



**Okaloosa School District
Mentor/Reading Tutor Program
Handbook**

**Okaloosa School District
Office of Community Affairs
Tel. 833-7614 or 833-9999
Fax 301-3065**

Dear Mentor,

Thank you for your desire to mentor a student in the Okaloosa School District. As a mentor, you will be a friend, tutor, role model and will help to build a child's foundation of basic values and assist them in setting goals and attaining them. Recent studies have shown that mentors have a great impact on students involved in school-based mentoring programs. Based on these studies, following are some significant results:

- 64% of students developed more positive attitudes toward school
- 58% achieved higher grades in reading, languages, math and social studies
- 60% improved relationships with adults
- 56% improved relationships with peers
- 55% were able to express their feelings
- 64% developed higher levels of self-confidence
- 62% were more likely to trust their teachers

In addition 77% of the teachers, parents and volunteers involved in the programs reported increases in students' self-confidence. They were also less likely than their peers to repeat a grade, and their average number of unexcused absences also dropped.

As you can see, mentoring is one of the most valuable contributions we can make in our students' lives. As a mentor, you will meet once a week with your student for 30 - 45 minutes at his or her school. These weekly sessions will take place during the school year only and at a time that is convenient for both you and your student. Outside contact with students by mentors is strictly prohibited. Although there will be times when you are not able to meet with your student, it is important to meet with them as regularly as possible.

Again, we appreciate your support of our mentoring program and your commitment to helping a student become a productive citizen and achieve academic success. If at any time we can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact our office at 833-7614.

Sincerely,

Office of Community Affairs

Okaloosa School District Mentor/Reading Tutor Program

Policies and Procedures

The goal of the Okaloosa School District Mentoring Program is to provide mentors for students who are in need of help to improve their academic performances. The district's focus will be to match mentors with students who have been identified and are receiving additional academic support as part of their individual improvement and monitoring plan. The one-on-one relationship provided by mentoring will assist these students in building self-esteem and developing life, problem-solving and interpersonal skills as well as academic support.

Following are the policies and procedures that must be strictly adhered to in order to participate in the Okaloosa School District's Mentoring Program. Failure to do so will result in dismissal of the mentor from the program.

1. All volunteers complete the electronic application on the Okaloosa County School District website: www.okaloosaschools.com. Look for the green "Volunteers Apply Here" button.
2. In accordance with School Board Policy, mentor volunteers must be fingerprinted and receive clearance prior to acceptance into the mentoring program.

Upon submission of the volunteer application, mentor volunteers contact the Office of Community Affairs for fingerprinting instructions. Volunteer fingerprinting is contracted through a local vendor, at the cost of the school district.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement forwards fingerprint results to the Office of Community Affairs. Volunteers will be contacted upon receipt of their fingerprint results.

3. Prior to being matched with a student, volunteers will attend mentor training. Mentor training options are posted on the district website and are available through school mentor coordinators.
4. Mentor volunteers contact the school in which they wish to volunteer and schedule an appointment with the school mentor coordinator to be matched with a student.
5. The school district's mentoring program is a school-based program. All mentoring is done on the school campus in a designated area during school hours only. Absolutely no contact can be made with students off-campus at any time.

6. Mentors must maintain confidentiality. No discussion or information sharing about the student should take place off-campus. Mentors must immediately report to school personnel (principal, guidance counselor, or teacher) information or situations about the student when there is concern for the student's safety.

7. Mentors must be role models of good character, be respectful and display appropriate behavior. They must also be aware of limitations. Mentors can't change a student's home situation, but should be a model of strong ethics and values which will have a positive impact on the student.

Mentoring Helps

- Take time to establish rapport.
- Keep confidentiality - *unless the student is in danger or there is danger to someone else.*
- Work for gradual progress (Not "F" to "A").
- Be aware that the student's value system may be different from yours.
- Be aware of limitations. You cannot change the student's home situation.
- Remember that everyone has some strengths. You may need to look to find them.
- Give positive reinforcement whenever possible.
- Remember that everyone needs to be valued in order to act responsibly.
- Remember that listening is what we can offer another person.
- Realize that you may not be able to reach every child. Responsibility for change lies with the student.
- Be yourself. If you are uncomfortable in a situation, seek help from school personnel.
- Be punctual and reliable and consistent.
- Remember to model appropriate behavior. Be conscious of your own behavior and what self-concept you are projecting.
- Have fun.
- Focus on one area, subject or problem at a time.
- Help the student see the importance of staying in school from your unique perspective.
- Remember that your visit may be the highlight of your student's week!

