

Dealing with Difficult Issues with Youth: Crises and Opportunities

June 2012

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HANDOUTS

Roadblocks to Effective Communication

Source: Gordon, Thomas. Parent Effectiveness Training, New York, Peter H. Wyden, 1972.

1) Ordering, directing, commanding

Telling the youth to do something; giving the youth an order or command
“Stop complaining!”

2) Moralizing, preaching, should's and ought's

Invoking vague outside authority as accepted truth
“You shouldn't act like that.”
“You ought to do . . . “
“Children are supposed to respect their elders.”

3) Teaching, lecturing, giving logical arguments

Trying to influence the youth with facts, counter-arguments, logic, information, or your own opinion:
“College can be the most wonderful experience you'll ever have.”
“Children must learn to get along with one another.”
“Let's look at the facts about college graduates.”
“If kids learn to take responsibility around the house, they'll grow up to be responsible adults.”
“When I was your age, I had twice as much to do as you.”

4) Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming

Making a negative judgment or evaluation of the child
“You're not thinking clearly.”
“That's an immature point of view.”
“You're very wrong about that.”
“I couldn't disagree with you more.”

5) Withdrawing, distracting, sarcasm, humoring, diverting

Trying to get the youth away from the problem, withdrawing from the problem yourself, distracting the youth, kidding the youth out of it, and pushing the problem aside
“Just forget it.”
“Let's not talk about this at the table.”
“Come on – let's talk about something more pleasant.”
“Why don't you try burning the school building down?”

Using a Non-Directive Approach with Youth

Real motivation comes from within. People have to be given the freedom to succeed or fail.

-Gordon Forward, CEO Chaparral Steel

In the non-directive approach, you do a great deal of listening and asking questions, and you spend minimal time giving advice.

Remember that a successful helper places the growth and development of the child above helping them solve a particular problem. If you continually tell the young person what to do, you are failing to create an environment where he or she can feel empowered.

The problem of being too direct: When you make decisions for people (by giving them advice or direction), two major types of outcomes might occur.

If the advice works, **from the child's perspective:** "Yes, it worked out, but I wasn't the one that made the right decision. It was the adult helping me, therefore, I still don't know how to solve these kinds problems.

If the advice does not work, **the dynamics could be:** "What I tried didn't work, but it wasn't really my choice, that adult told me to do that."

Strong advice and direction can result in young people not fully celebrating their successes, nor owning their failures.

The adult helper must have faith that the young person will eventually make the right decision, even though the "right" answers to a problem may not be immediately apparent.

The communication tools listed below (active listening, open questions, paraphrasing) are ways of not directing youths, but these tools serve to:

1. Help you to more fully understand his or her problem or situation;
2. Help the child to more fully explore and understand his or her situation, and;
3. Subtly lead or suggest to the child what you perceive to be a good course of action.

To be, or not to be directive: Having said this, at times the adult can be somewhat more directive, especially in crisis situations. If you perceive that there are safety issues, you can give direct advice.

A non-directive approach relies upon solid **basic communication skills...**

Basic Communication Skills

1) Active Listening

Active listening means that you make a special effort to genuinely hear what the youth is saying. This requires a great deal of effort on the part of the listener. You will know that you are acquiring active listening skills when you feel tired after listening and attending to others for a long period of time. Active listening requires a great deal of effort and energy. The goal of active listening is to allow the person who is speaking to come away from the interaction with a feeling they have been completely heard. It is not necessary that you agree with them; however, it is essential that you provide a non-judgmental environment that promotes freedom of expression.

