



Being a Mentor

What is a Mentor?

A mentor is a caring person who is willing to share cultural information and to help guide a family through their initial adjustment into a new life in the United States. A mentor acts as a friend, teacher, and advocate who meets with the newcomers for social interaction, English language learning, and cultural sharing.

The refugees you assist are sponsored by the agency. While sponsors primarily provide for basic needs and help refugees toward self-sufficiency, mentors offer friendship and encouragement during the difficult transition to life in a new country.

What do Mentors do?

Mentors do a variety of activities to help a refugee family adjust to life in the United States. Much of what a mentor does depends on the interests and talents of the mentor and the needs and the interests of the mentees.

Something a mentor might do...

- Take the children out to play
- Help the family with housework
- Call a school social worker to help with a problem
- Invite the family over for a picnic
- Give adults advice for their job hunting and interviews
- Sign children up for summer recreation programs (considering the family's budget)
- Teach the family how to make minor household repairs
- Share cooking lessons and recipes from each other's countries
- Take them to a thrift store
- Answer questions about utility bills or junk mail
- Show them how to childproof their home and identify safety hazards

Mentor Responsibilities

As a mentor, we ask that you:

Be a friend.

Develop a friendship with the mentees and acquaint them with their new community. This would involve visiting each other's homes; having a picnic in the park; going to a zoo, ball game, or concert; touring a library or local museum; going out for pizza; or watching a movie together.

Be a teacher.

Assist with English language learning while discussing survival topics. Your training manual provides information on housing, employment, transportation, education and more. Your discussions will help your mentees improve their English and learn about life in America. You will find that you are an expert on many things and will also learn about their home country and culture!

Be an advocate.

Help your mentees with specific problems they report to you that might require some advocacy or knowledge of "the system." If they are having trouble with an unreasonable neighbor or in understanding a bill, you might be able to help them solve the problem. Sometimes a quick phone call provides the solution. Larger issues may involve referring them to the caseworker or other local agencies.