



If you're considering an actual physical gift, take care. Situations involving gift giving in mentoring relationships can become complex and cause misunderstandings, so it's important to recognize that there are different guidelines for mentoring relationships than those for other personal relationships. The holiday times can be stressful, as usual demands upon time, unfulfilled expectations from either's family, and a push to spend lots of money becomes overwhelming.

Expectations for having a loving family, receiving lavish and personal gifts, and being able to be generous to others may not be met for a family that is struggling financially, emotionally, and dynamically. The messages about gifts from the media and friends may not be realistic for many, and this impact can be greater for children and youth. Feelings of disappointment and hurt are possible, no matter what situation a family is currently in. Finding ways to prevent stress and keep the relationship positive are crucial.

Your time is the greatest gift you can give - though we know that to a young person excited about receiving presents, this may not be true! Think something small, inexpensive, and meaningful, if you decide to give an actual present. One of the best gifts to give is an experience:

- Making artwork (that perhaps you take and glaze or frame)
- Making cards or other art pieces for each other
- Bringing in a kit or supplies for something your mentee can continue working on at home
- Putting together an iTunes playlist and burning a CD are all activities that continue to build your friendship while also being a little more special

Remember that a gift is a gift

If you give a gift; your mentee gets to choose what to do with it. Some mentors become disappointed or resentful if their mentee doesn't use the gift as intended or if the gift becomes lost or damaged. If you let negative feelings about the gift enter your relationship, that thinking can damage other parts of the mentoring experience.

Adapted from the November, 2012 newsletter of *Friends for Youth's Mentoring Institute Connections*.

For suggestions about what to do if you notice your mentee and family are in financial straits, [click here](#).