majority of young people arrested on prostitution charges come from the foster care system. Child traffickers are often used to recruit fellow foster youth, who are living in shelters and foster homes.
- 42% of foster youth, including 60% of women, become parents within 2.5-4 years after exiting care.
- 70% of all inmates have spent time in foster care.

2. What is Safe Families PLUS?

Safe Families PLUS (Providing Lasting Unconditional Support) pairs youth in care ages 14 through 21 who have independence goals with volunteer adult mentors who act as a long-term, consistent role model, similar to an extended family member.

Mentor

The mentor is a support person who will guide the youth along on their journey, working towards achieving their independence goals:

- Mentors will come alongside the youth to:
 - Provide lasting support and shared experiences
 - Help with exploring talents, strengths, and career interests
 - Teach life skills
- Mentors are expected to be available to the mentee via phone and in person at least three times per month, with a minimum of two in-person visits. This might simply mean including them in your own family's routine and working on life skills such as grocery shopping. Activities are flexible and determined between the mentor and mentee, as long as there is regular and consistent contact occurring.
- As mentors continue to build relationships with their mentee the opportunity may arise to host the youth in the mentor's home for a weekend, holidays, etc. All mentors who have completed the Safe Families licensing procedures as a Host Family are allowed to have the mentee over to their home.

Mentor Coach

Each Safe Families PLUS youth/young adult will be assigned a Coach. The Coach will be your primary link to Safe Families - a more experienced volunteer with whom you may talk things through and discuss any situations that might arise in the course of an assignment. They are there to offer guidance and will help you work within your strengths and not to become extended beyond your limits.

Responding to your needs: The Mentor Coach is your advocate. You can feel free to contact them whenever you need help or direction. If things are not going well, it is important for you to let your Coach know. The Coach will be available to the mentor and youth for ongoing and emergency support, and will focus on the goals of establishing, growing and sustaining a healthy, supportive relationship between all involved parties. The Coach can provide resources to assist the young adult with achieving their goals, and support the mentor with ideas and activities for relationship building.

3. Criteria for Mentors

- Over age 25, emotionally stable, and mature
- Not abuse drugs or alcohol
- Refrain from profanity and other potentially damaging behavior
- Willing to document contact with mentee in the database
- Be involved or willing to work with a Safe Families host church or agency

Successful Mentoring Qualities

Commitment	Patience
Positivity	Consistency
Respect	Persistence
Active Listening	Flexibility and Openness
Empathy	Open Mindedness
Resourcefulness	Value Driven

Being Positive: The youth is filled with relationships that are negative. They hear messages from themselves or others that they are a failure: “They aren’t smart.” “They can’t keep a job.” There is much truth in the struggles they have. However, they do have the ability to overcome many of their challenges. That is why SF Plus Mentors often act like a coach. A coach’s job is to inspire, motivate, instruct, and encourage. However, they have to do much of the work. We must learn how to help be positive in the midst of multiple problems and negativity. We must learn to help a youth break down tasks into doable activities. Ultimately, we realize that many of challenges need divine intervention. We must be willing to talk with the youth about their spiritual condition and how to improve it, if they want to.

DO:	DON'T:
Respect the youth as a unique individual	Be dogmatic about your religious/political opinions
Be prepared to listen and let the person talk	Rush in with judgments and advice
Focus on their aspirations as a youth	Take sides in family disputes
Sensitively approach known challenges that the youth wants help with	Press the youth to talk about things that they are not yet ready to address
Keep to set days and times for meetings	Administer medication for them
Give adequate notice and explanation if you	Include other people in your visits without

have to cancel a visit	consulting the youth
Inform the Coach of any concerns or incidents such as harmful behaviors	Exchange any money with the youth – either giving to or taking from

4. Mentor Approval Process

We have to take potential mentors through a process of careful screening to ensure that we are truly providing safe environments for the youth we serve. This process includes:

1. Completion of the Mentor Application, including references
2. Completion of Training, in person and/or on-line
3. Fingerprinting and background checks
4. Interview with Safe Families PLUS program staff

5. Mentor/Mentee Matching Process

The suitability of a match between the mentee and mentor will be based on the following:

- Common interests, strengths, and talents
- Preferences of the mentor and mentee
- Geographic proximity
- Gender

You will normally be introduced to the youth that you will be befriending by the Mentor Coach or Program Director. If the assignment is judged to be very straightforward and low risk, then you may be asked to see them on your own.

