READY TO USE MENTORING

# How to demotivate and infuriate a young person

Even though we love the young people we work with and are responsible for, sometimes we can be a stumbling block in their lives. Here are some warning signs to look out for, and how to avoid getting waylaid by them.

## Ignore any relevance of the task to them

Adolescence is all about discovering what your unique contribution is to the world and what your significance is in the grand scheme of things. So, if you ask them to do things with a minimal indication of why it is important or more specifically, what is in it for them, then expect blank faces and at best, disgruntled robotic compliance. If you want happy, energised contribution, try telling them what their actions will create, how the result will make you and others feel and how the world will be a better place.

## Continually force them to focus on the same things that they hate

If they see no point in what you are asking, they will not engage. If you cannot convince them of the value of that thing, then perhaps a better strategy is to leave it (for now?) and focus on being a positive influence on other things that they *do* have energy for. A rudder can only turn a ship that’s moving.

## Answer for them and don’t wait for their contribution

Allow their ideas and thoughts to shape the goal, whether that is how and why to clean the house, where to go on holiday, or what the church youth ministry should look like. If they feel they have a voice they will feel like a real human being and therefore won’t act out the parody of the smelly, grunting Neanderthal.

## Constantly save them from failure

If you step in and resolve every situation, they will have no chance to learn how to do it for themselves and will continue to rely on you, not only in circumstances where you’re present, but also when you’re not, deferring decisions and other important skills to you too. The process of working out what is important is an active, constantly developing process. Often it is happening literally as they are speaking. So let them speak. Even if it feels painful and you could answer it much quicker, zip your lips. Give them time to formulate their thoughts and ideas and responses, even if you then gently redirect them and ask questions that may lead them to rethink those things later.

Mistakes, failures, errors – they’re all part of the honing and forging process. Allow it to happen (safely and appropriately). If you have forced them repeatedly to get to school on time and given them a lift, maybe letting them be late and face the consequences is a wise thing to do once in a while. Just a thought.

## Ignore their physiological development

A key facet of this is that they will often forget things. Their brain is developing. Try to have that constantly somewhere in the back of your mind. They need lots of sleep so they will struggle to get up in the mornings. They haven’t yet developed organisational skills and haven’t had the many years you have of practising how to be on time for appointments, or remember them at all. Their chaotic developing brain may well be a valid reason they forgot to get milk from the shop again (but remembered sweets!). Their body is changing fast and they are still getting used to what that means regarding personal hygiene and self-care. Fluctuating hormones genuinely do play a part in moodiness and unpredictable behaviour in boys and girls.

Love your young person, even when they are unlovable. Forgive them when they repeatedly infuriate you. Go the extra mile when they are extra disrespectful. Why? Because they are indirectly mentoring you. They are teaching you to be more full of grace, more patient, more kind. So listen to them! Enjoy them!

**JOEL TOOMBS**

has an MA in Christian mentoring and wrote the *Mentoring and Young People* Grove booklet. He is a volunteer youth worker.