Placement Guidelines / Best Practices

Keeping Your Commitments:

- Remember that you are a guest in the community/agency.
- Make a commitment:
- Don’t make a commitment you cannot keep.
- Show up; people are depending on you.
- If you are expected to be somewhere, be there on time—every time.
- Make your placement a priority by organizing your life and responsibilities so that you show up when expected.
  - If you were up late the night before because you were studying, our expectation is that you will still go to your placement.
  - The clients/mentees/tutees you are working with deal with many disappointments in their daily lives. You need to show them respect and extend your support by showing up.
- You should also give advance notice, if possible, if you will not be coming in at your regularly scheduled time
- If you are sick and can’t go to your placement, you need to get in touch with your supervisor to provide as much advance notice as possible.

Be Communicative:

- Your placement has a beginning, middle and end. It is very important to be clear with the client/mentee/tutee when you will be there for your volunteering and when you will finish your placement. In the field of social work, this is called "termination"; termination starts at the beginning of the placement by being clear about your role.
- Periodically during the placement you should remind the client/mentee/tutee when the placement will end; this helps frame and normalize the relationship. Do not wait until the last week to tell the client that you are not going to be working with them any longer.
  - If you have trouble with terminating relationships, practice what you are going to say beforehand and make sure you follow through.
  - Say, for example, "I have enjoyed working with you. You have made good progress in..." “I wanted to let you know that I will be working with you for four more weeks." Be specific in your recognition of their progress.
- Keep the focus on your work and commitment to them, not on details of your upcoming vacation or other aspects of your life.
- Realize that termination or breaks in the placement may bring up issues for the client. Listen and help them to express and process their feelings. A client/mentee/tutee's response may vary widely—from indifference to anger. Each of these responses has meaning behind it. These responses are not about you as much as they are about other relationships and disappointments in their lives.
Scope and Boundaries of Placement:

- Contact outside of the placement is not okay. Keeping terms clear shows respect for the person you are working with and models good, transparent practices and communication.
- You are a role model. You need to be friendly and supportive but also keep in mind that you are not friends with your client/mentee/tutee.
- You have a specific role and it is very important that you follow the particular parameters of your responsibility; your contact with the people you are working with is limited to the hours, times and scope of the placement.
  - For example, you should not continue to meet with a tutor/mentee after the placement is finished, in different settings or at an unsupervised location nor should you give them the expectation that you will stay in touch with them after the placement is completed.
  - Some mentoring relationships have contact outside the primary meeting built into the structure, but most client/mentee/tutee programs do not. Do not be in contact through e-mail, phone calls, Facebook, etc. unless you have specific permission from the agency.
- Because there may be economic disparity between you and your client and because it is essential to keep the focus on your client/mentee/tutee, you should not exchange gifts with him or her at the end of the placement. You can write the client a card about their progress and efforts.

Be Supportive:

- Be specific in your praise. Avoid the non-descript “good job.”
  Instead, state what you noticed and energize their success. For example:
    - “Your letters look very clear. I can now see the difference between this i and this l in your sentence.”
    - “I noticed you sharing your toy with (x); that was very generous of you.”
    - “You did wonderfully reading that story. You enunciated your words clearly.”
- You can provide proactive recognition to support healthy choices and rules being adhered to, such as:
  - "I heard your friend yelling at you. You could have yelled back but instead you remained calm. You gave your friend time to calm down and then discussed why she was upset. It takes emotional maturity to do what you did."
  - “I am noticing how safe you are being with the scissors today.”
  - “That sounds like a very healthy choice you just made for yourself.”
- Re-direct negative behavior in a positive direction. For example:
  - “I appreciate how you are collecting yourself to focus on the work at hand.”
  - “(X), I need for students to concentrate right now, so please focus on your work. You can have your conversation after class.”
  - (Children running down the stairs) “Wait. You are all going so fast. Let’s go more slowly and count how many stairs there are.” (You can turn this into a math game.) If we walk up and down these stairs 4 times today, how many steps have taken?"
- In client/mentee/tutee relationships, the primary goal is to meet the academic needs of the tutee. However, lives are complex and things will come up that don't directly have to do with learning math or English.
You and the client/mentee/tuttee may come from different or similar circumstances, cultures and types of communities. Remember to put your preconceived judgments aside about their culture, community, or reasons why they need tutoring support. Look for strength in their ability to persevere under challenging circumstances.

When your client/mentee/tuttee brings up something that is challenging for them in their family or school, listen carefully.

Do not try to make their situation better by attempting to "balm" their feelings or make things right. The issues and complexities they grapple with on a daily basis are challenging and you are only working with them for a short period of time.

Be an attentive listener. Sometimes people just need to tell someone how they are feeling or talk about how they are experiencing a difficult situation. If you show you are listening and engaged, they will feel affirmed.

- Keep the focus on them and their expressions. Rather than telling them about a similar experience you may have had and how you managed it, demonstrate that you are "following what they are saying" or encouraging them to come up with responses to their situation.

Be open, attentive, and curious about what they share with you or bring up in a tutoring session.

- Ask, "How come?" not, "Why?"
- Ask, "How so...?" or "What was that like?" instead of, "How did that make you feel?" or "What do you think?"
- Ask, "What do you want to do about that?" or, "Is there someone at school or home you could talk to about this?"
- Use phrases such as "Can you give words to that...", "What do you imagine....?", or "Can you say more about that...?"
- Repeat their phrasing to show that you are listening. For example, "So you are upset because your Dad doesn't visit you...?" Let them finish the sentence and take it where they want to go.

At times when you reach an impasse in tutoring or during a difficult conversation, it is ok to sit with the silence to let them take the lead.

If they bring up concerns about abuse or neglect, their personal safety, depression, bullying or other at-risk behaviors or significant problems, you want to let the on-site supervisor and someone within the CSO know about the situation that day – do not leave the site without talking with the on-site supervisor who will inform you of any next steps.