

## Set Goals for the Mentor-Student Relationship

Before the process of goal-setting begins, it is wise for mentors to establish guidelines for the mentor-student relationship by means of some type of "mentor-student agreement." This activity can be valuable because it allows students the chance to decide how much and what type of help they want or need. By means of an agreement, mentors can also get a clear indication of students' expectations of the relationship. Negotiating and establishing an initial consensus with regard to the mentor-student relationship can help prevent misunderstanding and disappointment down the line. [Mentors can use the format provided above or modify it to meet their needs.]

## Long-Term Goals Give Students A Real Sense of Purpose.

For mentors, the first step in the planning process is: helping students identify their long-term goals. Students need to focus their "eyes on the prize" to begin to develop intrinsic motivation about the learning process: "I am going to study hard in order to become a ? Even elementary students should be encouraged to dream about their futures: "After college, I will? The secret here is to get students to visualize their goals to the highest degree possible. Visualization of a goal is the first step toward its realization. [The second activity listed above is an excellent tool to help students "imagine their futures."]

## Long-Term Goals Should Be Realistic.

Long-term goals can be lofty, but they should also be realistic. This does not mean that mentors should make this judgment for their students; on the contrary, it is important that mentors encourage students to set high goals for themselves. The role of a mentor is not to judge or criticize students' goals, but to make certain that they understand that the higher the goal, the greater will be the demands and expectations placed on them. One of the best ways to bring about such understanding is to have the student outline all the short-term goals necessary to achieve his/her ultimate objectives. [The third activity listed above can help students begin to understand this connection between short- and long-term goals.]

## Short-Term Goals Are The Key!

Visualizing long-term goals is a great motivational tool, but without proper planning these goals will remain fantasies. One of the most important roles a mentor can play in the life of a student is to keep them on track by helping them plan and achieve their short-term goals. If a student can set short-term goals, he/she can begin to plan a schedule and develop the all-important time-management skills necessary for success in the higher

grades and in college. One of the best ways to get this process going is to ask students to design the format for a journal in which they list their daily and weekly goals; more importantly, they can also evaluate their own performance and recognize the areas in which they need to improve. Mentors can also keep a journal in which they write down their goals and ask the student for help in planning how to achieve them.

### Patience Is The Virtue.

The ability to connect short- and long-term goals is the first phase of planning for academic and personal success. For many low-income students, however, this may be the first time in their lives that they have had to develop a plan or follow a schedule. Structure is a good thing, but it can be difficult for students to accept self-discipline at first. (How many adults stick with their first diet?) It is important that mentors be patient and prepared to deal with failure by means of positive reinforcement rather than disappointment or criticism. More people fail in life for lack of encouragement than for any other reason.

Conclusion. There are then a few simple principles for helping children and adolescents establish their goals:

- \* Determine the limits, guidelines and expectations of the mentor-student relationship.
- \* Have students visualize and write down their long-term goals.
- \* Help students identify realistic long-term goals by formulating the short-term goals necessary to attain them.
- \* Introduce time-management principles and strategies to help students determine their short-term goals.
- \* Teach students patience and emphasize the importance of small gains. Success in achieving one's long-term goals ultimately depends upon the ability to take care of business on a daily basis: Watch out for the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves.

Do you have any tools, activities, or stories that would be useful, interesting, and inspiring to mentors? If so, please send them to: [kmattox@takestockinchildren.com](mailto:kmattox@takestockinchildren.com)