Be An Active Listener

- Establish eye contact
- Sit face to face with your student
- Assume a relaxed position
- Stop talking. Really hear what the student is saying.

- Avoid labeling or judging what the student is telling you.
- Don't become distracted.
- Be patient and do not interrupt.
- If you disagree with something the student is saying or doing, it is very important to show the student that you disagree with the behavior—but not the person.
- Show that you are listening by repeating back what you just heard the student say.
- Avoid closed-ended questions (yes/no) or assuming you know how the student feels.
- It is not necessary to have an answer at all. The student may just need to get something off his/her chest. Just knowing that someone is listening and cares is sometimes enough.
- Empathize with the student. Put yourself in his/her shoes. Center around concerns of the student and not your own.
- Focus on what the student is saying.

Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving is a life skill that must be learned and practiced. It is not the mentor's place to solve the problem for the student; rather, the object is to assist the student in working through the solution process.

The student has to recognize that there is a problem and then want to find a solution. Talking through the process with a trusted adult is often very helpful. A student needs to know that there are choices to be made and that there is some control over things in his/her life.

The questions below outline the process to go through when addressing a problem. The student has to provide the answers.

- ❖ What is the problem? Who has the problem?
- ❖ What happens if the problem goes on?
- ❖ What happened to create the problem?
- ❖ What can you do to solve the problem? (List everything you can think of)
- ❖ What will happen if you use each solution?
- ❖ Predict if you can really carry out the solution.
- ❖ Choose the best solution. Tell why you chose it and when you will use it.

Goal Setting Guidelines

One of the most important tasks of the mentor is to assist the student in setting short-term and long-term individual goals. There are several important factors to consider before beginning the task of goal setting with your student.

- Time must be spent with the student in establishing a relationship of trust and confidentiality before goal setting should be attempted.
- Involve the student in setting goals. Each goal must be articulated by the student with your guidance. It must be the student's goal, not yours.
- A simple short-term goal which can be immediately achievable by the student is a good starting point, such as completing a homework assignment or being on time each day of the week.
- The goal must be believable. The student must believe that the goal can be accomplished. This goes back to the need to have a positive, affirmative feeling about one's self. Show your belief in the student.
- Goals must be specific and measurable such as being in school every day the next week or writing the week's homework assignments in a small spiral notebook.
- To assure that an attempt will be made by the student to meet the goal, a commitment should be made by a handshake or written agreement between you and the student.
- If the student fails to achieve the goal, the following points should be examined:
 - The goal may have been too difficult for the student to achieve.
 - The student may be "testing" you to see your reaction.
 - The goal may have been developed without the student's active involvement and commitment.
 - The student may be fearful of achieving a self-enhancing goal. Many "at-risk" students believe themselves to be "losers" and become accustomed to making poor choices which reinforce their negative self-image. The student may be afraid to try because of the risk of failure.

Sometimes a student may not see the need to work toward a short-term goal until it can be related to an important long-term goal. For example, passing English may be the long-term goal which will be affected by the short-term goal of turning in English homework.

Age-Level Student Characteristics

Elementary School Age Student Characteristics

- Mentoring makes a significant difference at this level.
- Many students are deficient in reading and math skills but one-on-one tutoring can make a big difference.
- Many students may be deficient in social skills.

Middle School Age Student Characteristics

- Mentoring makes a significant difference but it takes skill and patience.
- Wide range of interests which change frequently.
- Flit from subject to subject, easily distracted, difficulty in concentrating, moody.
- Need learning experiences which challenge reasoning.
- May exhibit negative behavior - aggressive, argumentative, critical, boisterous, defiant, rebellious, smart-mouthed.
- Hard to motivate. May accept failure.

High School Age Student Characteristics

- Mentoring makes a significant difference but it is challenging and requires patience.
- Need for consistent interest and support. Frustrated learners may consider dropping out.
- Acceptance from peers is important.
- Wide range of needs, abilities and motivation.
- Growing desire for independence and decision-making.
- Family problems may cause concern.

