

# understanding the relationship

troubleshooting

Section 6 of 7

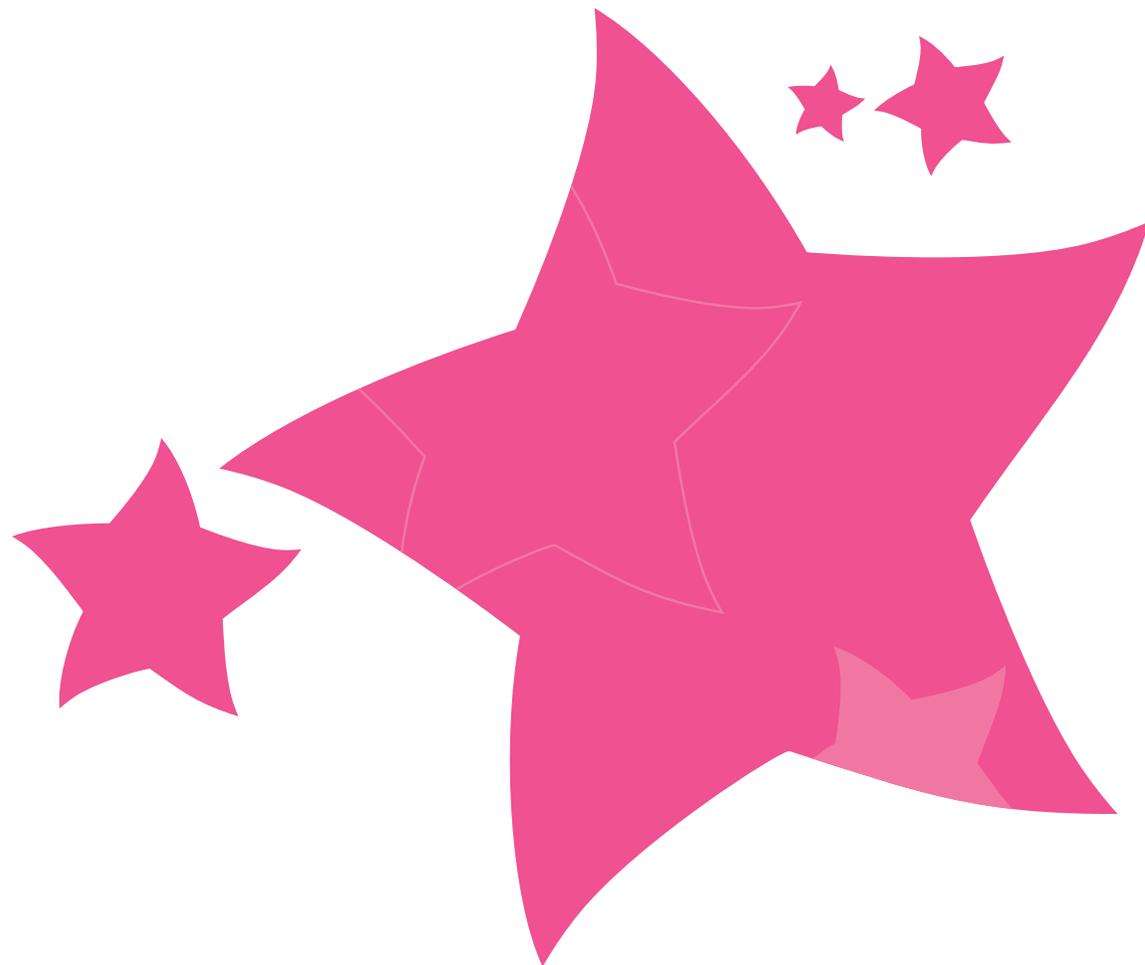


Worldstudio



FOUNDATION





# introduction



**Mentoring has the potential to be a lively and rewarding experience for mentors and mentees alike, offering the healthy types of challenges that come with friendship and hard work.**

**However, occasionally mentors are unsure of how to proceed; there is the rare possibility that the mentor may encounter a serious difficulty in the relationship. Remember that you are not alone. Peruse the troubleshooting section of this guide for suggestions.**

