

## Relationships and the early care experience

Young people who have experienced difficult, abusive or neglectful early care environments are likely to have experienced fractured relationships.

In addition to attachment difficulties, these negative early experiences can cause young people to feel insecure in their ability to establish and maintain relationships.

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*As a mentor, your main goals for relationship development include helping the young person with identification and establishment of healthy relationships, networks and connections.*

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**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**, 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 for yourself, who you are as a mentor, to 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.



It is necessary in your role that you teach the young person to 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.



## Preventing relationship breakdown and promoting repair:

**Teach the young person how to be a good friend.** Teach the young persons to engage in good habits during relationships. This includes finding ways to be fair, display even sharing and taking turns during the focus or activity during the interaction, support each other, check-in about how the other person is feeling, say nice things to others, replace negative statements with neutral or positive statements.

**Identify self- protection measures to prevent exploitation.** This can be developed through focussing on self-esteem development, and sharing with others, and also 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).

**Teach them to be able to speak up for themselves.** This 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 for support with severed relationships.

**Help them with the process of working through friendships/ relationships that are unhelpful.** Example steps: 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.

*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.*

## Mentor strengths

Be aware of your strengths in relationships and remember these when you are trying to support young people who go through fractured 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.

## Great relationships

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.

Help the young person, through self-esteem development, and encouragement through your role modelling.

Teach the young person to begin: (a) trying different hobbies or activities that involve new people, (b) learning to introduce themselves, gradually building acquaintances, (c) progressing their skills to a sharing of interests, checking that the relationship is healthy/ compatible, engaging in reciprocal interactions and maintaining steady progress toward (d) friendship. When problems occur (e) engage in back up planning which can be brainstormed by the mentor and young person.