At Risk Student Characteristics

- Lack of academic success
- Negative attitudes and behaviors
- May be older than usual for grade level
- Conditions at home
- Truancy
- Unrealistic outlook
- Influenced easily by others
- Thinks others do not value them

Suggestions For Student Activities

Elementary Student Activities

- Teach your student how to play a card game or chess. Critical thinking skills are involved.
- Play “tic-tac-toe” or “hang man”. Many young children don’t know how to play these games.
- Play board games. Conversation occurs while you play.
- Work on a puzzle.
- Draw pictures together of your houses, pets, families, etc.

Reading Helps

- Go to the library and help your student find an interesting book to check out. Spend time reading to each other.
- Give your student a book. Share it together each week, a little bit or a chapter at a time.
- Encourage your student to read or finish a book during the week and tell you about it when you next meet together.
- Bring in a magazine and read an article of interest together.

Math Helps

- Make flash cards with your student using index cards.
- Use play money to practice counting money and making correct change.

Secondary Student Activities

- Make flash cards using index cards for spelling, foreign language, vocabulary, etc.
- Teach the student to play chess to build critical thinking skills.
- Teach the student memory tricks to memorize things.
- Encourage and help the student to find an extracurricular activity in which to participate at school.
- Work on a project together.
- Bring information relating to possible career interests of the student.
- Help the student obtain college information from the guidance counselor.
- Practice filling out a job or college application.
- Help the student prepare a resume.

Reading Helps

- Bring in a magazine or newspaper to share. Let the student borrow or have one you have finished reading. Discuss an article of interest.
- Go to the school library and help the student find an interesting book to read.
- Read aloud together for a while. Take turns reading. Be positive and encouraging.
- Encourage the student to read during the week and tell you about the book or article.

Reading Strategies For School Mentors

Strategies Before Reading:

- ✓ **Select Books for Reading Strategies and Reading Success**
Mentors should select books that children are able to read with 90% accuracy. Young children need lots of practice, reading familiar, easy books. Children also need to read books that are unfamiliar as well.
- ✓ **Talk Through Books – Picture Walks**
Talking through the book before reading is a good way to interest children and gives them a feeling of confidence about reading it themselves. First discuss the title of the book and let the children predict what the book may be about. Be sure to include the language that is in the book and focus on the pictures.
- ✓ **Read, Review and Discuss**
Mentors should allow students to read at their own pace. Observe and offer support when needed. Most of your reading time is spent reading, reinforcing good reading strategies that the child displays, and discussing the story. Allow students to share how they figured out a word. The following are a few discussion starters that can be helpful: What do you think will happen next? Is that what you thought would happen? Tell me about your favorite part of the story. If you could be like any character in the story, who would it be? What would happen if...?

Tips For Choosing Children's Books:

- **Look for books that introduce new ideas.**
- **Vary your selections.**
- **Make sure the illustrations and text depict cultures, abilities, genders, and families in a positive way.**
- **Focus on the illustrations. Are they attractive? Colorful? Detailed? Interesting?**
- **Look for nominees and winners of book awards such as Caldecott, Newberry, and Coretta Scott King.**
- **Talk with children about books they have liked in the past. This will help in future selections.**
- **Check the Accelerated Reader book list if your school has this program.**

Strategies During Reading:

Mentor Positive Reinforcement Statements:

- ❖ I like the way you tried to help yourself. You skipped the hard word, read to the end of the sentence and then made a good guess. Good readers do that.
- ❖ Good for you. I saw you checking the picture to see if you were right.
- ❖ Excellent! You figured out that word by yourself.
- ❖ You didn't know that word on the last page, but you knew it on this page. Good thinking!

Hints:

- ❖ One of the most important things you can give a child is TIME!
- ❖ Children who self-correct are displaying good reading because they are reading for meaning.
- ❖ Children who cannot rhyme will have difficulty reading.
- ❖ There are more ways for a child to attack an unknown word besides "What sound does this letter make?"
- ❖ Remember three questions good readers and writers ask themselves. Does it make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right?

Encourage Good Reading Strategies During Reading:

- ❖ Look at the picture. What do you see?
- ❖ Where do we begin reading?
- ❖ Does that make sense?
- ❖ Look at how the word begins.
- ❖ Have you seen that word before?
- ❖ See if it looks like another word you have seen before.
- ❖ Put in a word that you think might make sense and read on.
- ❖ Is that right? Check again. Do the letters match?
- ❖ What can you do to help yourself?

