

Mentoring Qualities

The role of a mentor is one of a trustworthy friend. You are the model for your students' behavior and attitude.

Helpful mentor qualities include:

- Being non-judgmental
- Being an active listener
- Staying committed
- Being patient and encouraging
- Giving positive feedback on improvements and progress as well as successes

Remember that the experience is designed to be a fun interaction for both of you and your role is neither teacher nor parent.



SMART is a 501c3 nonprofit. Our vision is an Oregon where every child can read and is empowered to succeed.

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Relationship Building

Relationship Patterns

SMART's primary focus is on enhancing the literacy skills of kindergarten to third grade children. As a secondary outcome of the way the program is structured however, an informal mentoring relationship often occurs between the volunteer reader and the child. This does not happen with all reading pairs and usually depends on the needs of the child.

Regardless of the relationship that develops, volunteers may want some tips on how to begin particularly if the volunteer does not have any recent experience with young children.

The tips listed here are provided as guide to help with relationship building. They are merely ideas that may spark some of your own. Most relationships follow the same pattern of development:

- A tentative coming together at the beginning
- A "getting to know each other" phase
- "Testing the waters" and beginning to trust
- Working together well and making progress toward a goal
- Closure or end of the relationship

Helpful Tips

- Introduce yourself. Ask the child what s/he thinks s/he'll be doing in SMART. Say your name to help them remember.
- Initiate the conversations. Children may not have the self-esteem or self-confidence to interact with an adult they don't know. Don't be discouraged if conversations are one-way at first.
- Share some things about yourself, children's books you enjoy, your pets, your favorite foods, a hobby you have.
- Use some of your interests as a springboard to ask the child questions in a gentle, interested, non-threatening way. Watch for signs for interest to build on.
- Avoid questions that may be perceived as "too personal" such as, "Who do you live with?" or "What does your mother or father do?"
- Listen and remember the things the child tells you so you can follow-up at later sessions about what they told you.
- Learn all you can about your student's successes/activities and comment on them. Ask about favorite subjects which can help decide on book topics.
- Use praise a lot and stay positive. "I like the way you noticed that word started with a b" or "I love the books you pick!"
- Be patient and don't give up or take it personally if a child seems unenthusiastic or uninterested.

Saying Goodbye

Regardless of whether or not there is a goodbye organized by your coordinator or not, it is important for you to put some "closure" on the activity for both you and your child. Without doing so, the child may not understand and personalize why you are no longer showing up. Here are some things to keep in mind and prepare for. Although difficult to discuss, it is essential to do so.

- Start talking about the fact that the program and your reading time is coming to an end in a few weeks. The last day you get together is not enough "warning." You can say that because school is ending, SMART is ending too and you will miss reading with them.
- Talk about what enjoyed most, ask them what they liked best.
- When it's time, remind them that next week is your last time together and take your lead from the child...if they are obviously uncomfortable don't push a discussion.
- Acknowledge the progress you've seen and why you liked reading with them.
- You may be tempted but please remember SMART's policy of no gifts.
- Thank them. Consider things that have occurred as a result of having a year long relationship with your little reader.