Active Listening

- Hear the words
- Consider body language
- Listen to what's beneath the words

Active Listening Skills

- Avoid distractions - choose a comfortable and quiet place for your meeting
- Avoid time pressure for your meeting - whenever possible
- Don't jump into a conversation too soon – let the youth finish what s/he is saying
- Pause a few seconds before feedback – you both need time to think
- Listen for feeling as well as content – read between the lines
- Don't confuse content and delivery – assume the youth has something to say even if s/he is having trouble saying it.
- Cultivate empathy – try to put yourself in the young person's place
- Give the young person time to correct a mistake – this shows respect
- Use simple gestures and phrases – to show you are listening
- Ask questions beginning with 'What' or 'How' – avoid questions which force 'Yes' or 'No' answers
- pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues

- Maintain good eye contact
- Face youth head on
- Keep an open posture – don't cross arms and legs
- Lean toward the person – show involvement in what he/she is saying
- Be aware your bodies' language

Results of Active Listening

- Encourages Honesty
- Reduces fear – people become less afraid of negative feelings
- Builds respect and affection
- Increase acceptance – promotes a feeling of understanding

The first step towards problem solving

Three techniques for active listening:

1. **Receive rather than transmit.** A good listener usually receives (listens) before they transmit (talks). Remember that the situation is about the youth, not the adult. The first rule of active listening is that when you are talking you can't be listening. Do not be like the narcissistic character that Bette Midler played in the movie *Beaches*, who only slowed down enough to say to her friend, "That's enough about me. What do *you* think about me?"
2. **Bring your full attention to the conversation.** Good listeners are able to bring themselves fully to the moment. Of course, sometimes you will be having a rough day. It could be a fight with the spouse, bills to pay, a lack of sleep, or other problems that can prevent you from being able to fully focus on the youth's concerns. If you are having a bad day, the best thing to do is to attempt to temporarily switch your frame of mind for the time you are with a youth.
3. **Pay attention to the little things.** The adult should try to discern if there is anything unusual in the conversation. Pay attention to the nonverbal aspects of the youth's communication as well as the spoken word. Is their voice tense? Is breathing erratic? Do they use words out of context that might give you a clue as to what is going on with them? Do they keep coming back to a specific issue, even though in your mind it does not seem that significant? Do they seem happy or depressed? Is the youth focused, or do they go off on tangents?

2) Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing
- Shows you are listening by repeating what you heard

Paraphrasing is the process of repeating what you just heard the child say, but in a little different wording. Paraphrasing focuses on listening first and then reflecting the two parts of the speaker's message -- **FACT and FEELING** ---back to the speaker. Often, the fact is clearly stated, but a good listening is "listening between

the lines" for the "feeling" part of the communication. Using this skill is a way to "check out" what you heard for accuracy – did you interpret what a young person said correctly? This is particularly helpful when working with youth. Youth culture/language is constantly changing. Often words which meant one thing when adults were youth could have an entirely different meaning for youth today.

Format: Examples for FACT

"So you're saying that . . ."

"You believe that . . ."

"The problem is . . ."

Examples for FEELING

"You feel that . . ."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but..."

"And that made you feel . . ."

"Your reaction is . . ."

"It seems to me..."

"It sounds like..."

"I wonder if what you're are saying is..."

****Paraphrases are not a time to respond by evaluating, sympathizing, giving our opinion, offering advice, analyzing, or questioning.****

Results:

Using active listening skills will enable you to gather the information and then be able to simply report back what you heard in the message –the facts and the attitudes/feelings that were expressed. This lets the other person know that you hear, understand, and care about his/her thoughts and feelings. The act of paraphrasing is also a demonstration of your respect: it shows a young person that you are taking the time and effort to understand *exactly* what they are trying to get across.

Examples:

- “It sounds like what you are saying is that trouble seems to find you on the playground.”
- “Correct me if I’m wrong, but what I think I’m hearing you say is the teachers come down on you every day, no matter how you act?”

3) Open-Ended Questions

Open-Ended Questions
-Cannot be answered by a yes or no
-Help a person talk more openly

Open-ended questions are intended to collection information by exploring feelings, attitudes, and how the other person views a situation. Open-ended questions are extremely helpful when dealing with young people. Youth, teenagers especially, tend to answer questions with the least amount of

words as possible. In order to maintain an active dialogue without interrogating, try to ask questions which cannot be answered with a “yes,” “no,” “I don’t know,” or a grunt.

Examples:

- “How do you see this situation?”
- “What are your reasons for . . . ?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “How does this affect you?”
- “How did you decide that?”
- “What would you like to do about it?”
- “What part did you play?”

NOTE: Using the question, “why did you do that?” may sometimes yield a defensive response rather than a clarifying response.

