

## BACKGROUND

Young people in care environments, or those who have experienced difficult, abusive or neglectful early care environments are likely to have experienced fractured relationships. This can occur as a result of separation from significant caregivers, entering the care system as well as experiencing lots of conflict in relationships, or frequent movements (e.g. placement changes). In addition to attachment difficulties, these experiences can cause young people to feel insecure in relationships, and their ability to maintain relationships. They may feel disconnected from others, or purposely isolate themselves. Young people in these situations may not have learned important relationship skills, and miss out on new or safe opportunities to practice and learn new relationship skills.

### Helping young people who have experienced fractured relationships, in your mentor role:

- Your role as a HYPAR mentor can be to teach and model positive relationships to young people, and create the possibility of a good future. As a guide, your role is to help them understand the skills needed for good relationships, and help them build a network of acquaintances, connections and friends.
- It will be essential to support the young person to establish healthy relationships, where they too can have empathy and understanding for others to the best of their ability. The young person will need you to guide them in how to maintain relationships, solve problems and know how to repair relationships when conflicts arise.
- You do not need to be an expert on relationships, and you can always research or seek additional support from your managers for more knowledge in a certain area. Teach the young person realistic skills which fit their capabilities. Use your lived experience to highlight when and the reasons why certain behaviours might become problematic.
- Throughout this process, the young person will need you to: know who you are as a mentor, know your own boundaries and triggers that upset you, and to know what your strengths are. Your strengths will help you to be a strong mentor, who can see the big picture for the young person while holding their needs in mind.

### HYPAR'S HANDS ON APPROACHES FOR RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT: PRACTICE STEPS

As a mentor, your main goals for relationship development include identification and establishment of healthy relationships, networks and connections. It is also necessary that you understand how to effectively prevent relationship breakdown, and how to effectively repair relationships. It is also important to minimise the impacts of unhelpful peers, and help the young person focus on people who will add value to their lives. Together, these factors will help the young person understand, manage or respond to fracturing in relationships.

#### Identify and establish:

- Help the young person understand (and check for) characteristics of healthy relationships e.g. reciprocal, supportive, positive, friendly, trusting, accepting, patient, non-judgmental, caring and friendly. Usually there is a good feeling from being in the healthy relationship, and each party help or accompany each other with common goals or interests. Honesty and repair is able to occur through actions and communication.
- Help the young person, through self-esteem development, and encouragement through your role modelling. Help them understand that they are worthy of having and seeking good people in their life, no matter what their previous difficulties have been. Help them understand that several people can meet various needs, differently. Patience and managing expectations is also important as others may not live up to the young person's expectations. Others might also have their own expectations of the young person.
- Teach the young person some basic skills (in a safety plan format) to help them take realistic steps to make new connections and what to do when they are unsure or make a mistake. E.g. (a) trying different hobbies or activities that involve new people, (b) learning to introduce self and gradually build acquaintances, (c) progressing to the sharing of interests, checking that the relationship is healthy/ compatible, engaging in reciprocal interactions and having steady progress toward (d) friendship. When problems occur (e) engage in back up planning which can be brainstormed by the mentor and young person.

### Effective prevention and repair:

- Teach the young person how to be a good friend. Engage in good habits during relationships. This includes finding ways to be fair, how to engage in even sharing and taking turns during the focus or activity during the interaction, support each other, checking-in with how the other person is feeling, saying nice things to others, replacing negative statements with neutral or positive statements.
- Identify self- protection measures to prevent exploitation. This can be developed through focussing on the self-esteem development, sharing with others but identifying when someone else is taking advantage and what can be done in these times (remembering to value themselves first before others, finding someone to help problem solve).
- Being able to speak up for self can lead to earlier identification that a relationship is taking a wrong turn. Teach the young person how to identify, negotiate and navigate when a relationship may need repair. It is also important they are aware of circumstances when some relationships need to be managed or ceased. Safety, back-up planning and reliance on other interpersonal connections will also need to occur with the young person if a connection needs to cease.
- Help them with the process of working through friendships/ relationships that are unhelpful. Steps can include: identify the problem, discuss the issues, find ways to communicate accepting mixed feelings, understand each other's perspectives (a support person or mediator might help), negotiate options and what both parties want in the relationship, accept differences and plan forward with commitment to work in the best interests of the relationship.

### Minimise influence of unhelpful peers and focus on positive people:

- Support the young person to begin with a focus on themselves, through self-care and a valuing of who they are, their skills, positive traits and their tenacity or achievements.
- Self-care enables an individual to have energy to care for others. When there is self-care in place and valuing of oneself, young people will be better able to tell the difference between a positive relationship and one that is unhelpful. Help the young person check if their friends actions are working to their best benefit or interests.
- Check against the indicators for healthy relationships (listed earlier) to see if the young person's friends are a helpful influence. Help them identify people who may be good in their lives and address self-doubt, and uphold their worthiness for good relationships.

### Keeping on top of your mentor skills:

- Be aware of your strengths in relationships and remember these when you are trying to support young people who go through fractured relationships. You can offer general principles that you have learned or read about. You can also share some general experiences of where you learned about effective relationship development. It can be helpful for the young person to learn about ways that you have created your own safety plans, or have tried new things to bring about positive results in your interpersonal relationships.
- Focus heavily on where the young person is competent. This gives them a chance to believe in themselves and build on their skills. Expand on the trauma and attachment needs and regulate emotions.
- Teach skills from your lived experience and what has worked or not worked (generally) in your friendships, having and maintaining healthy relationships.
- Remember you do not need to be a skilled therapist to effect positive changes in the young persons ability to engage successfully in relationships.

### FURTHER READING:

#### References

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