- The Coach will help to kick-start the conversation between yourself and the referred youth, sharing some of their own story and then asking you both to do the same.
- By the time the introductory meeting is over, everyone should be clear about the expectations of the Safe Families PLUS program and have a consistent plan for meeting in the future



6. Guiding your Mentee

The mentee’s goals for working with a mentor should be identified together during the initial meeting, along with the Mentor Coach. Goals can address the following areas:

- 1) Character: developing attitudes and emotional regulation
- 2) Educational and Career goals, including steps to achieve them
- 3) Strategies to choose healthy behaviors and avoid high-risk activities
- 4) Conflict management and improving social connectedness
- 5) Community engagement and volunteerism to gain skills

As a Safe Families PLUS mentor, you may be involved in a variety of ways of supporting struggling families, some very simple and straightforward and others much more challenging and involved. One unifying theme in all befriending support is that the befriender and the adult receiving the support need to be clear about what support is being given, what the goal of providing the support is, and over what timeframe the support will be monitored for effectiveness.

For example:

Support to be given	SF PLUS Mentor will visit struggling single mother who has a 3 year old, a 2 year old, and a 3 month old.
Frequency of support	Weekly, on Wednesday mornings at 10 am
Duration of support	1 year then review
Goals of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage relationships and bonding in the family unit • Encourage healthy feeding and hygiene routines • Help mom get out to the park with the kids • Help mom plan for 3-year-old starting local school childcare half days from September

Goals of Mentoring

Preparedness	Young people need to develop competencies and skills to ready themselves for work and adult life. This can include educational, social-emotional, vocational, and financial skills.
Connectedness	We all need to belong—to be connected to family and community to thrive. Our brains are hardwired to connect. It is a core for learning, developing, and interacting with the world.
Engagement	Young people need opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, have a voice, take responsibility for their actions, and actively participate in issues that impact them and their communities.

Making the youth feel comfortable: The best way for the youth to feel comfortable is for you to be comfortable with yourself. They will sense your own degree of comfort and adapt accordingly. The best way of being comfortable with yourself is to bring who you are into the encounter with the youth. Know yourself and be yourself.

Have reasonable expectations. You are not meeting with the youth in order to change their life, but only to offer a small measure of emotional nourishment and support. Bring what you have and who you are.

[7. Recording meetings and progress being made](#)

Safe Families for Children has a database for recording notes about the families we are helping. ***It is important that you make use of this.*** A brief journal note following a meeting, even if it has been pretty uneventful, is important for continuity purposes and for tracking your meetings and contact. These notes will also help the Coach and Supervisor to build up a picture over time of the impact the support is having. They have access to all the notes created by all parties involved with a program participant, and are able to recognize patterns developing.

[8. Insight into Difficult Behaviors](#)

Guiding youth involves dealing with issues which run unseen below the surface, with little or no gratification or feedback. The art of guidance involves the balance of accepting a youth for who they are, while maintaining the ability to stand for values and standards of behavior.

For example, even though the youth may not show it, they may be fearful regarding the chaos of their life circumstances. Fears often revolve around the perception that they have no control over their life circumstances. The grief over the loss of family can trigger a lot of behaviors. Youth also need to have their basic needs for food, clothing and shelter met, and they need to feel safe before they can learn and grow. Youth in survival mode struggle to thrive. As a mentor, a central goal is to assist the youth in feeling safe so they can grow. Knowing that the young person's defiance might be a grief reaction can give even more room for mentors to have a heart of grace. But grace should not be confused with a lack of structure and boundaries.