Results:

Since open-ended questions require a bit more time than closed-ended questions (questions that can be answered by “yes,” “no,” or a brief phrase), they give the person a chance to explain. Open-ended questions yield significant information which can in turn be used to problem solve.

Open questions have nice soft beginnings and they help youth to respond without having to be defensive. Using a style that encourages youth to speak freely helps in generating ideas, as well as in building the relationship. Using open questions is also a good way to get young people to talk and (sometimes) subtly direct them to consider issues or options. By virtue of the way they are phrased, open-ended questions require elaboration to answer.

Closed Questions: The opposite of an open question is a closed, often painfully direct question that can be answered simply by the child providing a response without further elaboration. Closed-ended questions often feel harsh and judgmental on the receiving end, even when they are not intended in that manner.

For example:

- Closed: "Do you want to get to school on time?"
- Open: "What might you do to make it to school on time?"

Closed: "You didn't stay out of trouble on the playground this week, did you?"
 Open: "Please help me understand your ideas about what happened on the playground today."

Closed: "Do you think that sitting in the counseling office every day will help you to be successful?"
 Open: "Looking back, what are your thoughts about why you were called into the counseling office?"

4) "I" Messages

"I" Messages
 - Avoid judging
 - Keep lines of communication open

"I" messages provide an opportunity to keep the focus on you and explain your feelings in response to someone else's behavior. Because "I" messages do not accuse, point fingers at the other person, or place blame, they avoid judging and help keep the communication open. At the same time, "I"

messages continue to advance a situation to a problem-solving stage.

For example:

"I was really sad when you didn't show up for our meeting last week. I look forward to our meetings and was disappointed not to see you. In the future, I would appreciate it if you could call me and let me know if you will not be able to make it."

Avoid:

"You didn't show up, and I waited for one hour. You could have at least called me and let me know that you wouldn't be there. You are irresponsible."

Take care that your...

- Body language: slouching, turning away, pointing a finger
- Timing: speaking too fast or too slow
- Facial expressing: smiling, squirming, raising eyebrows, gritting teeth
- Tone of voice: shouting, whispering, sneering, whining
- Choice of words: biting, accusative, pretentious, emotionally laden

...are congruent with an honest, open heart.

Results:

"I" messages only present perspective. Allowing the other person to actually "have" a point of view and hearing it does not mean that s/he is right. "I" messages communicate both information and respect for each position. Again, this skill moves both parties along to the problem solving stage.

Dealing with Difficult Issues: Guiding Philosophies

- The importance of self-determination, empowerment
- Collaborative rather than prescriptive
- Problem-solving vs. advice giving
- Confidentiality
- Caution with self-disclosure

Multi-level Considerations

- Immediate Emotional Needs
- Physical and Psychological Safety
- Problem-Solving

Consider where to begin: if there is immediate danger (during the actual conversation only!), consider safety first. Otherwise, meeting the emotional needs of the youth IN THE MOMENT they come to you should take first precedence. Most often, problem-solving comes last!

The Range of Difficult Issues

1) Delicate Topics

“Delicate topics” are simply topics that can be difficult to discuss, but do not necessarily represent a crisis in the life of the youth (“Kids at school are starting to talk about sex,” as an example).

- Sex
- Peer pressure
- Hygiene
- Behavior
- School performance
- Self-image/personal insecurities
- Class/cultural identity
- Others: _____

Guidelines for Response

The topics listed here are likely to come up during discussions between adults and youth; however, caution needs to be taken since these topics can be touchy and strongly affect the relationship. Whenever possible, delicate topics should be discussed only when initiated by the young person, and confidentiality takes on greater importance. Adults who work with youth are encouraged to seek support and feedback from supervisors and peers when these issues come up. Keeping notes of ongoing issues may also be advisable.

2) Crises Requiring Intervention

“Crises” requiring immediate intervention include situations which pose direct and acute danger to the young person in question, or to someone else.