**This guide addresses two primary groups of potential mentors**

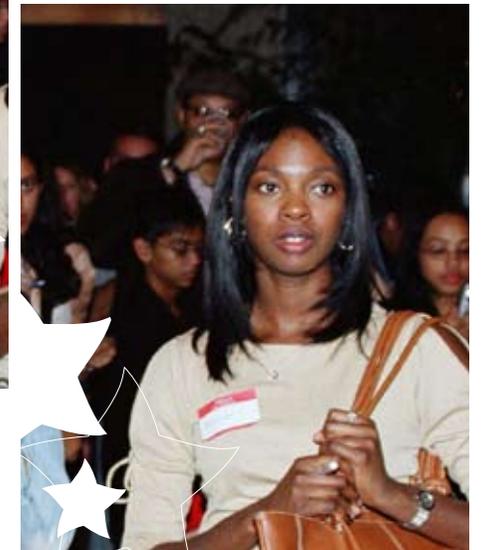
- Individual creatives who would like to participate in a short-term, one-on-one mentoring relationship with a young person.
- Organizations (AIGA chapters, design studios, corporate design departments) that wish to establish more extensive and/or longer-term mentoring programs.



# basic concerns

### what if my mentee becomes ill?

When you meet with your mentee's teacher or counselor, you should request all of the necessary contact information for your student before the sessions begin. If your student becomes ill during a session, care for the student and use common sense. If possible, let the student go home and reschedule the session for a later date. If necessary, call a parent or guardian to find out what s/he would like you to do. If it is a medical emergency, call 911 and then contact the program coordinator or parent.





### in case of emergency

It is unlikely that a mentee will face a true emergency. Nonetheless, at the beginning of each mentoring relationship it is wise to collect information about whom to contact in case an emergency does arise.

**Serious illness or injury**

911

**Minor illness**

Parent, guardian, school or organization contact

**Relationship difficulty**

School or organization contact

## what if my mentee needs to miss a session or is consistently late?

Discuss with your mentee the need for calling to confirm the evening before each session, and to establish the time you'll be meeting as well as what s/he will need to bring. Make sure the student knows how to get to your office; reiterate that you are expecting him or her and that you are looking forward to your session together. Set up your meetings to fit both of your schedules.

If a student consistently shows up late or fails to attend, and does not call to let you know, call the student to find out why s/he did not show up and make a point of rescheduling. If you still get no response or improvement, contact the student's host organization or coordinator.

### Suggestions

- Let your mentee know during your first session that if s/he needs to miss a meeting, it is imperative to call you as soon as possible to reschedule.
- Emphasize time-management skills.
- Let the student know the ways in which a “no-show” will inconvenience you, but try to be understanding and willing to accommodate your student—often students need to work or take care of younger siblings, and there's simply nothing they can do about it.

## what if i need to cancel a session?

You should make time for this relationship and set aside time accordingly. If you absolutely need to reschedule, call the student, apologize and reschedule your meeting. Be sure to let the student know why it is that you need to cancel—it could actually offer an insight into the working world.



# teaching difficulty

## i am not a teacher! how do i teach?

You have a great deal to offer, as do the students. This guide is here to help you enter the relationship with trust and with optimism. Additionally if you follow the suggested activities in *Section 4* of this guide, review the mentoring tips and relax you should be fine. Students benefit tremendously just from being exposed to a professional creative working environment, as well as from exploring the computers and tools that you use every day. View yourself as a collaborator, a resource and a friend more than as a teacher.