9. Managing Expectations and Boundaries

It is important to find the right balance in the relational support you give, so that you keep within the limits of your SF PLUS Mentor role responsibly. The following are some guidelines for appropriate boundaries:

- Do not raise unrealistic expectations - only offer what you really can do. Agree to the purpose of your involvement and tailor your support accordingly. In some circumstances, very firm boundaries need to be put in place.
- Whether or not you share your address and personal phone number with the youth will be something that varies case by case and according to how the relationship develops.
- Please do not give the youth money directly. It is appropriate to buy meals or activities with the mentee during the time you spend together, or a small gift or card to celebrate a birthday or other achievement. If the youth is in need of other resource support, keep in discussion with the Coach regarding possible referrals and how best to help.



10. Stages of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship



Stage 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Be predictable and persistent	It is critical to be predictable and consistent, particularly for youth who have had so many adults in and out of their lives. Keep scheduled appointments in order to build trust, even if the youth is less consistent than you.
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Anticipate testing	The youth may test you to determine whether or not they can trust you. Patience is very important but be firm when needed to teach the youth when their behavior is not okay.
Establish confidentiality	Confidentiality establishes trust. Inform the youth that anything they tell you is confidential unless they express plans to harm themselves or others.
Deal with disclosure	Many youth are unsure of how to talk about difficult issues in their lives. Be understanding and patient. It is up to the youth to decide if and when they are ready to share personal information.
Define ground rules of the mentoring relationship	From the beginning, take time together to set clear expectations for the relationship. Talk about the best way to communicate (phone, text, email) and how often you will each commit to being in contact. Discuss the types of activities you will do together. Lay out responsibilities of each party so both feel they are doing their share of the work. Plan and create an environment in which you and the mentee have dedicated, uninterrupted time set aside to meet. This will contribute to a sense of safety and comfort.

Goal Setting in Stage 1:

- 1) Set short, simple and achievable goals to help lay the groundwork for long-term goal setting later on.
- 2) Start with one goal. Once that is accomplished, move on to another one.
- 3) Listen to the youth and what they are saying. Working towards their goals and what they want to accomplish is foundational for your relationship to progress.

Stage 2: Deepening of the Relationship/Goal Setting

Getting more connected	A more genuine relationship should be developing or be developed at this point.
Affirming the uniqueness of the relationship	Do something different from what you and your mentee did earlier to affirm the uniqueness of the relationship.
Dealing with ups and downs	All relationships have ups and downs that continue throughout a relationship, even when you think you have moved on. Be prepared for rough periods and do not assume something is wrong with the relationship when these periods occur.
Seeking support from staff and other resource support	If a rough period continues, or if your mentor relationship has not reached the second stage, do not hesitate to seek out support from your Coach. It is important to check in with an outside person about the relationship,

commitment and responsibilities of both parties.

Goal Setting in Stage 2:

As your relationship deepens, the goals you work on with your mentee may become more complex. The **SMART** strategy is a helpful tool for setting and achieving goals for you and your mentee.

Specific: Goals need to be specific. Often we set goals that are too loose and it becomes nearly impossible to judge whether or not we reach them.

Measurable: Goals need to be measurable. Knowing you will measure success makes it easier to see if you hit your target.

Achievable: Goals need to be reasonable and achievable. Setting goals that are out of reach is a set up for failure.

Relevant: Goals need to be appropriate. Working to achieve a goal that does not really matter to the youth is difficult, if not impossible.

Time-Bound: Goals need a time frame. Having a set amount of time will give your goals structure. Having a specific time frame gives you the impetus to get started and monitor your progress.