- Child abuse and neglect
- Abusive relationships
- Chemical dependency
- Depression/suicidality
- Mental illness
- Other trauma
- Others: _____

Guidelines for Response

The crises listed here are of grave concern and may require direct and immediate intervention. Some, like child abuse and neglect, are mandated by law to be reported to county authorities, such as law enforcement and/or children services. Regardless, these issues require a referral or a direct intervention. Many of these situations will require collaboration with families of youth, which should be preferably be handled by program professionals with clinical or relationship expertise.

3) Issues of Concern

“Issues of concern” are troubles facing youth that may be difficult and may present risk, but may not require or be approachable with a direct intervention. One example is “fist fighting.” A youth may have gotten in trouble for fighting at school, and the adult in whom they confide may be very concerned about this behavior. The youth, however, may have had a problem with fighting at school since the first grade, and so this is a long-standing behavior for which a direct “intervention” may or may not work.

- Unsafe sex
- Fist fighting
- Delinquent behavior
- Gang affiliation
- Drug and alcohol use
- Others: _____

Because these issues are likely to have significant negative impact on the life of the youth, adults working with youth may need immediate and direct support from more experienced adults and professionals (and sometimes peer helpers) when these issues arise. However, adults must strive to accept these aspects of the lives of youth they serve without judgment. It is also important that adults do not focus too heavily on changing behavior in these regards. They should be aware of the challenges, and over time they may be able help youth to ameliorate them.

Assessing the Level of Particular Issues

These categories are fluid, and there can be many variables involved. For instance, how you approach the situation may depend on:

- Your training, expertise and comfort level
- The expectations regarding your role
- The quality and immediacy of support and supervision provided by your organization
- How well you know the youth (including length of time you have worked with him or her)
- The frequency that the issue/challenge occurs

Transforming the Relationship

Ask yourself, “If I were in this young person’s shoes, what would I want from an adult? What will appropriately strengthen the relationship?”

Times of crisis, big and small, represent a special opportunity for “teachable moments.” So though they may be times of great stress, and certainly can have a negative influence on relationships, they can also (when handled well) be times of self-learning and trust building for everyone. Training and ongoing guidance from staff are essential to these processes.

Dealing with Difficult Issues: Strategies for Applying Guiding Principles

1) Putting Youth at Ease

Telling an adult about a difficult issue can feel like a very risky thing for a child or youth. The adult’s ability to help the young person feel safe in sharing personal information is key to both the development of trust in the relationship and to offering the best possible support for a youth in his/her situation. As the primary role of the adult is to build a trusting relationship with their youth, these concerns should take precedence over attempts to change the young person’s behavior or to influence their decisions.

Tips:

- Stay calm.
- Use body language to communicate attentiveness — maintain eye contact, sit at same level, etc.
- Avoid judgmental statements like “Why would you do something like that?” or “I think you know better...”
- Be honest if you are getting emotional or upset, but never accuse or berate!
- Let them know that you are glad (s)he came to you.
- Reassure youth that his/her confidentiality will be honored whenever possible.
- Use tact but be honest.
- Allow youth to talk at his/her own pace — don’t force an issue.
- Don’t pry — allow youth to bring up topics with which they are comfortable.

2) Honoring the Right to Self-Determination**What is Self-Determination?**

Self-determination is the right that every human should have to make decisions for themselves. Of course this concept becomes tricky and confusing when youth are involved since many decisions are made for minors with or without their consent-- youth are not seen as old enough to be trusted with such decisions. Without the opportunity to exercise decision-making, decision-making skills may be limited. It is the job of a supportive adult to help youth develop these skills and learn to make their own choices. You can do this by helping young people process the implications of any particular course of action, and by helping them to discover what is truly important to them. This is important to the mutual relationship, as it communicates respect and trust, and these concerns should take precedence over a focus on changing behavior or influencing the youth’s course of action.

