



## Communication Guidelines

There are a few things that you need to explain to your students as soon as possible. They need to understand why and how we monitor their icouldbe emails and advice board comments. They also need to understand the obligations and limitations of their mentors.

### **Limitations of Mentors**

Some of your students will develop honest and trusting relationships with their mentors. It is natural that these relationships will lead to emails that discuss problems that your students may face with their families, with their peers, with the law or with their own growth and identity.

Our mentors are eager to help and quick to offer advice. BUT, your students need to remember that our mentors are not trained to be counselors. In general, they are not psychologists, not psychiatrists, not counselors, not therapists and not experts on the emotional development of young people. When they offer advice, they are doing so from their own personal experience and without a specific understanding of the life circumstances of your students. That means that the advice they give is just that: advice from a caring adult—not a professional.

Our mentors might be authorities on getting jobs in chemical engineering or negotiating a good contract with a new employer. But the advice they offer about boyfriends and girlfriends, peer pressure, family troubles or on issues with drugs and alcohol, legal situations or fights with peers is not coming from experts.

It is easy to feel that the emails arriving in their mentee inboxes are full of the wisdom of successful and piercingly intelligent adults who have all the answers. Help your students to remember that anytime they are asking about personal issues, they are just asking for another perspective from caring adults who, like all human beings, have their own challenges, faults, biases and issues. Students are not guaranteed to receive working and wholesome solutions.

### **Filters and the Obligation of Mentors**

Every email that your students send to anyone within our system passes through a filter. This filter catches profanity, personal information (like phone numbers or email and street addresses), sexual language and references to violence and drugs. Members of icouldbe staff review every message that gets caught in the filter before the message is allowed to continue. This means several things:

- 1) If your students write an abusive email to other mentees or to mentors with whom they are angry, icouldbe will receive those messages first. We will then send a

copy of the message to the student's teacher and expect the teacher to handle the matter. The abuse will not reach its target.

2) If mentors or mentees try to exchange personal information, those messages will be intercepted and the mentor will be warned or the student's teacher will be notified.

3) Any messages that deal with sexuality, violence and suicide will end up in the hands of icouldbe staff. When mentees reveal anything about sexual abuse, threats of violence or a tendency towards suicide, we at icouldbe are **obligated** to inform the teacher, who, in turn, will alert the school administration or counseling unit.

4) If a message that deals with sexual abuse, the threat of violence or a tendency towards suicide gets through the filter and reaches a mentor, the mentor is **obligated** to let icouldbe know. The mentors have to do this even if they think that your students are probably okay or dealing with the problem. Students need to know that it becomes a legal issue, where mentors and icouldbe.org alike are obligated to report such discussions to teachers and schools so that a professional support team can intervene. This is not intended to break the trust between mentors and mentees. It is to keep mentees safe and they should be informed of this.

Please make sure that your students understand all of this. The real strength of the icouldbe program lies in helping students plan for their futures. Our strength is not helping them deal with their past and current personal issues.

When your students focus their questions on careers, colleges, money management and community involvement, our mentors are at their most useful. Help your students remember the focus of this website and try to discourage them from filling the discussion boards with questions about boyfriends and girlfriends. We understand that those sorts of personal concerns matter to them, but when they post that sort of question on the discussion board, they might as well be stopping random people on the street and asking them how to live their own private lives.