11. Focus of Goals

Communication, trust, relationship building	<input type="checkbox"/> Build trusting relationships with mutual respect <input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries and expectations determined <input type="checkbox"/> Short-term and long-term goals
Education	<input type="checkbox"/> High School Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education/Training Plan
Identity	<input type="checkbox"/> Birth Certificate <input type="checkbox"/> State Issued ID <input type="checkbox"/> Social Security card <input type="checkbox"/> Safe Personal Filing system
Job and Career	<input type="checkbox"/> Current employment <input type="checkbox"/> Listing of past employment

	<input type="checkbox"/> Resume and/or sample application <input type="checkbox"/> Employment skills
Finances and Money Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Bank account <input type="checkbox"/> Savings <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly budget <input type="checkbox"/> Money management skills <input type="checkbox"/> Credit checks
Life Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Home-life skills, cooking <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Issues <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation & Leisure <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Hygiene
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/> Housing after care <input type="checkbox"/> Reference and/or co-signer <input type="checkbox"/> Sample rental application <input type="checkbox"/> Back-up plan
Self-Care and Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Health insurance/Health provider <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health insurance and provider/therapist <input type="checkbox"/> Prescription plan <input type="checkbox"/> Dental insurance/dental provider <input type="checkbox"/> Vision <input type="checkbox"/> Health education
Community, Culture and Social Life	<input type="checkbox"/> Community connections <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual support/church <input type="checkbox"/> Peer circle <input type="checkbox"/> Voter registration
Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Mode of transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Driver's license and insurance <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge of public transportation
Permanence	<input type="checkbox"/> Supportive adults <input type="checkbox"/> Connections with biological family

12. Resources

There are free services and discounted goods which could make a difference in supporting our youth. While we share our whole selves, our life experiences, our compassion, and intelligence as mentors, we can also look to expand the pool of outside resources for the youth to access. While we can share available resources with youth to access in their communities, we should also empower our youth with the tools to find these services on their own. The Family Coach can assist you in finding services to meet a youth's needs. If you learn of an organization which provides a useful service such as food, medical care, transportation, low cost counseling or legal aid, inform your coach to add it into the Safe Families PLUS database.

For Illinois DCFS resources specific to youth exiting the foster care system, see the DCFS website "Promoting Independence and Self-Sufficiency":

www.illinois.gov/dcfs/brighterfutures/independence/

The GET GOAL'D handbook provides resources for education, career, housing, life skills, health, parenting, and more:

www.illinois.gov/dcfs/brighterfutures/independence/Documents/GetGoaldHandbook.pdf

13. Ending a Relationship Well

How you draw a befriending arrangement to a conclusion will very much depend on the nature, the intensity, and the length of the involvement you have had with a youth. It is possible that your relationship with a young adult does not completely end but rather **transitions** so that you continue to be friends with a natural two-way relationship. Your Coach is available to help you all think through these steps in plenty of time. The Mentor Coach will also debrief with you once the assignment is over.

If an ending approaches, give consideration to the following:

- The extent to which the original goals of the involvement been achieved
- Ways in which the mentee has gained fresh confidence and stability, practically and emotionally, and how this will be maintained when the support is withdrawn
- Be realistic about the future, for example how much ongoing contact is likely.

Section II: Policies and Procedures



1. Safety

In addition to being protected from physical dangers, a safe environment is vital for emotional healing to be possible. The standards of care outlined below are required to ensure the safety of both the mentor and mentee. Being a mentor involves a commitment to providing a context for healing to occur. When people feel safe, then their true selves are more able to emerge. We at Safe Families PLUS cannot eliminate all of the emotional barriers to healing and health, but we can eliminate the physical barriers. The mentor is to be a watchful eye towards any dangers, physical or otherwise, in the youth's life.

