

## Mentor Handbook

- STUDENT:** A child enrolled in the program between kindergarten and Grade 4 who is willing to work to his or her maximum academic potential in a non-public school in order to eventually complete high school.
- PARENT:** The mother of the above child, with a history of incarceration and/or substance abuse, who is eager to brighten her child's future by placing her child in a non-public school.
- SPONSOR:** An adult interested in the student's academic performance who pays the Student's annual tuition to a non-public school. This sponsor may also (but not necessarily) choose to become the student's mentor.
- MENTOR:** An adult interested in the student's academic performance who agrees to contribute to a child's education through the gift of time and attention. The mentor agrees to establish a relationship with the student and to be in contact with the student at least once a month through the year.

## Star Kids Mission

The mission of the Star Kids Scholarship Program is to provide educational opportunities in the form of tuition aid to effective non-public schools for high risk, low-income children of women who have a history of incarceration and/or substance abuse.

### **Mentor's Responsibilities**

- The Mentor will sign the Mentor Agreement Form.
- The mentor will complete the BCI Check.
- Each relationship between mentor and student is unique. The amount of contact will vary with each pair. Mentors are encouraged to see their students as frequently as possible as long as they are consistent. Star Kids requests that mentors communicate with the student at least once a month throughout the year.

### **Student/ Parent Responsibilities to the Mentor**

- The parent will make sure the student meets with mentor at the agreed upon time and place and will return telephone calls. If the phone number changes, the parent will call the mentor with the new number.
- If the student can not make an appointment, the parent will contact the mentor before, not after the agreed meeting to let them know that the student cannot be there.
- The parent and/or student should not ask the mentor for money, food or services.

## **Mentor's Guidelines for Dealing with Star Kids Students and Parents**

*The following guidelines were created to protect both the student and the mentor and to aid in making your relationship with your student as successful as possible. You are part of a network of people who want to help the student succeed and cooperation between each branch is necessary for that success. As a mentor, it is important to recognize any effects your actions or words might have on a student. The students need support and encouragement to help them achieve their potential. Make this your primary goal when interacting with our students and their parents.*

### **Get to know your student's parent or guardian.**

It is a good idea to meet your student's parents and develop a rapport with them. Occasionally parents may feel uncomfortable with a stranger's unsolicited interest in their child. Demonstrate to the parent/guardian that your main concern is the student's academic performance and that you will not be an interfering or imposing figure in their home life. Also, keep in mind that parents/guardians, although thankful for the opportunity to have their child in a good school, may feel embarrassed about how the child qualified and also that they can not provide the money for the school themselves. The less said about it, outside of assuring them that the tuition will be paid, the better.

### **Keep the parents informed of any plans that involve your student.**

When you plan outings with your student, make sure that the parents know about it and know when to expect the student home. Not only is this courteous, but also it also insures against the possibility of the student "hanging out" with friends while claiming to spend time with you. When out with your student if you see that you will be running later than the arranged time, call home and let someone know. Also, make sure that there will be an adult home to receive the student once you bring him/her back.

### **Remember that you have plenty of time to get to know and spend time with your student.**

Do not attempt to become your student's confidant or buddy right away. Do not assume that your student will feel closer to you if you let him know everything about your life. Demonstrate appropriate boundaries, which at times have never been modeled to students by adults in their life. Being overly friendly or inquisitive may unnerve a student and make them pull away. We suggest you start slowly and keep contact with your student consistently. Be honest in your assessment of how often you will be able to see your student over time and do not see them more frequently at the beginning. You do not want your student to feel that you are pulling away after a few months because students will generally think they did something wrong and will feel bad about themselves. There will always be time to increase your time commitment.

### **Avoid asking questions that are too personal, particularly about a student's family situation.**

If a student is living with just one parent or with neither biological parent it is natural to be curious about the whereabouts of the family members not in the home. However, student's family histories are quite personal and may be painful for them to talk about. Let the student decide when to reveal these things to you. If he/she does reveal issues to you, don't react with "shock". This will make the student feel badly. Instead, be supportive and understanding. Never be judgmental and avoid probing too much if the student is being cautious.

