

# The Mentoring Booklet

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This is a booklet for YRAP mentors to be a sort of primer and quick reference for mentoring. It's based on the ideas that we came up with as a group as to what mentoring should be like. That consensus is laid out in a short point-form document that you should get at training, but can also find on the YRAP website. The **mentoring consensus document** will give more details about what people want in terms of support and what they think about what we should be doing. You can also see the regular **volunteer orientation booklet** for more general details about YRAP's function and inner workings. This booklet has more detail about what to expect day-to-day, how we as a group keep organized and effective, and who your supports are.

Also, YRAP isn't one of those places that just has a ton of booklets. I just mentioned all of them.

## A List of Important Things

Why read through a whole document to find important things when they can be listed at the start? *As a mentor for YRAP...*

1. ***You're entering an equal relationship.*** We are matched with people who we relate to based on empathy, common interest and mutual respect rather than any sort of obligation. We are not there to fix anyone or tell them what's what, and the idea is rather to support without judgment but with the respect of an equal human being. The whole thing is based on personal relationships, and for anything to be meaningfully personal you of course have to...
2. ***Come as yourself.*** Nobody expects you to be anyone or anything but who and what you already are. All that a mentor needs is to be a caring person (with a certain degree of stability) who can relate to another person and takes some time to do so. Except for maybe one exception, coming as yourself means that...
3. ***You're not superman.*** In fact, that's kind of your super power. In the bigger picture, nothing that you can do in a red cape and blue tights could be more powerful than genuinely giving a shit over a period of time that's longer than it takes to put out a fire by flying around it really fast. Keep that in mind when your mentee is in a tight spot and the figurative building is on fire and the figurative plane is crashing into it and the figurative nearby train is flying off the rails into a cargo ship full of endangered blue zebras and you feel like a useless, capeless turd. This won't happen often, but when it does you will do the same as any other time in that you simply:
4. ***Do the best you can.*** In your Clark Kent garb, you, working with other people in YRAP, are still able to do a lot both in supporting during the day-to-day or the odd crisis situation. Trust in yourself and try to do the best that you can given your own circumstances, knowing that there will usually have been a better way or more to have done that you learn of when the dust settles. As mortals, in the short run we just do the best we can and in the long-run we will never rescue anyone who won't rescue themselves, because...
5. ***This is their journey; you're along for the ride.*** You may or may not see a breakthrough, you may or may not see a great positive change. Often we get to see that, but above anything else you are there as a non-judgmental support. Having that safe, stable person there may do a ton

in terms of allowing someone the emotional space they need to grow themselves. And as one of those growing people yourself, especially those trying to do a good thing...

6. ***You should always feel supported.*** We will often not know the perfect thing to do or have the answer to every problem. We do, however, know what it is like to go through what you are going through and what you might need, whether a hug or a high-five, something in between or something not exactly on that spectrum. As a group, we have a lot of energy, ideas and experience that can end up helping in a whole range of situations. “We,” of course, includes you, since everyone can support one another, which is why...
7. ***Communication should always be open and clear.*** We have no hidden agenda, so you can be honest and straightforward with your mentee. Doing the same within YRAP as well as with others means that we can avoid conflict before it begins. Clear communication at all times means that we can learn from and support one another and be able to...
8. ***Always honestly do the rightest thing we know.*** It would be crazy to speak of trusting ourselves or doing the right thing if we punished for mistakes or swept them under the rug. Hopefully nobody has the illusion that we are doing the right thing all the time, instead knowing that when we’re open with our successes and mistakes we’ll always be closer to knowing what right is and how to get closest to doing it. If it’s really an equal relationship we can be supportive and non-judgmental both ways, give ourselves the same honest and safe space to grow that we give to the people who land on our doorstep with a court order.

For details of how we’re doing this mentor-wise at the moment, read on.

## **Mostly the same stuff with more detail and less colorful metaphor**

It is one thing to state some values or ideals, but we also have a way of applying them day-to-day that would confusing if crammed into the short 8-point list above. Hopefully this next bit will answer any lingering questions.

Another note: We (the co-writers) often use the term “young person” in the document to refer to the mentee/client/youknowwho because that’s what it is in the legal system, but I really need a better word.

### **THE MENTOR AS AN EQUAL AND A SUPPORT**

YRAP is a group founded on the idea of youth supporting youth. It is voluntary both for clients and for volunteer members. There is no superior or authority in the relationship between clients, youth members and coordinators.

