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WYSE TRAINING COMPONENT 4:

Working with Adolescent Girls

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Adolescence and Decision-Making Capacity

Mentor Training Component: 4. Working with Adolescent Girls

Key Theme: As mentors, it is important to acknowledge our own biases when it comes to helping our mentees think through conflicts and make healthy decisions. We are at a different stage in life from our mentees and must acknowledge our adult assumptions while relating to our own experiences during adolescence.

During adolescence, teens generally:

- Want to appear more mature
- Are sensation-seeking
- Perceive behaviors as less dangerous than do adults/parents
- Misperceive risks as being cumulative
- Overestimate their ability to identify/cope with danger
- Allow emotionality to affect their decision-making capacity (adolescents experience strong/fluctuating emotions)
- Are impacted by peer influence (influenced by what they THINK their peers are doing)



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Important Points for Discussion:

Reflect on your own experience in middle school.

How did you identify yourself?

Who were your friends? Your crushes? Boyfriends or girlfriends?

What were your favorite activities?

How was your relationship with your family?

What major changes did you go through during that time?

Refraining from using judgment or “because I said so/because I’m older” logic with mentees

Relating to mentees without faking a shared experience

It is tempting to try to relate directly to your mentee’s life when they are going through a hard time, especially when you are first trying to establish a connection with them. However, you should never pretend or claim to have gone through an experience unless you have actually gone through it yourself. It is okay to admit you have never experienced a certain hardship or incident – you can still be a great resource to your mentee!

What are some ways you can relate to your mentee’s life experiences without always relying on the “me too” approach?



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“SOY”: THE WYSE MENTOR’S BEST FRIEND

Mentor Training Component: 4. Working with Adolescent Girls

“

Some people do it.

Others don’t.

You decide what is right for you.

”

When a mentee asks for a mentor’s experience, sometimes they are looking for validation in what decision they should make. The best strategy is to encourage mentees to evaluate what their own decision, especially in circumstances when the mentor is uncomfortable sharing their own experience.

Sample Debrief Questions:

- What part does SOY play in ensuring that mentors stay a supportive figure in mentees lives, rather than an authoritative one?
- What sort of questions can be answered by utilizing SOY? (Drug use, alcohol use, sexual experience, questions on politics, sexuality, & the list goes on)

TAKEAWAYS:

- Mentors must understand how and in what situations they should utilize SOY, the most important being as a useful alternative to telling mentees what to do and who to be.
- They must also understand that in no circumstance should they ever force an opinion on mentees, and SOY is a great way to avoid accidentally doing so.



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EIGHT UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS

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Knowing how to approach these “universal” questions can be helpful when confronted with tricky questions from your mentee. Though real-life questions may not be (and often are not) the same as the examples here, the basic structure, meaning, and approach to finding an answer can be very similar.

1. “What is true?”

These questions have one right answer. Try to keep the answer short, sweet, and to the point. If the mentee asks more related questions, continue to answer and always answer truthfully.

Examples: “What is an STD?” “What is a condom?” “Can you get pregnant every time you have sex?”

2. “What is right?”

This is a values question, so there is not just one right answer. Be open-minded and have a discussion with her about different values without pushing your own values onto her. You may choose to not tell her your opinions, since this might encourage her to think the same way or discourage her from expressing her own thoughts. Encourage her to consider all of the possible positive and negative aspects of the issue. **Use the “SOY” method when communicating with your mentee. (“Some people do this, other people do that, you decide what is right for you.”)**

Examples: “What do you think is the right age for sex?” “Can gay people go to heaven?” “Is it okay for people to live together before they are married?”



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3. “Can you please help me figure this out?”

This is a subset of “What is true” questions, but with some confusion or misinformation. Fill in the missing information or correct false information.

Examples: “How does the boy’s penis get in the girl’s hole if the hole is so small?”
 “How does a woman have an orgasm?” “How can a girl get pregnant if she’s a virgin?”

4. “How do people do that?”

This is usually about sexual behaviors. Identify slang terms and teach the proper terms. Explain answers using these terms and continue to clarify slang or misconceptions.

Examples: “What do you do when you give a guy a blow job?” “What happens when a guy ‘gets off’?” “What is the difference between making out and kissing?”

5. “Am I normal?”

These questions often sound like “What is true” questions, but a trained ear or someone listening carefully can sense the need for validation. Always be assuring and calm any concerns.

Examples: “Do you think many girls masturbate?” “Is it weird that I haven’t gotten my period yet?” “If someone thinks another girl is cute, does that mean she’s a lesbian?”



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6. “Can I trust you? Can I get to you? Will you set and stick to boundaries?”

These questions are usually asked rather explicitly, perhaps slyly, with giggles, or in a surly tone. You can tell this type of question by how you feel – like you are backed in a corner or put on the spot. These questions are not really about sexuality or a need for information, but are rather about the relationship between you and her. Sometimes these questions are asked out of pure curiosity, but it is good to set limits and answer these questions in a way that takes the focus off of you.

Examples: “How old were you when you first had sex?” “Have you ever smoked weed?” “How many people have you had sex with?”

7. “Could this hurt me?”

Present a balance, giving her all of the appropriate information. Fear tactics can easily backfire and they also give mentees the wrong idea about what WYSE’s purpose and goals are. Be reassuring, truthful, and stay positive.