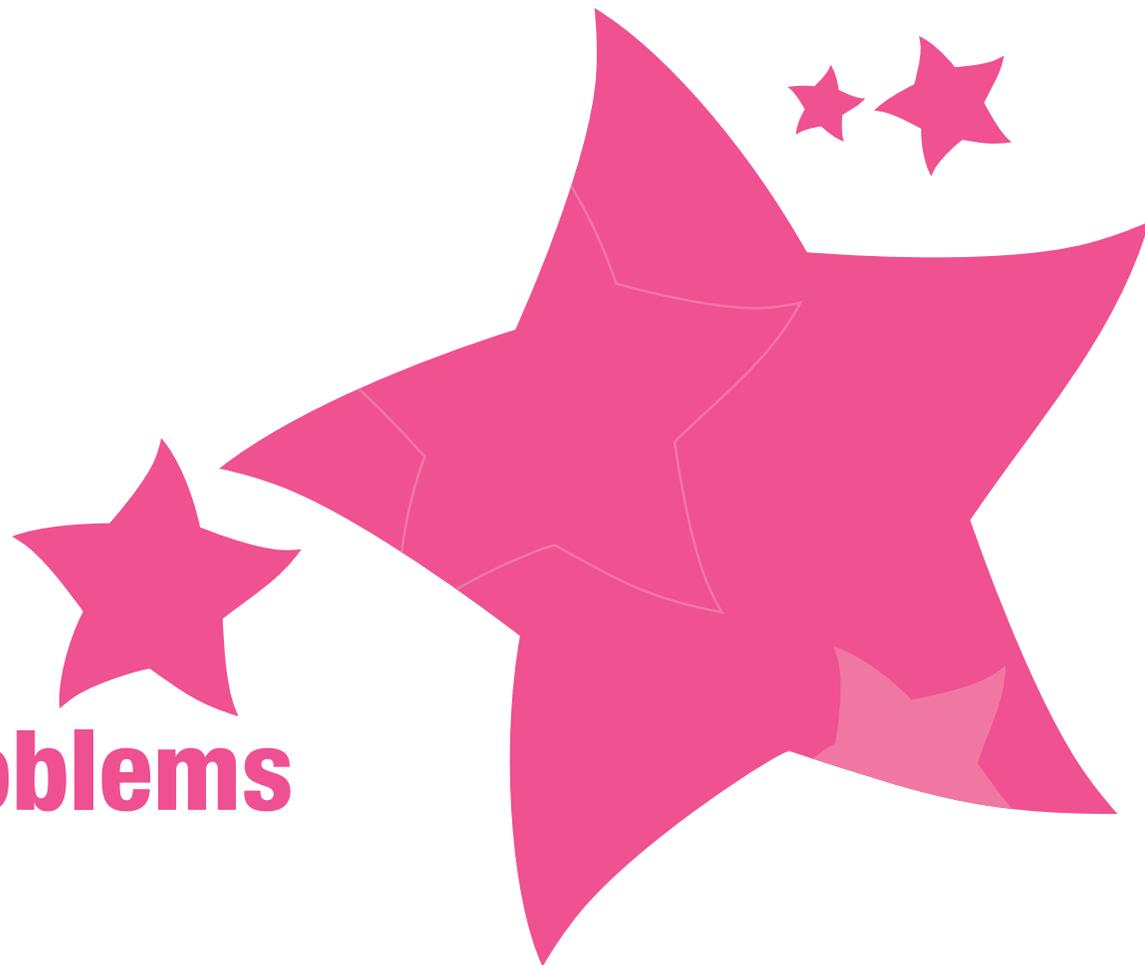
Although studies have shown that youth need to feel the presence of caring adults in order to successfully make the transition to adulthood, in reality all people need friends. And you might be surprised, as are many mentors, at how much you can gain from your mentee. Set aside time for your student, and get to know each other along the way.

## what if my student seems uninterested?

While a majority of students express profound enjoyment of the program, occasionally a mentee may seem uninterested. If this occurs, try to ask leading questions to find out what s/he likes to do. Be honest and open. Ask the student why s/he wanted to participate initially, and work from there. Sometimes it is simply difficult to read students' true reactions and feelings.

## what if the project does not meet your expectations?

Don't be so hard on yourself. This is an organic relationship and an important learning experience for your student. The program isn't about the project as much as it is about the student and the process s/he goes through.



# relationship problems

## what if i don't like my mentee?

First, evaluate your own reaction. Try to discern what about the student makes you uncomfortable or irritated. Is he surly or effeminate? Is she arrogant or distant? Or is it something more oblique, such as the way s/he dresses? Understanding your own reaction is the first step toward dealing with this problem. You may discover that the mentee reminds you of someone from your own childhood, or that s/he brings up certain anxieties that are unique to you. This knowledge can help you get past the obstacle. If the mentee is truly difficult to deal with, you may in fact need to call the school or organization to discuss the problem further. You should not force a relationship that simply is not working. Most relationships take time.



## what if my mentee does not like me?

Try to work through the tension, as well as establish common ground and “safe” areas for discussion and work. Focusing on a project or goal will help take the pressure off of the relationship. Remember that you are the professional in the relationship and the student is there to learn not just career skills but interpersonal skills as well.



There are many times in life, especially in the professional world, when you need to work with someone despite not regarding that person as a great friend. Although difficult, working to the best of your abilities to create a successful project in spite of interpersonal issues would be a useful experience for the student. You might try to talk with the student about what is bothering him or her, and see if there’s a way to modify your behavior within reason that will make things better.