A YRAP mentor is a youth member (15-24 inclusive) of YRAP who works one-on-one with a young person in the program. They act as a stable, non-judgmental individual who collaborates with the young person and others within and outside of YRAP to support the young person as they complete their commitments to the court or to the program.

A YRAP mentor is a support rather than an expert or professional, and is not there to supervise or reform the young person. Each mentor is an expert on what they put into the relationship: themselves. Everyone has times of stability and instability in their lives; a YRAP mentor is a person of a similar age

and with different experiences who may be stable at times that the young person is not. Having a relationship of mutual trust and respect will mean that the young person will keep in contact voluntarily and is able to share concerns or destabilizing factors as well as their successes.

## **GOALS/ROLE OF MENTORSHIP**

A mentor is the young person's main contact within YRAP. They support the young person to complete the conditions that have been imposed by the courts, and also work with the young person towards long-term success. The following are ways in which mentors are able to facilitate this support:

***Supporting Stability.*** In order to comply with court conditions of any kind—whether a sentence, extrajudicial sanctions or bail conditions—there is a need for the young person to achieve or maintain a certain level of stability. Without stability, the ideas of “meaningful consequence” and “educational and rehabilitative” contained in the YCJA are weightless. One of YRAP's main goals is to support things that let a young person be to be stable enough to grow in positive ways.

***Advocacy.*** Being in a position of trust with the young person will mean that a mentor will be more aware of personal, family other issues that the young person may face. Often a mentor will be the first one to know if the recommendations that have been approved by court are being blocked by other agencies, or if they are facing difficulty or discrimination when looking for school, work, or employment. As objective third parties, mentors can assist in establishing productive lines of communication with other groups or professionals, as well as support the young person in successfully advocating for themselves.

If you find that the young person is not getting the support that they need from YRAP, or a YRAP staff or other member is not effectively meeting the needs of the young person, *a mentor is in the best position to advocate internally as well.*

***Empowerment.*** One of the underlying premises of YRAP was empowering youth to deal with youth issues. By being involved with YRAP, a young person should be given place to have their voice heard and should be invested in what they have to do in order to make things right, whether for their community or for themselves. Though young persons will certainly have ups and downs at various points, the mentor should not need to work harder than the young person is willing to work. A mentor can provide consistent support and model healthy behavior, but it is the young person who can take the decisive role in their own destiny and work towards establishing their own successful independence.

## **WHAT DOES MENTORING LOOK LIKE?**

What role a mentor takes varies depending on the situation of the young person with whom they are matched. The young person might be highly motivated to complete their conditions or else have conditions that require little or no work and only need to check in causally with their mentor every once in a while. It is also possible that the young person may be facing serious issues that require a great deal of support. The mentor might keep in contact only with the young person, or they may get to know the young person's friends or family members. There also may be collaboration with other workers in the young person's life, like youth workers, caseworkers, or group home workers.

Because the role of the mentor can vary so widely, the support and collaboration from other members of YRAP is important. It may be as simple as keeping the director updated on what is going on with the young person regularly, or it may be much more hands on.

Regardless of the specific scenario, **mentors should never feel alone or unsupported in whatever they are facing**. Mentors can only be asked to take on what they can handle, and a young person's needs might become much more substantial than had been expected. It is the responsibility of YRAP as a group, not just the mentor, to adapt to each circumstance. This may mean that the original mentor will co-mentor with another member, that the coordinator will on a larger role in supporting the young person, or that support will be drawn from outside agencies and professionals.

This is the most important paragraph for a new mentor.

## PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS

As YRAP is a by-youth-for-youth group, the main expectation, rather than a formal set of rules, is that we use our judgment, are honest, and are transparent. A YRAP member should behave as a role model, but the mentoring relationship is an equal one and the respect should be mutual—the young person will make mistakes and so will we, and when we do we will have a chance to role model resolving it.

### Communication

The mentor keeps in regular contact with the young person he or she is mentoring as well as with a YRAP coordinator. The most important thing is that everyone should be on the same page in terms of keeping in contact. The mentor should be clear to the young person about how and when he or she expects to communicate or meet.

