

Mentoring the "Safe Sanctuaries" Way

Congregational mentoring programs are designed to nurture a spiritual friendship - one youth to one adult. How does the mentoring relationship fit with some of the procedures that Safe Sanctuaries suggest? The "rule" that two adults be present at every event where there is youth or children's ministry may frustrate mentors as they plan times with their mentee. Also in question may be conversations / counseling within the mentor / mentee relationship conducted in isolation. At first glance, it may seem that the mentoring ministry of a congregation is not appropriate, because often the mentor pair is alone. yet we would all agree that healthy intimacy, spiritual conversations and trust is a big part of youth ministry and about nurturing faith between youth and adults.

Here are some ideas that will reduce the risk of both accusations and abuse:

- 1. Host Mentor / Mentee gatherings in groups.** All mentor pairs are invited to a time at the church or some other public setting where they will engage together in group activities. While there, they could break into pairs and discuss, pray, etc.
- 2. Keep parents in the loop when you are with your mentee.** Make sure the parents are informed about pick up and drop off time, where you will be going and how you will get there. If you are running late on the way home - you or the youth should phone. *Don't go by the phrase "better to ask forgiveness than permission" with regards to informing parents.*
- 3. Be at "public places" with your mentee.** Avoid places where you are isolated. Overnights with just the two of you are off limits. Public places would be concerts, sporting events; shopping, parks in daylight.
- 4. If your mentee comes to your home, another adult should be present** - a spouse, friend. Keep your conversations and activities in full view of other family members, do not sequester yourself in a family room and close the door.
- 5. Mentors, just like youth pastors and youth sponsors should undergo training on appropriate language, boundaries and touch issues.** Those educated on these issues understand the risk factors and will make better decisions about what is appropriate.
- 6. Consider your own motivation for being a mentor.** Make sure you have their best interests in mind and design your time together for healthy interaction.

Remember, Safe Sanctuaries is not trying to sabotage or shut down any effective ministry. The goal is to keep relationships healthy; encourage appropriate boundary management; protect church workers from accusations; protect the children and youth from possible misconduct and abuse and after all – it's common sense! ☺

Marlene Bogard,
Minister of Christian Nurture
Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA