

“Pet Peeves”

Activity

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This exercise will take approximately 30 minutes, depending on the age of the youth and the number of people involved. It is appropriate for children as young as 8 years old, and for teens as well, but you will need to gear the discussion to the age group you are working with. It is ideally conducted with a group of mentees who are about to be matched with mentors, or who have recently been matched.

First, set ground rules for this group conversation about personal likes and dislikes. Let the participants know that today we are going to talk about ourselves, and that you want everyone to feel very safe in sharing. Ask what will help them feel safe—you may offer a few ground rules of your own first—e.g. confidentiality, no making fun, etc. Ask the group to promise to respect the ground rules.

Next ask if anyone knows what a “pet peeve” is. Discuss responses and ideas. A pet peeve is something that especially bothers someone. It is a quirk or personal dislike that bothers the person, perhaps more so than it bothers the average person. Explain that we all have pet peeves, but each person’s are different.

Then ask participants to share some of their pet peeves—you can either have them go around one-by-one or just ask for volunteers to share. Before they begin sharing, ask everyone in the room to promise to respect each other’s pet peeves.

Once participants have shared and explored, explain that you now want to discuss how it is and is not okay for people to touch each other. Explain that physical touch is very personal and that everyone is different. Now ask participants to share their pet peeves about being touched.

Explain that in your mentor program, it is very important that everyone feel comfortable with the way they are treated and the way they are touched. Explain that there are also some program rules about touching—no hitting or violence, no touching someone in a way they don’t want to be touched, and any rules your program has about hugging, holding hands, etc.

You can also lead the discussion into a talk about how youth would like to interact with their mentors, in terms of touching and how they talk to them, etc. Then you can end by explaining how mentors are supposed to behave toward their mentees in your program. Encourage mentees to discuss anything at all with program staff that bothers them or makes them uncomfortable.

***Note: the purpose of this exercise is several-fold: you are explaining program rules and boundaries of mentoring relationships; you are encouraging mentees to be their own “watchdogs” for inappropriate behavior of mentors and other youth; you are assisting mentees to build trust and setting ground rules for interaction in your program, and you are also DISCOVERING some of the needs and special issues your mentees might have. This can help you with matching and also with monitoring of the match once it begins. Remember, however, that young people will not always share personal information in a group setting. You are therefore encouraged to also have 1-to-1 conversations with mentees before matching them to explore similar issues. Watch for “red flags” that might indicate a young person has been hurt or is highly sensitive in some way.