Mentors should be prepared for communication to vary and change as the needs and the circumstances of the young person do. Know that the young person may fall out of contact, miss meeting you, or choose to not contact you. It is not the mentor's responsibility to try and keep this from happening, but rather to ensure that the young person knows how to contact you when they so choose, and that they can contact you again without judgment. Again, this is a voluntary program and the consequences of falling out of contact with us are natural. Our job is just to make sure that they are given a fair chance at doing the right thing.

#### Contact with Young Person

Regular contact: Try to make contact with the young person **at least once a week**. It can be a simple check-in if there is no want or need for anything else. It might be helpful to have an arrangement like "call me on Friday and if I don't hear from Sunday I'll call you". If possible, get multiple ways of contacting them (home, cell, email, facebook, friend's number, etc.) as modes of communication are often cancelled or disconnected unexpectedly.

If you are concerned about an inability to keep in contact with the young person, log your attempts at contacting them on a contact log, which will give a record of all your attempts to contact them, and discuss with either a coordinator or another YRAP member your best course of action in reestablishing communication.

#### Contact with Coordinator

Be sure to send an update to the YRAP coordinator by **email once every two weeks at an absolute minimum**. Once per week is preferred until things settle into a routine. An email serves as a record of

our involvement with the young person, and allows the coordinator to check what has been going on recently without having to keep detailed notes (or having the mentor have to keep them). The update should simply say what is going on with the youth in general, as well as things that are going well and any issues or concerns. The email can be casual as long as all the information is there. The coordinator who meets the young person first and arranges the panel is the primary one that the mentor should be keeping in contact with.

If you have any specific or immediate concerns, **call the coordinator directly**, as not all updates will be read right away. After an important call, send email as a reminder and record of having made the call.

### **Communication with the courts**

Every time the young person returns to court, YRAP sends an official update on what has been going on. When the young person has completed their conditions, a closing letter is written. Both are usually well under a page of writing. The mentor can write either of these, and should write the closing one if possible. If there have been good updates all along, however, the coordinator can do it as well.

### **Confidentiality**

A mentor is in a trusting relationship with the young person, and breaking that trust could destroy the foundation of this relationship. Inappropriately sharing information pertaining to a young person with someone who is not an affiliated professional, or a member of YRAP is considered a breach of YRAP's oath of confidentiality, and should not happen under any circumstance.

As working with young persons can be stressful, confusing, or frustrating at times, it is important that mentors regularly draw on supports from within the organization, and that young persons be made aware that mentors will be doing so.

Whether working in some capacity with YRAP or taking a walk in the park or playing a dangerous drinking version of *Dance Dance Revolution*, anyone in Canada has an obligation to report to Children's Services when they have reason to believe that a person under the age of 18 is at risk. It is a criminal offense not to. This includes child abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation and the like. Be sure that the young person understands why you might report something like this before it becomes an issue. You are welcome to talk to a coordinator or advisor if you are unsure of a certain circumstance.

### **Expenses**

Money is spent for a wide variety of reasons while a young person is participating in YRAP, and often this is done through the mentor. Money is most commonly spent on things like buying food or drink when meeting to talk, on recreation like going to a movie or a show, or on recreation or other activities for the young person. Sometimes there is a need to make a long trip out of town (such as to take a young person to treatment), to pay cab fare in an emergency, or to buy necessities such as groceries or clothing. A small bit of money for these kinds of things can be a great investment in terms of building a relationship or supporting someone to grow.

The main rule of thumb is that the mentor should not have to pay their own money. Mentors can keep their receipts and turn them in to the office for reimbursement. In situations where mentors do not have money to spend, other arrangements can be made (like YRAP purchasing a gift card for a coffee shop). YRAP also has bus tickets for members to get to panels or for mentors to meet with their match.

Spending is up to the mentor's discretion for amounts up to \$30. For larger expenses, or if the mentor is unsure or has made questionable purchases in the past, mentors can talk to a coordinator to make sure it is something that can be reimbursed. For even larger expenses, board approval may be necessary.

## **Unforeseeable Difficult Situations**

YRAP often gets into situations that are pretty difficult, often due to working with people in really difficult situations, which tends to lead to some difficult situations.

### **Trouble with a match or within YRAP**

The coordinator generally has the responsibility of making as certain as possible that everyone is safe and supported and never set up to fail. In some cases, a coordinator may do things such as switch a mentor, ask for more frequent check-ins, or call a meeting to discuss issues that they have. It is not the coordinator's role to choose who is or is not in YRAP, but if they have serious concerns they can avoid putting an individual on a panel or matching them with a youth until the issues can be resolved.