Ultimately, you should try to remain giving and focused—it is important not to give up on your mentee—and to judge only your own actions, not the mentee’s; it’s hard not feeling liked, but if you’re truly doing everything you can, try not to take it too personally. If the mentee’s feelings are causing him or her to be disruptive or to miss sessions, call the school or organization to discuss the problem.

## what if my mentee is too invasive or interested in my personal life?

Share your own interests and experiences, as this should be a reciprocal relationship. However, if a student makes you uncomfortable with his or her questions or expectations, first ask yourself whether the mentee is asking the same types of questions that you have been asking him or her. Perhaps you need to change your expectations and approach. Additionally, try to discern where the question is coming from; each person brings his or her own life and values to the relationship, and the key to a good friendship is acknowledging those differences. Nevertheless, it is important to communicate clearly in these instances and to explain why certain types of questions are inappropriate.

## what if my mentee seems unappreciative?

Although it has been proven that mentoring relationships have the potential to tremendously impact youth, mentors often feel frustrated by the fact that their mentee seems unappreciative of their efforts. Mentors often wonder at the close of a relationship whether their efforts had a lasting impact. The truth is, mentors seldom know to what degree their efforts matter to the student. Not knowing the impact does not indicate a lack of influence. Neither does it diminish the number of youth who prosper from mentoring relationships. Ultimately, if your student learns a lot and is able to express this to you, great. But try not to enter the relationship expecting praise. Keep your expectations realistic.

“Mentoring is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ proposition. Each child has unique needs; the type of mentoring relationship that addresses one child’s needs may not address another’s.”

–Dr. Jean Rhodes, Mentoring.org

“ ‘Why did you do all this for me?’  
[Wilbur] asked. ‘I don’t deserve it.  
I’ve never done anything for you.’

‘You have been my friend,’ replied  
Charlotte.... ‘By helping you,  
perhaps I was trying to lift my life a  
trifle. Heaven knows, anyone’s life  
can stand a little of that.’ ”

–E. B. White, *Charlotte’s Web*





# serious conflicts

## what if a serious conflict develops?

Students, like adults, have bad days. If a student takes his or her frustration out on you, attempt to provide counsel. Remember that no one is perfect and that each of us has experienced moments we regret. Because such occurrences are infrequent, we hope for and expect another chance. Some students, however, frequently misbehave. You should try whenever possible to hold your mentee accountable for his or her actions, while allowing for mistakes and a fresh start.

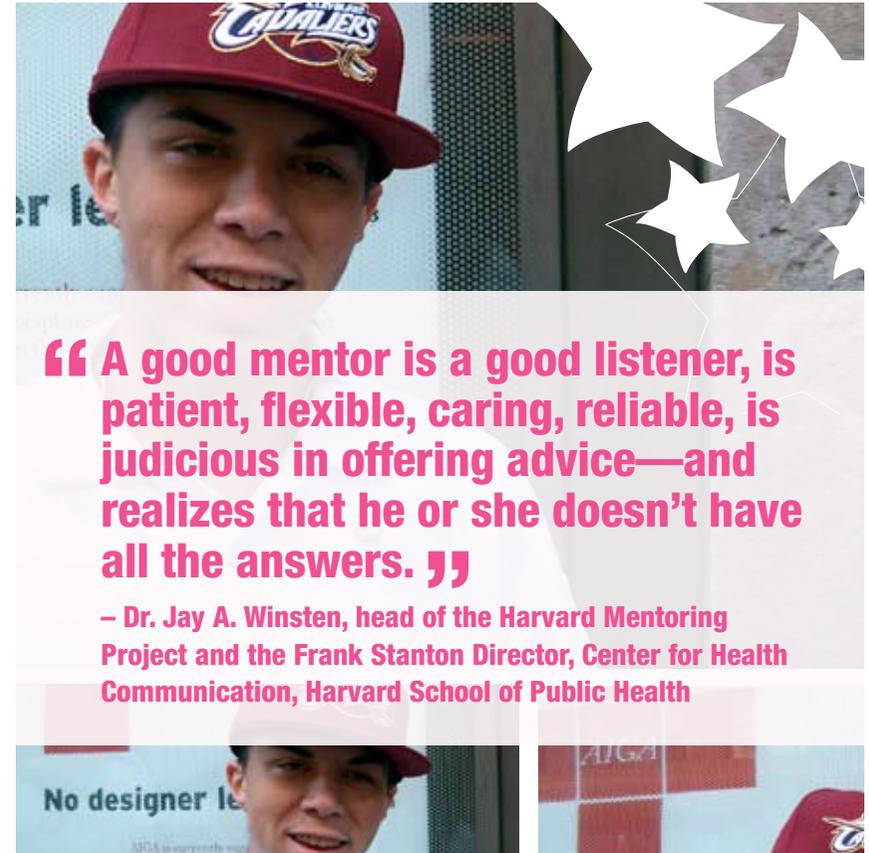
If the negative behavior continues, take the student aside and speak candidly and privately about the consequences of such behavior.

