



Tina And Marianne

This scenario has been adapted from the book Handbook of Youth mentoring (Eddy et al., *Special Populations* 2013 378-379).

Friends of the Children is a nonprofit mentoring organization that focuses on youth that exhibit behavior problems in early childhood and are living with difficult family circumstances. The program begins when children are in kindergarten or 1st grade, and provides a caring relationship with a paid, supervised, professional mentor until high

school graduation. Mentors receive extensive training before working with youth, and then receive ongoing continuing education on key topics, including culturally competent mentoring and working with children of incarcerated parents.



Friends' mentors support youth through in-school visits and outings in the community. They spend an average of 4 hours a week with each youth. They focus on intentionally promoting the development of academic, life, and career skills. During elementary school, most of the time spent with the youth is in

one-on-one activities. During adolescence, these experiences continue, but most activities are group based, involving other FOTC youth and their Friends.

Tina was a kindergartner when she was matched with Friend's mentor Marianne. As part of the mentee selection process Friends' mentors observe in local kindergarten classrooms. Tina was absent from school during many of the initial selection observations. When she did attend school, she always seemed tired and regularly had not eaten breakfast. She exhibited poor work habits, seemed socially withdrawn, and displayed signs of depression. Her teacher reported that Tina tended to be disruptive and required frequent redirection.

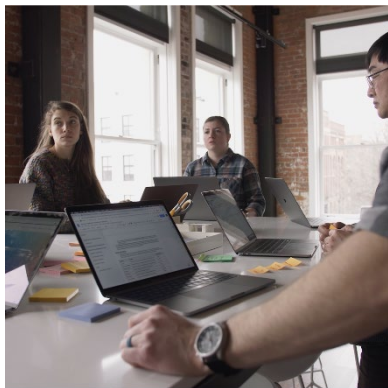


Of further concern, Tina's mother has been incarcerated since Tina was four years old. At the time of the initial match Tina was living with her grandmother and her two older brothers. The family was living in impoverished conditions.

Marianne joined FOTC after working for 2 years in an after-school program with children from low-income families. She was interested in the program not only because she enjoyed working with children but also because of the opportunity FOTC provided to do so through long-term, intensive relationships with a few children. Marianne views being a Friend as an opportunity to "give back" to her community through being a caring and consistent adult to children who have little family support to overcome the challenges in their lives.



When Tina and Marianne first met, Tina would not talk about her incarcerated mother and did not show any positive emotion or warmth for Marianne. Tina was reluctant to show that she looked forward to going on outings with her Friend and would frequently pretend that she did not see Marianne when she visited Tina's school. This was difficult for Marianne. However, she kept trying to connect. Marianne had been trained to expect new relationships to go through a period of "testing." Tina was clearly testing to see if Marianne was going to come and leave the way that many adults had done in her life.



In a required continuing education seminar focused on working with the children of incarcerated parents, Marianne learned about the grief process that Tina was likely to be experiencing. She figured that Tina might be at a stage in that process in which she was particularly reluctant to form bonds with other adults. This knowledge provided additional comfort that perhaps things would eventually change in their relationship.

Marianne understood that it would take time to develop a trusting bond with Tina. She addressed Tina's hesitancy by using key strategies of the Friends program.

First, she sought to be consistent and predictable, ensuring that she contacted Tina twice a week and always followed through with what she and Tina agreed to do.

Second, she strove to be authentic, always being open, honest, and genuine with Tina during their interactions.

Third, she tried to be patient and persistent, and to keep in mind that building a relationship with a child takes time and effort, particularly when the child's relationship with the primary caregiver has been disrupted by something like incarceration.



After about a year of using these strategies, Tina began to show a few signs of attachment to Marianne. She began greeting Marianne as she walked into her classroom and said, "I can't wait to see you next week," now and then when they concluded an outing together. Behaviors like these indicated that Tina had begun to bond with Marianne.

As the relationship between Marianne and Tina deepened, Tina began to share little things about her mother, such as

her favorite movies and foods. Behaviors such as this indicated to Marianne that Tina was getting ready for their relationship to include a deeper consideration of Tina's experiences and feelings about her mother.

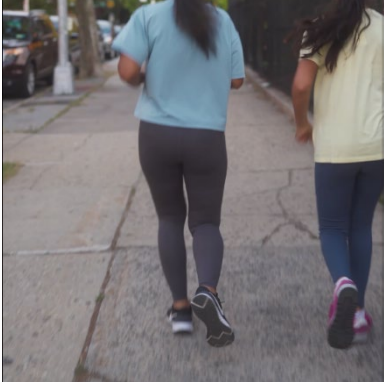


Taking Tina's lead, Marianne began to insert brief activities into their time together that gave Tina the opportunity to express what she was feeling without asking her directly. For example, Marianne asked Tina to draw a picture of her family, and then asked her to identify each person and say one thing that she loved about each of them. With small attempts such as this, over the next several outings, Tina began to open more about her current feelings. This work gave Tina the room she needed to feel comfortable talking with Marianne, and she now openly discusses memories or current interactions she has with her mother.

Tina's home situation remains chaotic today. Her mother returned from prison but was unable to regain custody of Tina and her brothers, and eventually had her visitation rights revoked. During this same period, Tina's grandmother had major health problems and was no longer able to care for Tina and her brothers. For the past several years, Tina has lived with her aunt, who has had trouble holding a job and has had financial troubles. Tina, although very bright, continues to struggle in school. Her difficulties at school have been compounded by frequent moves. As a result, she has attended four different schools in the past 2 years, diminishing her abilities to form healthy relationships with peers and to have a consistent relationship with a teacher.



Marianne has stayed with Tina through her caregiver changes and various moves. She has provided specific supports for Tina's transitions by arranging outings that acquaint Tina with her new neighborhood, school, and teachers. Further, with support from her Team Leader and teammates, Marianne has provided Tina with opportunities for prosocial involvement in her school and local community and sought out ways for Tina to learn the skills necessary to be successful in such involvement. Throughout the changes, she has created opportunities for Tina to continually foster her individual strengths and interests.



For example, Tina likes singing and running, and with each move, Marianne has linked up Tina with local choirs and track clubs and has helped her get to practice each week. Through FOTC group activities, Tina has received recognition for her involvement and successes in these endeavors.