By extension, if you feel that you are in a difficult or unfair situation, it is the coordinator's job to listen to your concern and to work with you (and potentially others) to remediate it. If you are not satisfied, you are welcome to take your concern to the other coordinator or to the board. Notify the board president of your issue, and if they cannot help to resolve it, the matter can be resolved at the next board meeting.

### **Crisis situations**

Some youth are in pretty difficult circumstances. As someone who is trusted and respected, the mentor can be someone that a young person will call when in a time of need (or after it's merely a time of need and it's *really* hit the fan). As above, the more important thing is to know that you are just a person who cares will do their best knowing that although you will not be able to resolve every problem, just being supportive makes a huge impact.

During mentor training, you should have gotten some idea of things that can be done in crises as well as the kinds of things that can happen. If it is serious enough, do not be afraid to call 911. But also remember that every single person in YRAP would support you if they could, and do not hesitate to contact them. Coordinators and certain experienced members may be the best bet at first, and between the four coordinators you should always be able to get hold of someone. You should also have a list of people who can be contacted, including some advisors and experienced members who could help out even in the unlikely circumstance of no coordinators being available.

It's normal to not know what to do in a crisis situation, especially when the main crisis is happening to someone else whose situation you may not fully understand. It is okay and natural to be scared or hurt for a while, even if rationally you feel like you should not be hurt. It's also common to be upset by something in ways you do not realize, or to have something upsetting hit you later.

Everyone reacts in their own way and in their own time, just know that it is always okay to talk about being hurt, scared, touched, excited or whatever else you feel. There are lots of people at YRAP or who are known to people at YRAP who probably have been through something similar and can support you when you are dealing with something tough. You have your own personal support network, and there are of course groups and professionals around who can help deal with any processing you need to do (keeping confidentiality in mind). Feel free to use any of those supports. Do what you need in order to feel better, but also be sure that other people at YRAP know what you are going through.

Things can certainly come up outside of crisis situations relating to mentoring. Whatever hits your particular buttons is legitimate. Know that having a culture where we are alright with dealing with these sorts of things helps to protect all of us, and you are never inconveniencing or burdening anyone by telling them how you have been affected (or if you are, it's short-term and minor compared to the long-term major consequence of clamming up when we need support).

### **Ending/Closing**

There is no set end date to mentoring in YRAP. It is voluntary through and through. Some “young persons” (damned words) will keep at arm’s length and won’t be interested in continuing with mentoring once their conditions are finished (if they remain in contact at all), some may end up best friends years later. The choice should be left to the young person. If the mentor is not able to continue, the young person is instead given the choice of keeping in contact with YRAP rather than with the mentor.

### **In Conclusion**

This booklet would probably be better with more concrete examples, but would also be longer. There should be plenty of examples in training, so maybe use this booklet as a quick-reference or guideline to help out along the way. *Remember that all of this is a work in progress, and you have as much right as anyone to help make things work better.*

Never hold back from asking a question, asking for advice, or for support. We can’t predict specifics of what will happen in a given instance, but we can be generally ready to deal with whatever happens by having healthy relationships with one another and a supportive culture. A lot of great things have happened as a result of people doing the mentor thing. Have fun.

## BONUS 1: A Checklist for mentors:

This is sort of sad as a checklist, since some checks you want and some you don't want. **Instead, think of it as a list of common experiences that mentors have with some added commentary.** These touch on almost all of the common problems that people have when mentoring. *The good news is that we have come across them a lot and they are almost all taken care of very easily, even if the solution isn't obvious at first.*