2. Procedures for Unusual Incident Reports

- 1) All incidents will first be verbally communicated by the mentor to program staff. The staff will then report the incident to their respective program supervisor, and the youth's caseworker, if applicable. The supervisor will make a determination regarding immediate action. Very serious incidents such as severe injury and allegations of abuse or neglect should be reported immediately.
- 2) An unusual incident is defined as an issue or event which is significant to the client and which requires action or further oversight and monitoring. Examples of unusual incidents include:
 - a. Life threatening accidents, illness, or injury requiring medical treatment or hospitalization, including psychiatric hospitalization
 - b. Death, kidnapping
 - c. Convicted or charged with a crime
 - d. Allegations of abuse or neglect
 - e. Damage of property including fire, robbery, or other emergency situations

- f. Other problematic behavior (i.e. running away, sexual acting out or sexual abuse, threats, etc.)
- g. Media Involvement

Volunteers are not mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect, but program staff are mandated reporters. If you are unsure about whether to notify the child abuse and neglect hotline (1-800-25-ABUSE) about an incident or report made by program participants, **call your coach**. They can call the hotline with you or advise on any actions that should be taken.

3. Confidentiality Policy

It is illegal for anyone, other than Department employees and Contractual staff (under limited circumstances) to convey specific information about a case, identifying personal information about a DCFS youth, personal information regarding the clients, including the parents, or information regarding the foster parent(s) to a third party not entitled to that information. Caregivers, youth, and caseworkers should be mindful that the use of any photos of DCFS youth in any form, including any posted online images, should not identify those children as DCFS youth in care. The DCFS Guardianship Administrator must consent, in advance, to the release of any image or picture of a DCFS youth if that youth is going to be identified as a youth in the care of DCFS in any publication, whether online or in print format.



4. Transportation Policy

Staff and mentors transporting clients must have a valid driver's license and insurance, and all passengers must be safely secured as required by law.

- 1) Staff and mentors must maintain adequate passenger supervision at all times, and must never leave clients unattended in a vehicle.
- 2) In the event of an accident, drivers must notify the appropriate police department immediately and the agency as soon as possible.
- 3) The driver is responsible for any ticket incurred while driving.

5. Use of Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco, and Firearms Policy

The use of illegal drugs, smoking, or drinking alcohol during mentorship activities is not allowed. The possession or use of firearms, firecrackers, explosives, toxic or dangerous chemicals, or other lethal weapons, equipment, or material while participating in mentoring activities is strictly prohibited. Any violation of this policy will result in the immediate suspension and/or termination of the mentoring relationship.

6. Grievance Policy

In the occasion that a participant has a conflict with their mentor, it is recommended that they communicate this with their Coach. It is recommended that all participants attempt to resolve the conflict through verbal communication. The Coach is available to assist with grievances. The participant will be encouraged to write down the following:

- 1) The nature of the problem or conflict
- 2) The date the actual problem or conflict occurred or arose
- 3) A description of what happened, including specific names of individuals involved, and a brief statement of the efforts made to resolve the conflict
- 4) The participant's idea of an appropriate solution

The participant, the Coach, and the mentor will set a time to review the grievance and settle on a solution.

7. Dismissal/Termination from the Program

It is the hope that each Safe Families PLUS participant will reach their goals and make a successful transition into independence. However, mentees may voluntarily decide they no longer wish to have contact with their mentor. The following are some general reasons a participant may be asked to leave the program:

1. Acting in a manner that is dangerous to self or others
2. Involvement in illegal activities, such as possession of a weapon
3. Consistently not showing up to meetings with mentor

Should a participant be asked to leave the program, Safe Families PLUS will attempt to give them a 7-day written notice unless there is an immediate risk of safety.

8. Signature Page

I have received the Safe Families PLUS Mentor Policy and Procedures Guide and understand my role within the program. I agree to follow all policies as outlined in this guide, and understand that if I do not do so, I could possibly be terminated from the program. If I have further questions or concerns I will contact Safe Families PLUS staff to ensure that I receive the answers I need in order to ideally commit to the youth for as long as is appropriately necessary.

Mentor Signature

Date

Safe Families PLUS Staff

Date