### **The information that your student reveals to you should always be kept confidential.**

You should not share any personal information about your student or his or her family with friends, co-workers or your family. However, if the child reports any child abuse or neglect or thoughts to harm self or others you are obligated to contact the Star Kids office as soon as possible.

### **Be sensitive and appropriate about what you do with your student.**

If you want to invite the student to your home, let some time pass before doing so. The differences between your lifestyle and theirs may embarrass students and make them feel uncomfortable. Recognizing when your student is ready to absorb the differences in your lifestyles is hard to judge. We caution you to take it slowly. You may want to wait until the end of the first year to invite the student to your home. Don't assume that everyone lives the way you do and does things the way you and your family do things.

### **Be sensitive about where you take your student.**

It is not necessary to take a student to lavish restaurants or into expensive stores. Keep outings modest. If you wish to treat your student to outings, be discriminate about the places to which you take them. Do not try to impress the student with the "Good Life" you may lead. Your example as a responsible, productive member of your community who is interested in giving time and or money to help a student get a good education should be motivation enough for your student to want to achieve.

**Please do not buy your student expensive gifts.**

It is nice to remember your student on his or her birthday or at holiday time with a gift. Please be thoughtful of their families and of other students in the program when selecting a gift. Books, tapes, tickets to events, alarm clocks, dictionaries, school supplies, art supplies and calculators are examples of some reasonable gifts.

**Plan events with other mentors and their students.**

This works very well for both mentors and students. It allows you to get to know others and provides a more comfortable environment for the students.

**Plan outings that are appropriate for a youngster.**

Do not take your student into bars or movies that their parents would not permit them to see. Do not drink alcohol or engage in risky behavior when you are with your student. You are a role model for them and everything you do in front of them is important. Use your seat belt, say “thank you”, “please”, etc.

**Remember that you are the adult and they are the children.**

Do not be reluctant to tell them something is wrong if you see it that way. If your student asks to confide in you, be sure to tell them that you must break the confidence if what they tell you is so serious in nature that you feel outside help is needed. A student will not turn against you for this. Don't give in to poor behavior. You should correct negative behavior and emphasize positive behavior.

**Star Kids does not recommend overnight outings at your home.**

However, if both the mentor and the student wish for the student to stay overnight, we strongly advise that the mentor adhere to the following precautions to avoid upsetting the student's parents and to protect the mentor from any adverse repercussions.

- Always ask the parents permission to make sure they are aware of the date of the overnight.
- Call the parents the day before the overnight to confirm that the student will be with you.
- Never allow the student to stay in your home if you are not present, even if other people are there.
- Do not have people, other than members of your immediate family overnight at the same time.

If you are also the sponsor, your financial responsibility is limited to the tuition that you provide through Star Kids. If a student or family asks you for direct financial help, tell them that Star Kids does not allow this and please inform us of the situation. If there is a real problem with school related expenses, Star Kids will evaluate the situation and make sure that no student leaves school for financial reasons.

**Get to know the school that your student attends.**

Be sure your student takes advantage of the services the school offers, such as tutoring, counseling, and extracurricular activities. Not only does this foster communication between you and the school, but it also ensures that trained professionals will handle problems at hand. Throughout the year schools host a number of activities like sports events, plays and award ceremonies. Such occasions are a great opportunity to learn about your student's interests and see students at their best.

**Be patient and encouraging with your student even if his or her academic performance is poor.**

A large part of the mentor's role is to help raise expectations and to encourage academic success. Help your student set high goals and be sure to compliment your student on successes. When you are disappointed with your student's performance, be gentle and caring instead of critical. Coming down hard on a student, particularly in the first year when you are just getting to know one another will not likely change your student's behavior and might cause him or her to pull away. Rather than focusing too much on poor grades, concentrate on goals for the future and concrete methods for achieving them. Remember that poor academic habits usually take more than a couple of months to change.

If you are introduced to a social worker, principal or teacher who works with your student, feel free to call him or her. Sometimes it helps to talk to someone who knows the student's history when trying to find the best way to communicate with him or her. They are trained professionals equipped to handle difficult situations.

**Do not assume the role of a social worker.**

Contact Star Kids, the parent or school counselor if you hear of a situation in a student's life that you feel is serious.