

Mentoring adolescents

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

The stage of adolescence is commonly a challenging time, not only for the young person but also for others that interact, teach or live with them.

The past year has been especially difficult as we continue to navigate COVID-19 restrictions and ongoing uncertainty about the future. These challenges are felt by adolescents, but unlike adults, adolescents experience significant changes in their own cognitive, emotional and physical development, which adds to the stress of coping with the broader dynamics.

As caring adults, we can all play a role in helping our young people feel more secure and okay about themselves at this time.

Here are some suggestions to help when we are mentoring or interacting with young people:

1. Practice patience

Remember, despite their adult size and ability to be very adult-like at times, adolescents behavior is likely to be inconsistent at this stage of their development, which can be puzzling and frustrating. That rational thinking young person you interact with one day is likely to be irrational the next day. Be patient, the adolescent brain takes years to fully develop.

2. Practice acceptance

Young people want to be heard and need to be heard so listen more than you talk. Practice accepting how they feel about a situation, rather judging, advising or worse, criticizing. Like adults, adolescents will have strong opinions and they need to know their feelings will not be disregarded or made to feel 'wrong'.

3. Listen, then respond

Listen to their opinions and listen some more. Ask questions, be curious about how they see things. If you have some advice, they're much more likely to take it on board once you've listened well and accepted their opinion, whatever that may be. Acceptance does not mean you agree but it provides a baseline from which further (and often healthier) communication can take place. Challenge or advise gently and respectfully.

4. Let them know they're not alone

'Normalise' their experience when you can, especially when they are upset. This is part of empathy, telling a young person that others too would likely feel this way, given the same circumstance, and conveying you accept how they feel and that you understand. Adolescents need to know they're not alone in their overwhelming feelings.

5. Be generous and encouraging

Praise them fully when they try to do the right thing or show their strengths. Build your capacity to be specific in your praise - rather than just saying "well done", tell them exactly why they've done well and what attributes they have shown. People grow on their strengths, not their weaknesses.

6. Tell them you care

Through good and bad times, adolescents need to know you care. Let them know they're important to you, that you believe in them and that you're there for them. And make sure you follow this up in your actions. Adolescents (like children) will still watch what you do.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on [Mentoring Adolescents](#) or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.