Tips:

- Focus on his/her feelings and needs rather than jumping to problem-solving.
- When issue has been talked about, ask, “What do you think you would like to do about this situation,” and “How would you like for me to help?”
- If you are not comfortable with what (s)he wants to do, ask yourself why before you decide whether to say so.
- If what (s)he wants to do is not possible, explain so gently and apologize.
- Ask what alternative solutions would make him/her comfortable.
- If you must take an action which is uncomfortable for a young person (such as reporting abuse), offer him or her as much choice and autonomy as possible.
- Encourage critical thinking through questions and reflections.
- Use the words, “I don’t know — what do you think?”
- Other thoughts:

3) Problem-Solving and Resources**Problem-Solving, Not Advice-Giving**

Once the adult has successfully addressed the youth’s feelings, and has processed with them in a way that honors their need for self-determination, they can now further assist the young person in locating resources and options. It is important at this stage that the agency is prepared for any interventions that are needed. Ideally, this should be a team effort, a team of which the young person his or herself is the key player. Any adults who are relevant to the youth’s life or situation should ideally work together, so that the young person has the best support available. This way, youth and adults can together solve problems, rather than the adult “advising” the youth about what to do.

Giving Advice

- Youth is passive, possibly resistant
- Cuts off further exploration of problem
- Often premature

- Youth does not learn
- Adult's solution cannot be imposed on the youth's situation
- Does not encourage self-esteem
- Advice is often not well received

Problem Solving

- Active youth
- Opens lines of communication
- Eliminates timing troubles
- Youth learns how to handle problem
- Solutions belong to the young person
- Foster's self-esteem
- Problem solving creates tools for future

Tips:

- Know your appropriate role
- Be honest with the youth if they have given you information which you will be unable to keep confidential.
- Suggest that your supervisor may have thoughts, if you don't know what to do.
- Provide information if youth are unaware of resources or options.
- Brainstorm with youth and be creative in finding a solution — there is usually more than one way to handle a situation, and this process is educational for young people.
- Offer to accompany a young person if (s)he is uncomfortable with something (s)he has decided to do.
- BE COLLABORATIVE — you are a team.
- FOLLOW THROUGH WITH ANY AND ALL COMMITMENTS
- Other thoughts:

4) Confidentiality

General Considerations Regarding Confidentiality

- Policies must be established for safety & liability concerns
- Also helps build trust with young people
- Adhere to local laws, reviewed by board, legal counsel, insurance carriers
- Train staff & volunteers on legalities and processes of mandated reporting

Guidelines for Confidentiality

Why Establish Confidentiality?

In addition to safety and liability issues, the reasons to establish confidentiality include that a young person typically won't open up if they think you are going to tell others information they have disclosed to you.

Developing Confidentiality Policies

Organizations should carefully think through and establish written guidelines on confidentiality. It is also highly recommended that these policies be reviewed and approved by an organization's board of directors (or administration) by legal counsel, and by insurance carriers. In addition, initial training should be given to staff and volunteers before they have contact with youth; ongoing training and support should also be provided.

Below are some general guidelines that organizations may find useful when developing their confidentiality policies. However, because reporting laws vary, programs need to make sure that their guidelines adhere to local statutes within their jurisdictions.

Exceptions

for

Maintaining Confidentiality

- Talking to Program Personnel
- Interagency Communications
- Group Work (Including Peer Support)
- Child Abuse, Neglect & Endangerment

Because of safety and liability issues, and because volunteers and staff need to communicate in order to receive and provide support, there are several exceptions where adults are allowed to (or they must) break confidentiality.

Exception 1 – Talking to Program Personnel: Program staff and volunteers should be allowed (and highly encouraged) talk to their supervisors and other staff about any particular problem, issue or concern the have with a young person. This does not mean, however, that confidentiality does not apply in these situations. (It is best to have youth and parents sign a release stating that they understand that staff may work as a team and therefore share information.)

Exception 2 – Interagency Communications. Additionally, when agencies collaborate to provide services, in order to effectively serve youth, at times it will be necessary to exchange specific information about these young people. With such collaborations, all organizations involved must gain permission before they share information about clients across agencies. Staff and volunteers must then remain respectful of confidential information when interacting with youth and parents after such information is disclosed.

Exception 3 – Group Work: In some programs, staff and volunteers have group sessions to discuss with their peers issues about the young people they are working with (in order to get suggestions). Again, once information about a youth has been disclosed in this manner, group members must still avoid divulging this information with anyone outside of the program.

