Mentor Handbook



*Refugee Resettlement*



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What is a Mentor?

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines mentor as a “person looked upon for wise advice and guidance.” A mentor encourages the mentee to become actively involved in self-discovery and improvement. Over a period of time, a mentor stimulates and supports growth in character and competence. Respect and commitment characterize the relationship.



At one time or another, a mentor may take on many roles, including those of:

Friend Motivator Companion

Guide Advisor Role Model Listener Encourager Nurturer Trusted Confidant

Sounding Board Advocate Skill Builder

Cheerleader Instructor Coach

Tutor Career Advisor

Though a mentor may be a role model, he/she does not ask the mentee to “be like him/her”. Instead, he/she helps the mentee become the person he or she chooses to be, encouraging them to grow and mature, providing support, guidance and a positive perspective on life.

Basic Tasks of Mentors

Effective mentors are sensitive to the individual needs of their mentee and shape the mentoring relationship in response to those needs. Although every mentoring relationship is unique, mentors have four basic tasks:

*Establish an open, friendly, trusting relationship with the mentee.* The primary task of a mentor is to develop a positive relationship with the mentee. Some mentors may spend the greater part of their time together focused on building rapport. It is no small accomplishment to gain the trust and confidence of an adult, child, or young person.

*Help the mentee develop life skills.* These skills vary depending on the age and education level of the mentee. For a child, helping him/her understand good grooming (teeth brushed, hair combed, etc.) would be appropriate – if these are problem areas. Mentors can role-play with mentees to teach them how to shake hands, conduct introductions or demonstrate other social skills.

Some of the life skills may address academics. Tutoring and/or helping the student to organize their work or learn to study more effectively may be appropriate. Other life skills such as how to work through problems or set goals will always be useful to a mentee.

*Provide the mentee with new possibilities.* Mentors help mentees enlarge their vision of the world. The mentor’s knowledge, experience and guidance can be the keys to helping the mentees unlock the door to new possibilities. Mentors may model a different set of rules, values or ways of working or living than the mentee had been exposed to. Mentors can expand the mentees’ understanding of the United States and acquaint them with the opportunities it holds for them.

*Increase the mentee’s ability to interact and communicate.* Mentors model the American communication process. Through this relationship, mentees will learn to express themselves more clearly. This will help them in school, on the job, and in the community.

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# Volunteer Job Description

## Job Title: **Family Mentor**

Purpose: ♦ Provide friendship and cultural orientation to a refugee or immigrant family.

♦ Assist family in achieving self-sufficiency.

Qualifications: ♦ An interest in helping refugees/immigrants, commitment, ability to relate to people from different cultural backgrounds, patience, and sensitivity.

Time Commitment: ♦ Visit at least once a week for 4-6 months.

♦ Minimum 4 month time commitment.

Responsibilities: ♦ Work together with resettlement staff to help family understand and achieve self-sufficiency. If problems arise, consult with staff to avoid duplication of effort or misunderstandings.

♦ Adhere to confidentiality agreement

♦ Notify family in advance if you need to reschedule a meeting time.

**♦** Submit monthly volunteer service report to Staff Supervisor

Training: ♦ Two-hour Orientation and Training

Supervisor: AmeriCorps Vista Volunteer Sharon Singer will assign you to work directly with a refugee family and the agency that resettled them.

**What is expected of mentors?**

Promptness Dependability Enthusiasm

Flexibility Patience Tact

Businesslike Manner Imagination Creativity

### Loyalty Sense of Humor Initiative

Confidentiality Respect

Cross-Cultural Sensitivity

* Use discretion and maintain confidence in matters relating to mentees.
* Willingness to help, ask for directions, and try a variety of approaches and techniques.
* Pleasant and friendly with a warm, positive attitude.
* Notify supervisor of any schedule changes or any concerns.