Strategies After Reading:

Mentor Hints:

- **Encourage students to ask their own questions.**
- **Share some of your thoughts and opinions about the story.**
- **Ask questions you think your student will be able to answer. Ask about feelings, beliefs and experiences.**
- **After reading and discussing the story, encourage students to write about the story by asking, “What could you write about the story?” Once sentence is a good start.**
- **Later on, students could be encouraged to write their own book.**
- **Use discussion starters if students need a prompt.**
- **More guided prompts: Tell me what you remember about the story. How did the story begin? Pretend you are telling the story to someone who had never heard/read it before. If students are having difficulty and prompting is not helping, ask specific story questions.**
- **The environment for reading instruction is best when students are enthusiastic about reading and have a “can do” attitude.**
- **When students complete difficult reading tasks with assistance, they experience feelings of success.**
- **Success helps lead to your student’s reading independence and a self-regulated approach to reading.**

Getting Your Grades Together

Study Skills:

- Have a regular time to study.
- Have a special place to study.
- Take pride in doing your work neatly.
- Write down assignments in one place, i.e. a small spiral notebook.
- Ask questions
- Outline and summarize your work.
- Ask your teacher for help, if needed.
- Concentrate on what you don't know.
- Do homework promptly so work doesn't pile up. Don't procrastinate.
- Review briefly before a test.

Test Taking Tips:

- Know when tests are scheduled.
- Get a good night's rest beforehand.
- Be on time and well-equipped for the test.
- Be positive and approach the test with a "can do" attitude.
- Look over the entire test quickly.
- Make sure you know how much time is given and how much questions count.
- Read directions carefully and follow them exactly.
- Notice key words in directions (for example, "less, sometimes, best, all, every, most, few, none, better, worst, seldom, rarely, never").
- Do the easiest first; put a check beside those you can't answer and go back to them later.
- Return to questions that have been checked after finishing the rest.
- Review all questions that have been checked after finishing the rest.

Conversation Starters

Some students are more difficult to talk with than others. Sometimes you may want to direct the conversation of a very talkative child to something more substantive. Pick a few of the following questions to have in mind for those times when you want to get a conversation started:

- ❖ What is the best thing that happened in the last week?
- ❖ How could the past week have been better?
- ❖ What is something you know a lot about?
- ❖ What is the funniest thing you have ever done or seen?
- ❖ What interesting places have you visited?
- ❖ What interesting places would you like to visit?
- ❖ What famous person do you admire and why?
- ❖ What is your favorite class? What makes it your favorite?
- ❖ What class is hardest for you? What makes it hard?
- ❖ What is the thing that you like most about yourself?
- ❖ If you could change something about yourself, what would it be?
- ❖ What thing do you wish others knew about you?
- ❖ If you have any collections, what are they?
- ❖ Tell me about a time when you felt very angry (or happy, sad, etc.)
- ❖ What is your favorite thing to do in your free time?
- ❖ What is your favorite book (movie, TV show, song, etc.)?
- ❖ Tell me about any pets you have had.
- ❖ What do you do when you get angry (or frustrated, nervous, etc.)
- ❖ What has given you the most personal satisfaction or sense of accomplishment?
- ❖ Who is the most important person in your life?
- ❖ What are your thoughts about going to college (or a career, etc.)?

Going over a few of these per session for the first several visits may help mentors in getting to know their students.

Let's Get Acquainted!

My name is _____

My family consists of (names and ages):

When I grow up I want to be: _____

My favorite things to do: _____

My favorite sport: _____

My favorite TV shows: _____

My favorite computer games: _____

My favorite books: _____

My favorite music: _____

Do you play an instrument? _____

My favorite school subject: _____

School subjects I don't understand well: _____

My hobbies: _____

Two wishes I would make: _____

Words For Positive Reinforcement

Wow
Way to go
Super
You're special
Outstanding
Great
I'm proud of you
Well done
I knew you could do it
You should be proud of yourself
Fantastic
You really tried hard
Nice work
You're catching on
Now you've got it
Dynamite
Good job
How smart of you
What a nice job you're doing

I like the way you are trying your best
You figured it out yourself
That is very creative
What a good imagination
All right
I like being around you
That is very responsible
Super job
You really worked hard on that
Outstanding performance
You are important
You mean a lot to me
You make me happy
You are my friend
You brighten my day
Incredible
Looking good
Bravo
Hurrah for you
You're right on target

Remember: A smile is worth 1,000 words