Exception 4 – Child Abuse, Neglect, Endangerment / Child Abuse Reporting: In many jurisdictions (including California) when a person receives pay for their work with minors, and they suspect that a child is being or has been abused neglected, or endangered, they must make an immediate report to children services and/or law enforcement. In some jurisdictions, volunteers (those who are not paid) that interact with minors are not required to make a report to children services and law enforcement. However, all programs should train volunteers about child abuse, neglect and endangerment, and they should also require volunteers to immediately report any suspicion to program staff.

The operative word is *suspicion*. If adults who work with youth witness or hear anything that might be of concern, they should report it right away.

Even in this extreme situation, the privacy of individuals must be protected from other program participants and others in their lives—only the child welfare system, (and sometimes law enforcement), and program staff should be notified.

* * *

What constitutes possible abuse, neglect, and endangerment? (Note that the information provided below includes only partial descriptions.)

Physical Abuse. This includes any striking of a child where it leaves marks, bruises, welts, etc. In addition, any intentional and cruel exposure to water, heat, or any other unusual or painful punishments.

Physical Neglect and Endangerment. Basic needs include food, shelter, hygiene, safety and health care. Physical neglect may include leaving young children either alone, or leaving them with other young children.

Sexual Abuse. Any sexual conduct or relationship where a minor is being manipulated and exploited is reportable. In addition, note that sexual intercourse, even though consensual, between an adult (18 or older) and a minor (under the age of 18) is a violation within various jurisdictions (check your local statutes for a full description of violations, and for laws relating to the specific ages of offenders and victims).

Emotional Abuse. This type of abuse may include a lack of care and attention, humiliation, terror, intimidation and character assassination. Domestic violence can also be considered a form of emotional abuse. Violence is terrifying and it leaves physical damage on bodies and property. Violence can also leave caregivers unable to tend to their children.

How About Abuse in the Past, or in the Future? Suspected abuse must be reported past, present or future. For example, someone may have abused the minor in the past who is not currently around this individual, but they may be abusing other children elsewhere. In addition, if you hear or suspect that anyone might be harmed in the future, this is also reportable.

How About Danger to Someone Besides Youth I Am Working With? Any suspicion is also reportable even if it concerns minors other than those you are working with. For example, if a young person you are working with tells you about abuse that is occurring with their friends, this is reportable.

Talk to Your Youth About Confidentiality

During early meetings, you should make this or a similar statement to the young people you are working with (and the program will do the same during youth and parent orientations):

“Anything you tell me will be between you and me, except if I hear that you or anyone else has been hurt, or is in danger (past, present, or future), then I need to tell someone in the program.”

(Or, if you are a staff person, “...then I will need to make a report.”)

5) Self-Disclosure Issues

When adults work with youth, sometimes young people will want to know about the adults' personal lives. It can be tricky finding an appropriate response, especially when the question comes without warning, so adults should be trained on how to manage these situations. In general, when adults help young people, they should refrain from going deeply into their own personal issues.

The following are some things to consider about a young person's probing questions:

Their Question May be a Conversation Starter

Before you panic, consider that the question that the young person is asking might not be about you; instead, it could be a way to begin talking about something that's on their mind. For instance, “How old were you when you first had sex?” may be a way for them to begin talking about a friend they are concerned about.

Don't “Get It Off Your Own Chest”

When you respond to a young person's question, does it feel really good? If it does STOP, as it's likely that you are using the relationship for your own therapy, even if you are telling yourself that you are providing the youth with a needed lesson.

Maintain Your Role as a Stable Person

Going deeply into your own issues might shake the young person's confidence in you. They might end up asking themselves, "Why does person, who has so many problems, think that they can help me? Maybe I should be helping them!"

"The Bus Stop Test" – A Rule of Thumb

Have you ever found yourself waiting for a bus, and struck up a conversation with someone else who is also waiting? It can be nice to share an exchange in such a moment... "are you married? Hey, me too..." or "I work in youth services, how about you?" But have you had the experience where someone starts "unloading" their deep dark needs and issues in such a setting? It feels wrong, doesn't it? So if you are considering divulging something to a young person you are working with, ask yourself how you would feel if someone brought this up at a bus stop.

