

# The Mentoring Center of Central Ohio

## Tips for Mentors: HANDLING CONFLICT WITH YOUR MENTEE

### 1. Identify the problem

- Use the who, what, where, when, how method of questioning to get to the core of why your mentee is upset.
  - EX: “*You seem upset. What happened?*”

### 2. Validate the concern

- People need to feel as though they are being heard and understood.
    - EX: “*I hear you saying that it felt good for you to kick your little brother. And I understand you were angry. It probably did feel good at the time. How else do you think you could have expressed how upset you were?*”
- \*Please note: Understanding why someone did something does not mean you agree with his or her behavior.***

### 3. De-escalate the situation

- If your mentee is upset and shows his/her frustration by yelling, hitting or any other form of inappropriate behavior, your first goal is to de-escalate that anger. You won't be able to help until the young person is focused enough to hear what you have to say. Here are some sample de-escalation techniques:
  - Lower your voice
  - Speak in a calm manner
  - Express support for helping solve the situation by listening well to the person. (Say: “I understand,” or “I'm sorry this situation has upset you.”)

### 4. Be proactive instead of reactive

- Listen without passing judgment or placing blame. Think about the best possible thing to say or do instead of immediately reacting to what has happened.
- Avoid creating a situation in which you now have to apologize for the way you reacted to something you didn't cause.

### 5. Be an active listener and use reflective listening

- **Reflective listening** reiterates the sense of what the other person is saying. This ensures that you understand what is meant including the feelings underlying the actual words.
- **Active listening** involves verbal and non-verbal feedback. It affirms the person speaking by giving your undivided attention and by helping the mentee first express his/her feelings followed by (when able) to think together about next steps, consider alternatives and ultimately, develop a course of action.

## 6. Use I-Messages

- Instead of saying “*You are always late for our appointments,*” which feels like an accusation, you can better say: “*I am disappointed when you’re late because it cuts down on the time we have for our planned activities.*”

## 7. If you make a mistake, admit it—and think about how to do better the next time.

- It teaches your mentee that it’s ok to make mistakes, thus modeling useful behavior for the mentee to follow.

## 8. Find common ground

- Find elements you agree on. Perhaps you agree on the goals but not the methods for getting there. Perhaps you can list possible courses of action, then weigh them pro and con together.
  - EX: “*It seems like we agree that we like working together. We just need to learn about and be sensitive to each other’s work styles.*”
  - EX: “*Well, it seems like we agree that you can improve your grades. What are some ways you think you could help make that happen?*”

## 9. Refer back to the positive

- “This is actually the first time we’ve had a disagreement. I like the fact that we get along so well together.”
- “I enjoy spending time with you,” or “I like the fact that we each shared ideas and didn’t feel we had to agree.”
- “I understand your feelings better now that you’ve explained them to me,” or
- “Do you think we learned anything about how to do a better job of working out a disagreement? What did we learn?”

## 10. Getting to the solution

- After identifying the cause of the mentee’s frustration, and validating his/her feelings, move beyond the problem into the solution.
  - EX: “*What can I do to help you feel better about this?*”
  - EX: “*Are you satisfied with the decision you made? or “the actions you took?”*”
  - EX: “*How do you think you might handle a situation like this the next time?*”

**These are all wonderful opportunities to practice problem-solving techniques with your mentee!**