

GUIDELINES FOR KINSHIP VOLUNTEERS

1. **Be a model for youth** – It is not enough to tell someone that you want to help, you must show them by your actions. Youth have a genuine appreciation for those who know how to lead without ordering or scolding. Be kind but firm; be reasonable but realistic in your expectations. Avoid preaching.
2. **Be persistent** – Sometimes the child expects to be disappointed, so convey to him or her that you will not give up. Do not concern yourself with achieving immediate results. This will give assurance to the child that he or she can trust you and place his or her confidence in you.
3. **Be patient** – Allow time to get to know the child gradually. The impact of your relationship may not be evident until after you've been working together for a long time. The youth may need time to think over your suggestions, so don't be too impatient or demanding. Sympathy and understanding are the best incentives to help encourage youth.
4. **Be consistent** – Say what you mean and do not make impossible promises. Keep your appointments, be on time, and plan with the child so he or she can anticipate future meetings with a real trust in your reliability. If you have to miss one or more meetings because of an emergency or illness, contact the child personally and assure him or her of your intention to continue the relationship. If you go away on vacation or business, send a letter or postcard to maintain contact.
5. **Show empathy** – Freely accept the child without forcing your expectations upon him or her. We all need acceptance in order to grow. Discuss your own growing pains and point out the similarities to those of the child. Have faith that your honest and sincere example will have a positive impact.
6. **Be friendly** – Give attention and affection. The child you're working with may never have known sustained attention and affection. The boy or girl should know that you are aware of his or her background. This will help the child feel that you are a friend who is interested and concerned, regardless of his or her past experiences or growing problems.
7. **Be honest** – Be frank, honest, and loving in your relationship. Honesty without love is brutal; love without truth is sympathy. Display a genuine interest in the child. Share your own growing experiences, but give advice sparingly. Let the child develop his or her own personality.
8. **Really listen** – Be prepared to listen and really hear what a child has to say. The child may not have another adult willing to hear him or her out. Try to understand the feelings underlying the words. Don't be naïve, however. If you really doubt what you are being told and think it is necessary, check facts.
9. **Model trust** – Trust can be a vehicle for developing self-respect and responsibility for the kinschild. It is natural for youth who are struggling with their own identities and insecurities to deceive others and some children have learned to lie to survive. Let a child know if you have discovered you were not told the truth, but don't be overly upset with him or her. Be willing to forgive. Your continued trust and guidance can help teach him or her how to tell the truth without fear.
10. **Show respect** – Youth, just like adults, should be treated with respect. Assume the best about your kinschild and most often he or she will try to live up to your expectations. Let your kinschild know you recognize his or her good qualities and positive achievements. Also, be sensitive and show respect for differences based on race, culture or economics.
11. **Maintain focus** – Some parents of children in the Kinship Program may need attention and support as much as their children. Although it is helpful to be supportive and establish a good rapport with the parent, your focus must remain on the child. On rare occasions you may want to include a parent in your time with the child if it seems appropriate. Other siblings may also be in need of an adult friend. However, unless it has been clearly discussed with the Kinship staff, shared outings should be kept to a minimum. Siblings may be matched with their own volunteers when possible.
12. **Anticipate and encourage growth and change** – Kinship asks volunteers for a one year commitment, but many relationships last much longer. Think of the child as a friend, not a temporary volunteer project, but be aware as the child changes and grows that your relationship may change too. As a child's need for support becomes less pressing, and the official Kinship match is terminated, many kinskids and volunteers remain friends and stay in touch. The best volunteers celebrate a growing child's ability to be more independent, while still offering friendship. If, however, changing work or family commitments force you to end a Kinship match before you otherwise would, try to be honest about the reasons and accept that the child may feel bad about it. Do whatever you can to make it easier. Never stop seeing a child without explanation.