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**Tips for Mentors**

1. Be warm and friendly. Learn the family’s name and show interest in what they are doing and telling you. You are very important as a listener.
2. When working with children, encourage them to do their own thinking. Give them plenty of time to answer; silence often means they are thinking and organizing what they want to say or write.
3. If you do not know an answer or are unsure what to do, admit it and work it out together. Feel free to ask for help when you need it.
4. Use tact and positive comments. Encourage. Seek something worthy of a compliment, especially when the family is having difficulties.
5. Accept each individual as they are. You are not there to judge abilities, progress or behaviors.
6. If a family member is upset, encourage him/her to talk the problem over with you. You don’t need to solve the problem, but by listening and talking, you help the family feel you care.
7. Respect the family’s privacy. If the family reveals personal information, regard it as a confidence. Respect confidentiality.
8. Maintain a sense of humor.
9. If friends or family ask you about your mentoring, tell them you enjoy working with refugees, and discuss *activities* you do, rather than sharing specific information about the family.
10. Keep your commitment. The family will expect you and look forward to seeing you. If you are unable to come on a certain day, tell the family in advance. Keep all promises, and make none that you cannot keep.

*(The National Associations of Partners in Education published these hints.)*

##### Cultural Diversity

Some points to remember about cross-cultural relationships:

1. What seems to be logical, sensible, important and reasonable to a person in one culture may seem stupid, irrational, and unimportant to an outsider.
2. Firsthand experience is necessary to understand many subtleties of any culture.
3. Feelings of apprehension, loneliness, or lack of confidence are common when experiencing another culture.
4. Differences between cultures are often experienced as threatening.
5. In describing another culture, people tend to stress the differences and overlook the similarities.
6. Stereotyping due to generalizing may be inevitable among those who lack frequent contact with another culture.
7. Personal observations of others about another culture should be regarded with skepticism.
8. Many cultures often exist within a single race, language group, religion, or nationality, differentiated by age, gender, socio-economic status, education, and exposure to other cultures.
9. All cultures have internal variations.
10. Cultural awareness varies among individuals.
11. One’s own sense of cultural identity often is not evident until one encounters another culture.
12. Cultures are continually evolving.
13. Understanding another culture is a continuous process.

“The message mentors provide is twofold: you’re worth my time and effort because you are a valuable human being. And I can offer you – by my work and deed or by the example of my life – ways to expand your horizons and to increase the likelihood that you will achieve success.”

**(from One on One: A Guide for Establishing Mentoring Programs, U.S. Department of Education)**

**Working with Refugee Children**

Uncertainty about how to work with a refugee child is common and can be easily remedied. There are many resources (books, news articles, etc.) available that can help explain past experiences and behavior, as well as answer questions.

The refugee child’s culture and religion are deeply engrained. Keeping in mind the spiritual essence of the student and his/her beliefs can greatly aid in avoiding complicated misunderstandings.

The new refugee student has not been in the U.S. very long – perhaps only a few weeks. Although he/she has had some cultural orientation to American life, it was quick and much has been forgotten. Correct the student when he/she behaves inappropriately, but keep in mind that he/she has many new rules to remember and a life time of engrained behaviors, culturally based or not.

The same laws that protect American children also protect refugee children. If you suspect abuse and/or neglect please report this to ReEstablish Richmond.

Commonwealth Catholic Charities, CCC, Refugee Resettlement provides School Liaison services to help students with adjustment to a new school system. CCC also provides interpreters for parents at the schools. All students receive English as a Second Language instruction at their local school.

Be honest with the refugee child if you are confused about their behavior and/or attitude. The student may have lived through war or lived in a refugee camp and had to go through many hardships, but he/she knows you have not gone through the same experiences. As long as you are sincere in your relationship, the child will learn to trust you.

Although many refugee children have lived through the same experiences of war, persecution, and trauma, they cannot be compartmentalized. Each child is unique and brings his/her own language, culture, heritage, and beliefs to their new country. As with all children, they will act and react based on their own experiences and abilities.