- Does the coordinator know what's going on enough that they could take a call from the youth, probation officer, lawyer, etc.?
  - Even if you think so, have you written a quick email update in the past couple weeks?
    - *Coordinators often are the bridge that keeps a lot of people in the loop. Even if they seem to be on the ball at one time, be sure that there's some way for them to get caught up on things easily and when there's lots going on and things fall out of their heads, or two kids have almost identical situations and they get confused, etc. A quick email as described earlier almost always solves this.*
  - Maybe you feel like you should have known or were told but the opportunity where it was comfortable to ask has long passed, or a situation you never even considered has come up.
    - *Anyone who is on any list that you have has felt that way before and will feel relieved when you call.*
    - *Feeling over your head is not always avoidable, but it can always be temporary. Ask anyone for the support you and the people you're working with deserve.*
- Do you have that stress feeling when something needs to get done or is unaddressed?
  - This is commonly checking in with the youth, making a phone call, checking in with someone like a community service placement, or something like not knowing an important date or court date, etc.
  - It could also be that there is some sort of conflict that is unaddressed, or you are waiting for someone to do something (like the youth's social worker or even the YRAP coordinator).
    - *It's always easy to get caught up on fault and blame or to isolate yourself over the small stuff. Take the first example—it's easy to say "this is my fault that I haven't been consistent in calling" and get stressed about it. Pretty much everyone has been there. A lot of us have tricks that help, and even just talking it out with someone who has no helpful advice could change things for you.*
- Do you feel like you
  - *First, however bad a mistake, it almost always seems way worse than it is, especially if we deal with it right away. There*

have done the wrong thing or made a mistake that will mess someone up?

*is a lot of hidden flexibility in the system and it is almost always a way to work things out so well it's like they never happened.*

▪ *Even in cases where you've made mistakes, almost always we will find a way to make it right without causing anyone any trouble. At minimum we'll work out a way to be ready for the next time something like that happens so that nobody has to feel that way again.*

Do you feel safe and comfortable dealing with stuff in YRAP?

○ This could mean that you're not comfortable with discussing problems or mistakes, or feel that people are too busy for you or aren't listening for some other reason, or feel that your issues aren't as important as what other people are dealing with. It could mean that you think something is wrong but are uncomfortable saying so.

▪ *There is no rule that keeps an environment safe or supportive. It's all about the people and the culture that we create together. Assume that people are open and will be supportive, and make it known when you feel that they aren't. Probably something is wrong that we all need to deal with.*

If you're feeling something on this list or something related to it, then someone's been there before (probably a lot of people). If it's not on there, it's my fault and not yours. Give a coordinator or experienced member a call and we can help sort it out. If it is an epic/crazy enough situation, there's a high chance that someday someone will be calling you and will get the best advice ever.

## Bonus 2: The YRAP Mentor Process in context

This is the basic process. It changes slightly when we're dealing with different circumstances, and of course we're not even always dealing with someone who's committed a crime (ex. Bail). But it still follows mostly the same pattern, with variations case-by-case. And if it sounds too much like "Jane Sees Spot Run," it's not because I think you're stupid, it's because I confused myself and had to give them names.

1. Johnny is caught shoplifting.
2. Johnny is charged by the police. A huge, complex and expensive legal process kicks off.
3. At some point, someone involved in that process thinks that Johnny would do well in YRAP, because there are other issues going on besides the shoplifting and he could really do with some more support than people get in the legal system.
4. A referral is made to YRAP.
5. Joe the Coordinator takes the file.
6. Joe the Coordinator gets background on the situation and meets everyone involved. This includes lawyers and other professionals, and especially the Susan, whose struggling mom-and-pop store was stolen from, and Johnny as well as whomever Johnny and Susan feel that Joe the Coordinator should talk to.
  - *At this point, Johnny and Susan both know Joe the Coordinator. There has been trust built and they all understand the process.*
7. Joe the Coordinator uses what he's learned to set up the best panel and conference to suit the situation.
8. The YRAP panel meets Johnny, and sometimes Susan. They come up with a resolution for Johnny. Someone agrees to follow through with Johnny and his resolution as the mentor. It's Phil the Mentor.
  - *Johnny now knows Joe the Coordinator pretty well, and has met some other people at YRAP as well. Soon he will get to know Phil the Mentor much better.*
9. Phil the Mentor keeps in closest contact with Johnny. He supports Johnny in general and helps to keep up on those conditions. Joe the Coordinator keeps in touch with both Johnny and Phil, and sometimes Susan or others involved.
  - *This allows Joe the Coordinator to support both Johnny and Phil especially, and also to be the bridge that allows Johnny and the court system to know what's going on with one another. Depending on the situation, the court may have to approve the resolution and may have to be kept in the loop on what is going on.*
10. When Johnny has completed his resolution, he goes back to court where he gets +3 karma and sometimes loses his criminal record. Then he gets on with his life.

*If you'd like more information on the details of how this all works technically or in practice, check out the documents in the Member's Only section of the website or ask someone.*