### *Conflict Resolutions*

- Really listen to what your mentee is saying, with the goal of truly understanding his or her point of view.
- Affirm and acknowledge the student's position.
- Ask questions that are open-ended rather than ones that will evoke a yes or no response.
- Keep looking for alternative ideas for resolving your dispute so that both of you have your needs met.

## what if i suspect that my mentee is in trouble or is on the wrong track?

If you have suspicions about your mentee's relationships, habits or family life and feel genuinely concerned, ask questions but do not pressure your mentee to reveal something s/he does not want to. Continue to be a friend and to work and learn together; you are not expected to be the student's savior or parent. You are there as an experienced adult friend and cannot presume to know how to handle every situation. Your continued friendship and presence within your mentee's life will give him or her the guidance and confidence to change those habits and the opportunity to confide in you.



## what if my mentee discloses sensitive information (about abuse, drugs or pregnancy)?

Many kids today live in fiercely difficult environments and face obstacles such as violence, drug abuse and poverty, over which they have little, if any, control. Often, as students and mentors get to know each other better and trust is established, students share parts of their personal lives that may strike you as deeply unfair or unjust. Keep your compassion, not your pity. Pity is demeaning.



If you are uncomfortable with the information the student is trying to tell you, explain your concern to the student. Remember that although you are an important person in the student's life and have the opportunity to help in many ways, you cannot do everything. When your student is in danger of hurting him- or herself or someone else, if s/he is clinically depressed, or if s/he is doing something illegal, it is best to seek outside help.

A mentor's role does not include medical or psychological treatment. There are support systems in place for real emergencies, and the most a mentor can do is guide the student to the appropriate source of professional help. This in no way means that you should abandon your student. As much as possible, continue to be a listener and a friend without judging. Hold your student's confidences; trust is hard to win back once you've lost it. As always, you are the student's best defense and champion.



# about us



164 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10010

T: 212 807 1990 / F: 212 807 1799  
E: [mentoring@aiga.org](mailto:mentoring@aiga.org)

AIGA, the professional association for design, is the oldest and largest organization for professionals engaged in the discipline, practice and culture of designing. AIGA was founded in 1914 and now represents more than 18,000 designers through national activities and local programs developed by 55 chapters and more than 150 student groups.

AIGA supports the interests of professionals, educators and students who are engaged in the process of designing. The association is committed to stimulating thinking about design, demonstrating the value of design and enabling success for designers throughout the arc of their careers.

Through conferences, competitions, exhibitions, publications and websites, AIGA inspires, educates and informs designers, helping them to realize their talents and to advocate the value of design among the media, the business community, governments and the public.

Worldstudio



FOUNDATION

200 Varick Street, Suite 507  
New York, NY 10014

T: 212 366 1317 / F: 212 807 0024  
E: [mentoring@worldstudio.org](mailto:mentoring@worldstudio.org)

Worldstudio Foundation is a nonprofit organization that offers scholarships and mentoring programs in the fine and applied arts. Acting on the belief that creativity holds enormous power for social change, graphic designer David Sterling established the organization in New York City in 1993 and developed it with his business partner Mark Randall. Since its inception, the Foundation has launched several programs dedicated to helping the next generation of artists, architects and designers realize their dreams while being proactively involved in their communities. Mentoring programs pair at-risk high school students with creative professionals to work on collaborative projects. Scholarships are aimed at increasing diversity in the creative professions and building a more socially responsive creative studio of the future. The first nonprofit in the United States devoted exclusively to encouraging social responsibility in the design and arts professions, Worldstudio Foundation dares young artists to dream—of new lives, new careers and new solutions for the world in which we live.