

Guidelines for Foster Parents/Parents with children in the Heart Gallery Mentor Program

Our mentor program is designed to bring stable, long-term relational support to foster youth. We believe that mentoring relationships provide stable emotional support, increase self-efficacy and expose foster youth to new experiences and cultures, thus broadening their vision of “what could be” in their lives. We do ask that the mentors commit to one year, however many of the relationships last a lifetime, however we understand that life happens and sometimes things are out of our control. The caseworker of the child has made a referral to our program and we have done our best to match the child with a mentor with like interests.

Following are some basic guidelines for helping to make the mentoring relationship a success. Followed by common questions Caregivers may have about their role and that of the mentor who is a volunteer. We feel it is always important to be supportive of the children we are serving. If you have questions or concerns regarding the mentor program please feel free to contact the Mentor Director for more information.

Guidelines and Basic Rules:

- Please Understand that the mentors are all volunteers
- If plans need to change please make a point of calling the mentor.
- The mentor’s role is to be a companion/friend to the child/mentee.
- There may be times when you feel it is important to share information with the mentor regarding the child; this may be very helpful to the mentor. However please do not discuss negative behaviors of the child with the mentor in the presence of your child. If you think there is something the mentor should know, please call or email him/her when your child is not present.
- Try to avoid excessive quizzing about the mentee/mentor visits, so that the child/mentee can enjoy having his/her special friend. Remember, the relationship that exists is between your child and the mentor. The relationship focus needs to stay about the child/mentee and mentor.
- The mentor has been trained but is not a trained professional nor are they perfect. You will probably disagree at times, be willing to talk, forgive and move forward. Forgive minor mistakes as many mentors have not raised children. An example may be that they go for ice cream after 7:00 and you do not allow that.
- The child/mentee needs the support of their mentors, many foster children do not have a lot of friends, and if you could encourage this relationship the child/mentee may be

more at ease. Please don't deprive the youth/mentee of visits with his/her mentor as a means of discipline.

- Please be flexible, scheduling the times for visits can sometimes be difficult for all as everyone is very busy.
- The mentoring relationship needs time to develop, usually at least three months, so don't judge it too quickly; give it time.
- Please allow the child/mentee communication with the mentor at least once a week. There will be times that the mentor/mentee cannot see each other face to face, we do ask the mentor to have face to face, phone or email contact with the youth once each week.
- Please notify the Heart Gallery Mentor Director should your phone numbers or address change.
- We want the child/mentee to have fun in building this new relationship and to grow positively from the match. The success or failure of a match depends on the cooperation of all the individuals, child/mentee, mentor, caregivers, caseworker, and at times CASA or therapist.

Questions and Answers:

- What should I do if the youth/mentee cannot attend a planned meeting with the mentor? **To encourage the responsibility in your youth, have him/her call the mentor.**
- Can other family members or siblings go with the mentor and the mentee/youth? **A mentoring relationship is special, in part, because it is a one-to-one relationship. Even teens who feel close to their parents sometimes need to talk with people outside the family. The mentor is an adult friend with whom your youth/mentee can talk about things that concern him/her.**
- How can I be sure that the mentor will support my rules and regulations? **If you have strict rules about bedtimes, places the youth may not go, foods he/she may not eat, or movies he/she cannot see, please discuss this with the mentor. By making this information known at the beginning, you can help avoid misunderstandings.**
- What if the mentor says things with which I do not agree? **No matter how carefully we match mentors and mentees, you may find some areas where your beliefs or ideas differ from your mentors. If these are important to you, let the mentor know. We support and value each person and it is our goal to present the youth with the ability to work through differences in life in a positive way.**
- Who will pay for the activities for the mentor and youth/mentee? **All the Heart Gallery Mentors are volunteers, if the planned activity involve fees the mentor knows they will be paying for this expense (this is tax deductible). The most important part of mentoring is the relationship, not a lot of costly activities. However, because activities**

help build competence, we hope that the mentor/youth pairs can do special things occasionally. You should encourage the youth not to ask the mentor to buy things for the youth, as with any friend, gifts should be appreciated when and if they are given, not expected on a regular basis.

- If the youth has misbehaved, should I allow him/her to see the mentor? **The mentor/youth visits should not be used as a discipline to the youth. Time with the mentor is a pleasure but it is also a time of learning and growth, denying time with the mentor puts you in opposition to the mentor instead of emphasizing your mutual concern to build the youth's competence.**
- What happens if the match has to end? **We will try our best to end the match as easily as possible, this will create some sadness for the child and we will do what we can to quickly try to rematch the child with another mentor. We understand that this type of change is hard for a child and may be a trigger to the child from their past. It is always our goal to do what is best for the child, however at times decisions are made out of our control.**