Examples: “Does an abortion hurt?” “Is it safe to swallow sperm?” “Are condoms really safe?”

8. “What should I do?”

Young women often find themselves in challenging situations and may turn to trusted mentors for advice. Resist the temptation to give advice and instead help guide her to a healthy solution. Help her see all of her options and their consequences in an unbiased manner, and facilitate a healthy, but independent, problem- solving process.

Examples: “What should I do if my boyfriend asks me to have sex with him?” “My friend thinks she is pregnant, what should she do?” “I think my brother is doing a lot of drugs...should I do something?”

Source: Hoffman, Deborah. Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent’s Guide to Talking Sense about Sex. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001.



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ACTIVITY: Middle School Mentality

Mentor Training Component: 4. Working with Adolescent Girls

Objectives:

To get mentors to reflect on their experiences as middle school aged girls
 Help mentors understand how they should treat their mentees by thinking about how they would've liked to be treated by a mentor when they were in middle school

Directions:

- Put mentors into small groups and think about/discuss what they were like in middle school, the community they had then, how they changed, their significant characteristics during that age, and things that bothered them or made them happy, including and especially how others would treat them at that age.
- After a 10-15-minute small group discussion, come together as a big group and have each group share common themes from their middle school experience.
- ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY: give mentors sheets of paper, and have them draw themselves in middle school, as well as things that were important to them at that time. Share the drawings as a group, and discuss common themes of the drawings, concerning the priorities of middle school girls.

TAKEAWAYS:

- By reflecting on and discussing their experiences as middle school girls, mentors should be able to understand how they would've liked to have been treated by a mentor – respectfully, honestly, and most importantly, without judgment.
- The importance of the concept, “Some do, others don’t, you decide” must be covered thoroughly, especially in reference to the importance of allowing adolescents to become their own person without imposing beliefs or opinions on them.
- Ensure that the concepts referenced in “Important Points for Discussion” are covered and elaborated on.
 - Importance of not relating to mentees through faking an experience
 - Utilizing SOY, and never forcing opinions on mentees
 - Never using condescending tactics, including “I told you so” logic, with mentees.



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ACTIVITY: Mentorship Role Play

Mentor Training Component: 4. Working with Adolescent Girls

Overview: Role playing mentorship scenarios is a great exercise to provide mentors with WYSE-specific dilemmas which require them to draw upon their problem solving skills, explore various options for handling difficult situations, and further develop the necessary leadership traits of a successful WYSE mentor.

Directions: Divide into small groups (2-3 people in each). Each group will be assigned one (or more, if time permits) of the scenario prompts below. The group must work together to figure out how to best solve the problem at hand (8-10 mins). Then each group must act out their scene for the others, reading aloud their scenario prompt first. After each group acts out their solution, the activity facilitator should debrief with the entire group by asking the following questions:

- What was most difficult about that situation?
- Why did you choose to handle the situation in that way?
- What traits of leadership did you rely on to make your decisions?
- Are there any other options you considered?
- What outside resources did you consider using (e.g. school counselor, WYSE Board, parent, etc.)?

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS:

1. You have had your mentee for a few weeks now and one day she comes to session acting kind of strange. Later she tells you that she thinks she might be pregnant. How do you respond to this situation?
2. Last semester your mentee really enjoyed weekly sessions and the topics that WYSE was talking about. This semester, sessions revolve heavily around sex, birth control, violence against women, etc. and you've noticed that she seems really uncomfortable while at session. When you try to get her to speak up, she is too shy to participate. How do you handle this situation?
3. During the session about violence against women, your mentee – who is usually very talkative/upbeat and participates in session – seems very uncomfortable and quiet. After session you two are chatting and she seems like she wants to tell



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you something but ends up leaving without doing so. You are concerned about her but don't want to invade her privacy. How do you handle the situation?

4. You have a pretty good relationship with your mentee. She regularly confides in you and trusts you to keep her secrets. One day you get a call from your mentee's mom. She asks you about her daughter's relationship with her boyfriend (i.e. if she has had sex with him yet, etc.). You know from your mentee that she fights with her mom a lot about her boyfriend and that her mom doesn't trust her. How do you handle this situation?
5. You have a good relationship with your mentee and she trusts your advice. One day she tells you she is thinking of having sex with her boyfriend for the first time. She asks you about your sexual experiences but you're not sure if it's appropriate to share those details with her. How do you handle this situation?
6. It's your turn to facilitate the weekly session and you're super excited because you love the subject! However, when you begin the activities, the mentees seem uninterested, bored and distracted. Several of them are on their phones. The mentors tried to engage their mentees at the start but even they are beginning to give up. Energy is really low and there are still 2 activities left to do. How do you handle this situation and get the mentees engaged?
7. It's your week to lead session and you're really excited! During session everyone seems pretty interested in the topic and activities but there is one **mentor** who keeps having side conversations, texting on their phone and generally not paying attention. You are afraid that they are distracting mentees and other mentors from the session. How do you handle this situation?
8. You are planning next week's session with 2 other mentors. When you read through the WYSE curriculum you notice that some of the suggested activities for that unit are ones you have tried in the past and which did not go over well with the mentees. You want to make sure session is fun and engaging but do not want to repeat activities over again. What do you do?

NEXT STEPS: Encourage the mentors to continue discussing any larger issues that arise during this activity. Brainstorm a group list of the best ways that the situations were handled.