When you join a mentoring program — and before you are matched with a young person — you will receive intensive training aimed at helping you understand and prepare for your role and responsibilities. Then, throughout your mentoring relationship, you’ll receive ongoing training and support. That training and support should address the majority of your concerns. If it doesn’t, don’t hesitate to ask questions! On this page, we’ve listed a few common concerns you may have. We understand that committing to mentor a youth comes with a lot of responsibility and may feel like brand new territory. You may worry that you won’t know how to do this. Try thinking about your background; you may have already been a mentor in informal situations. Maybe you helped a niece or nephew with schoolwork or listened to a youngster who thought nobody cared. In each instance, you were acting as a mentor. By joining a mentoring program, you are simply formalizing your commitment to help guide a young person. At the same time, you get the benefit of comprehensive training and ongoing support.

WHAT IF WE DON’T HIT IT OFF RIGHT AWAY?

It’s not easy to trust a stranger, especially if you’re a young person who’s had a lot of bad experiences with adults in the past. It may take a while to build trust. Don’t interpret caution as rejection. A young person may not show it — in fact, he or she may not even know it fully — but your help is definitely wanted.

WHAT IF SOMETHING EXTREMELY SERIOUS COMES UP?

While most mentoring relationships develop and flourish without serious problems, things do happen. Mentors have an important role, but that role does not include family counseling or medical or psychological treatment. There are support systems in place for real emergencies. Contact your mentoring program coordinator for information. The most a mentor is expected to do — and should do — is to help guide a young person to the appropriate source of professional help.

WHAT IF WE DON’T HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON?

Many first-time mentors worry that differences in age, race, religion, education or gender will be insurmountable barriers. Actually, most experienced mentors report that mentoring a young person from a different background broadened their own horizons and deepened their understanding of other people and cultures.

WHAT IF I CAN’T MENTOR ANYMORE?

This is a very serious concern. Mentoring is a deep commitment. There are times, however, when uncontrollable things happen — perhaps a job relocation or sickness — and you simply must withdraw from your mentoring relationship. If that happens, you need to talk with your program coordinator and discuss the best way to end the relationship. Except for such unavoidable circumstances, it’s best to stay in a mentoring relationship. You could do far more harm than good if you enter a young person’s life, build trust and then abandon the relationship. Be honest with yourself when committing to be a mentor. If you aren’t sure about in-depth mentoring, try one of the many shorter-term alternatives, such as tutoring or one-time projects.