Strategies for Responding to Probing Questions

While there is no set formula for answering a young person's probing questions, below are strategies for you to consider.

1. "I'm wondering why you are asking?" – Immediately asking a question back helps return the emphasis to the youth. This often inspires the young person to begin relating their own experience, instead of probing further into your life.
2. "I'm a little uncomfortable talking about my personal life." – If you don't want to answer the question, consider being truthful; hopefully, the young person will respect your boundaries. (This can also be a good lesson to them about their own boundaries.)
3. Show your humanity, but without disclosing. Young people want to know you are not "bullet-proof," but at the same time it is not good thing for them to hear your dark secrets. So, you might say something like, "There are things in my life I've done that I wished I hadn't, and things I didn't do that I wish I did. And if I tell you what I did or didn't do, it might make you decide to do the same thing, even if it isn't right for you. So I'd rather talk about you, since you seem to have something on your mind. How can I help you? – This way, you haven't made it seem that you must have done it or would otherwise tell the truth, but you have placed the focus back on them.
4. Another example of showing your humanity with disclosing, for instance, if they ask about your past break-ups, say, "Gee, I've had plenty of problems with relationships in my life. Who hasn't!"
5. Hesitate before saying, "Yes, I did, but..." – Some people who work with youth feel that they need to be to be totally open, and so when questions come up they readily discuss their past discretions. Adults need to weigh their intent (which is usually good) with what the young person might actually hear (which is what they want to hear). For example, you might say, "I had sex when I was 14, but I really, really, really wish I had waited!" and the young person might hear, "They had sex when they were 14, and look how successful they are now—it must have not hurt them." Therefore, it is recommended that you use another strategy (such as the ones listed above), before you get into "Yes, I did, but..."

Additional Resources

Dealing with Difficult Issues with Youth: Crises and Opportunities.
(interactive DVD self-administered training for adults who work with youth)
www.emt.org

NMC Training Curriculum (2000): Module 9: Connecting and Communicating
http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/topic_pubs.php

Plain Talk Program

http://www.ppv.org/ppv/replication_expansion/replication_expansion_publications.asp?section_id=4

Incorporating an Understanding of Youth Culture and Development into Your Mentor Program (2005).
www.emt.org

Responsible Mentoring - Talking About Drugs, Sex and Other Difficult Issues (2000)
www.emt.org

Intervention Skills: Process Consultation for Small Groups and Teams, by W. Brendan Reddy. 1994; Jossey-Bass

Ethics Consultation: From Theory to Practice, by Mark P. Aulisio (Editor), Robert M. Arnold (Editor), Stuart J. Youngner (Editor). 2003; The Johns_hopkins University Press

Behavior Psychology in the Schools: Innovations in Evaluation, Support, and Consultation, by James K. Luiselli (Editor), Charles Diament (Editor). 2002; The Hayworth Press Inc.

Trainer Bios

Dustianne North has been working in the field of youth prevention and mentoring since 1995, when she began building a mentor and volunteer program to serve the youth in foster care at the Florence Crittenton Center in Los Angeles. Ms. North has provided training and technical assistance since 1997 through CARS/EMT Associates. A nationally recognized consultant, she specializes in assisting prevention programs and large-scale collaborative efforts which serve youth in distressed situations, as well as community-driven and grassroots efforts. Dustianne has completed her M.S.W., and is now a doctoral candidate in Social Welfare (UCLA). She draws upon her diverse experience and training to work with direct practice issues such as communicating with youth, as well as macro-level issues, program design, and interagency partnerships.

Jerry Sherk is President and founder of Mentor Management Systems, of Encinitas, California. Jerry has a Masters in Counseling Psychology, and he brings much experience gained from providing technical assistance and training to both adult and youth-based mentoring and prevention programs. Over the past 15 years, Jerry has facilitated workshops for numerous program staff, while helping approximately 350 programs to develop their operating systems. Drawing from his background as a long-time NFL football player, Jerry also developed and ran youth mentoring and leadership programs for high-risk youth in schools and non-profit agencies. In addition, Jerry is an author who has written numerous publications in the areas of prevention, youth and adult mentoring, and employment training.