**A Year’s Worth of Mentoring Activities**

**52 Ideas, One for Each Week of the Year**

1. Set your mentoring goals together.

2. Tackle some homework.

3. Make dinner together.

4. Go out for dinner together.

5. Make popcorn and talk.

6. Go to a movie.

7. Go to a concert.

8. Shoot some hoops.

9. Go to the library together.

10. Just hang out.

11. Figure out how to program your VCR.

12. Learn about pop music.

13. Talk about life.

14. Give a tour of your current job.

15. Talk about your very first job.

16. Talk about planning a career.

17. Plan a career.

18. Get together with friends from work.

19. Take tours of friends' jobs.

20. Visit a local technical school.

21. Visit a community college.

22. Talk about college.

23. Have your friends talk about college.

24. Sit in on some evening classes.

25. Work on applications together.

26. Explore financial aid options.

27. Work on a resume.

28. Talk about dressing for success.

29. Do a pretend job interview.

30. Talk about how to look for a job.

31. Talk about where to find a job.

32. Find a summer job.

33. Set up a work internship.

34. Talk about networking.

35. Talk about what it takes to get ahead.

36. Talk about health insurance.

37. Talk about taxes.

38. Talk about balancing work and life.

39. Talk about balancing a checkbook.

40. Talk about balancing a budget.

41. Talk about living within one's means.

42. Talk about credit cards.

43. Go bargain hunting.

44. Plan a week's worth of meals.

45. Do a week's grocery shopping together.

46. Go holiday shopping.

47. Write "thank you" notes.

48. Go to a house of worship.

49. Celebrate a friend's religious holiday.

50. Talk about relationships.

51. Talk about personal values.

52. Talk about the future.

###### **Refugee Resettlement Basics**

Refugees are victims of persecution who cannot return to their country of origin. These uprooted families come from all parts of the world. Some are fleeing from recent violence, some have been in camps for many years. A number lived in cities, others in the country. They are a mix of highly educated individuals and adults who have had no formal schooling. Regardless of their prior experience, all are dealing with loss and great uncertainty.

Most refugees come to the US with no resources and many do not speak English. The majority fled their homes with little more than the clothes on their backs. They come to Richmond under the auspices of three local resettlement agencies\* that have contracts with the U.S. Department of State to provide initial housing, orientation, and assistance with health screening and accessing public benefits. The majority of services are provided by these agencies to refugees during their first three months in the U.S.; assistance then tapers off as staff and resources are limited. Few refugees receive services after four months.

The bulk of funds provided for initial resettlement of refugees are used to pay for initial housing. Depending on family size and area housing costs, these federal dollars may subsidize rent for 3 or 4 months. The resettlement agency assists with job placement but entry level employment often provides only a subsistence wage. Families need to learn how to cover costs at the poverty level and gain the skills necessary to advance to better employment. Through their friendship, a mentor can guide the newcomer in understanding his or her environment thus improving their self sufficiency. Comfortable interaction with an American is invaluable to improving English fluency.

ReEstablish Richmond works with the three resettlement agencies to assist these new arrivals with transportation and supportive services. Volunteers are matched with refugees at various stages of their resettlement. If the match is made with a new arrival, it will be necessary to have frequent contact with the caseworker of the resettlement agency to ensure coordination of effort. If the match is made with a family who has been in the country for several months, there will likely be little contact with that agency. ReEstablish Richmond will provide guidance on the organization that is working with the family you are assigned.

\*The Richmond area refugee resettlement agencies are:

**Commonwealth Catholic Charities,** CCC: 804-285-5900; <http://cccofva.org/services/resettlement-services/refugee-resettlement/>

**Church World Service,** CWS : 804-658-5279; the office director is John Bauman [jbaumann@cwsglobal.org](mailto:jbaumann@cwsglobal.org).

**International Rescue Committee**, the IRC: 804-308-9144 <https://www.rescue.org/united-states/richmond-va>

###### **refugee at airport w sponsors.jpeg**

###### **OTHER RESOURCES**

* **ReEstablish Richmond**

[www.reestablishrichmond.org](http://www.reestablishrichmond.org)

* **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:** [**http://www.unhcr.org**](http://www.unhcr.org)
* **The National Mentoring Partnership:** [**http://www.mentoring.org**](http://www.mentoring.org)
* **VCU Division of Community Engagement:** [**http://www.vcu.edu/ocp/ocpdocs/mentor.html**](http://www.vcu.edu/ocp/ocpdocs/mentor.html)
* **Dept of State Refugee Processing**

<http://www.wrapsnet.org/#intro>

* **Refugee background information**

<http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders>