

# iTrack : Hints and Tips for Engaging with Teens



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Has it been a while since you last chatted with teenagers or attended high school? Don't worry. The iTrack Program Specialist team has seen it all before. The following "hints and tricks" will help you get through the more common questions our mentors come across during chats. The websites provided are in no way affiliated with The Smith Family. They have been chosen from the internet to help you with anything that comes up in regards to your student's emotional, physical or mental wellbeing.

The following conceptual information are here to support you but remember your focus should always stay on school, university/TAFE and other post-school options. If your student confides in you, sympathise appropriately, then try to keep the focus on post-school options. Always feel free to call your Smith Family Program Specialist for further advice. We are here to help.

## What is mentoring?

At The Smith Family, we work with the following definition of mentoring.

*"Mentoring provides a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement"* (Hartley, 2004)

This definition is also used by the Australian National Youth Mentoring Network ([www.aymn.org.au](http://www.aymn.org.au))

To expand on this, let's understand what mentoring definitely excludes. As a mentor, your role is not to transform or reform the student. Do not perceive the student as a "project". Rather, focus on the student as a young individual needing help to explore or plan for their future. Mentoring is not about telling the student what to do or doing it for them. Never attempt to manipulate the student to your way of thinking or behaving. The students need to own their decisions and value the mentors who have enabled them to make those decisions.

## Why does the cycle start with rapport building?

Teens value relationships. Teens need to like you before they will listen to you and trust what you say. Start slowly.

Understanding the student, their perspectives, their circumstances, their likes and interests will not only help the rapport building stage but will also inform next steps when you are exploring post school options. Remember to listen and be responsive to "where the student is at". Be conscious to retain an encouraging and inquisitive conversation-style chat. Students don't need more homework nor another teacher figure in their life.

Struggling for conversation starters? Choosing a question or two from the following could help you build repertoire with your student by keeping it light, finding out more about each other and what you have in common. Remember to use emoji's 😊



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1. *If you had a time machine, would you go back in time or visit the future?*
2. *If you could visit one place on Earth where would you go?*
3. *What would your dream house be like?*
4. *If you won \$10 million on the lottery what would you do with it?*
5. *If you were a superhero what powers would you have?*
6. *If you were an animal, what would you be and why?*
7. *If you could be trained up in any profession of your choice by top professionals, what profession would you choose?*
8. *Who inspires you?*
9. *What was the best concert you ever attended?*
10. *Books or movies and why?*
11. *What are you passionate about?*
12. *What are you currently watching on Netflix?*
13. *Who would you most like to swap places with for a day?*
14. *What's the best meal you've ever had?*
15. *What are some of your pet peeves?*
16. *What's your secret talent?*
17. *Which four individuals, living or dead, would you like to eat dinner with the most?*
18. *If you were a crayon, what colour would you be?*
19. *What's the most helpful way for you to get feedback?*
20. *Who is your least favourite superhero?*
21. *What's your dream job and why?*
22. *What are/were your favourite subjects at school and why?*

## My student is giving one word answers/we are stuck

"How was school?"

"Fine."

"What did you do after school?"

"Not much."

We've all been there. Here are some ways to get around those one word answers:

- Ask questions that pull a more detailed answer. Try something like, "Ask me a question from your test today that you think might stump me — let's see if I remember anything from school." That might begin a conversation that goes beyond judgment and evaluation, and lays the foundation for connection and surprise.
- Try and find an interest of your students and ask them to teach you all about it – resist the temptation of "I ask, you respond".
- Ask for stories: "Tell me a story about something that made you laugh today at school." "Who was your favourite teacher today? What did they do?" "Tell me about your best friend, what do you normally do together?"



- Please understand that, more than likely, your student being monosyllabic is not something they only do with you. This is a very normal teenage behaviour and something that you can help them work through.

The above information was found here: <https://onbeing.org/blog/moving-beyond-the-monosyllabic-nine-pointers-on-how-to-open-a-richer-conversation-with-your-family/>

Check out the *iTrack Mentor Handbook* and the other topics below for resources to go through with your student to stimulate conversation to potentially help them find a path they want to go down.

Check out this website: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/mentor-tips-positive-impact>

(Please note that these sites are not necessarily for mentoring, e.g. some are for parents or guardians, but still have some good information to alter to a mentoring relationship)

Personality quizzes to help your student find a career that suits them. Go through these together during your chats. Each of these quizzes are free and do not require registration to gain

- Truity MBTI: <https://www.truity.com/test/type-finder-personality-test-new>
- 16Personalities: <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>
- Truity The Big 5: <https://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test>
- <https://joboutlook.gov.au/CareerQuiz> - this quiz will determine the industry that best suits you based on your personality, and then give you a list of jobs and earning potentials in that industry.
- <https://www.truity.com/test/type-finder-personality-test-new> - based on the Myers & Briggs personality test, this test will break your personality down into 1 of a possible 16 and can help you narrow down careers best suited for your personality type.

## My student gets stuck on topics that aren't related to careers or school

### The Discuss Divert Demonstrate technique

Your student may want to discuss topics that aren't necessarily related to careers or school such as peer trouble, school stress, COVID-19 or current events. That's normal and okay so long as it's in passing and you don't get stuck there. The Discuss, Divert, Demonstrate technique (see below) may prove useful to subtly bring the conversation back to post school options.

## DISCUSS

It is important to acknowledge your student's thoughts and opinions and to empathise in order to ensure they feel heard. Here's some pointers to help keep the conversation productive and fruitful.

Safe	Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank them for opening up and telling you</li> <li>• It's okay to be honest and let them know you went through similar things and tell them how things got better</li> <li>• Keep things brief and positive</li> <li>• Help them find someone they can talk to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeding uncertainty</li> <li>• Negative language</li> <li>• Catastrophe talk or conspiracy</li> </ul>

## DIVERT

<b>Code Name</b>	Agree on a time limit per chat that you and your young person will discuss non-iTrack topics. Come up with a code word to use to signal that time is up. The sillier the better! When the moment arises drop the word into the conversation – 'did you know it's <u>pineapple</u> season?'
<b>Silver Linings</b>	Flip the script. What opportunities does your current situation open up? What new skill could you develop through this time? Commit to taking small actions and report back to each other in your next chat.
<b>Fabulous Five</b>	Challenge each other to look out for five fabulous opportunities during the week or create a list of five thoughts. Examples: notice five times you laughed out loud, or five times you felt relaxed and calm. What five opportunities arose this week to further your career? What are five paths you could take toward your career goal? Think of five people who could help you explore/progress your career journey.

## DEMONSTRATE





Organisations such as Headspace and Beyond Blue have created resources specifically to assist with anxiety relating to COVID-19. These resources are likely to be applicable and/or adaptable to a number of topics which teens face daily and can help them manage anxiety.

We often use the phrase, “meet them where they are at” and use the Discuss, Divert, Demonstrate technique to work through the off-topic subjects. If you remain concerned about your student, ask them whom they could reach out to – a teacher, parent, trusted adult. Suggest your student may contact Headspace or Beyond Blue. After your chat, please contact the iTrack Program Specialist team at The Smith Family.

## My student has exam/school stress

When students are going into exam time, they are under a lot of pressure. They'll need your understanding and support.

Try some of these options:

- Teach them the importance of study breaks and stay constructive and positive
- Encourage good sleeping and eating habits
- Help them to have realistic expectations and encourage them to ask teachers for help and guidance
- Help them to know exactly what exam day will look like
- After the exam, listen to their concerns
- Get them to explain what topics the exam will be on – quiz them, ask them what questions they think may come up on the exam and how they would answer them.
- Share with them how you deal with stress and which coping mechanisms you used/still use for exams or other situations

Info above found here: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/helping-kids-cope-exam-stress-0>

Check the Youth Central website out for more help:

- <http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/study-and-training/help-with-study>

## My student already has a plan

“My student already has a well thought out plan, is motivated and proactive . . . how do I help them?”

Check out some of these options:



- Help them to “fine-tune” the plan ahead – help them to find where some “pain points” might arise and ask them to take you through how they would work through it. Example: Your ATAR may be quite difficult, what are the ways you are going to prepare? (You can help them prepare.) What will you do if you do not get the score you wanted/needed?
- Encourage your student to beat their personal best
- Have them share their resume and/cover letter with you through your Smith Family Program Specialist
- Help them to create a thorough plan B and even a plan C
- Find other topics to chat about to support their success such as goal setting, extracurricular, life balance, acceptance of life changing etc.
- Ask them potential interview questions
- Share moments in your life where you faced a challenge getting to your career and ask them how they would handle the same situation

## I don't know how to connect with my student/I think my student struggles at home

Many of our students have families who are unable to fully support their children in such forward thinking as what they may be doing after Year 12. Many of these same students have parents and other family members who have never been through University or had someone who was there to help them to navigate all of the options. As a mentor, you are there to support them and work with them to show them you are there to be a personal and focused help. Here are some quick tips when working with this type of student:

- Be friendly: You are not to be a surrogate parent or authority figure. You are there to be a supportive adult in your mentee's life who meets them where they are at and give your time and attention to them for that hour a week.
- Relate with the student where possible: Share some of your own stories and ask them to share. Ask your student to help you work through something, or give them an example of a challenge you had in the past and ask them to help you to work through it. This will build understanding, trust and a commonality that they wouldn't get from a parent or authority figure. This will also show them it's okay to open up to you and share their challenges to work through them together.
- Be honest, but stay positive: Students who grow up in instability are often good at detecting dishonesty and pretending. Don't be afraid to be straight forward about struggles and

recognise the help and hard work they will need to achieve their goals. Simultaneously, stay positive and encouraging. Listen and find a positive way forward together.

- Listen and be understanding of where they are at: One of the most important things you can give to a student, especially those who come from troubled homes, is to simply show up and be there to listen to them whenever they are ready to open up - no matter what it's about. As much as you are there to guide and help them to navigate life after school, you are also there to meet them where they are and lend a sympathetic ear.
- Help them to make a plan and be a model for the future: Help your student to break down the dreams they have, no matter what they are, big or small. Help them to see that one step at a time, they can accomplish great things in their life. Help them to build knowledge, understand the challenges and how to overcome them with goal setting and breaking it all down. Don't be afraid to share your own story of how hard you worked and give them personal examples.
- Have fun with your student: As said above, yes you are there to help your student to navigate life after school, but that does not mean that you are not allowed to not have fun with them. Find out some of their favourite things and chat about them amongst future planning. Talk about the weekend, talk about what makes them happy.

Information above pulled from: <https://www.wikihow.com/Mentor-a-Troubled-Child>

Check out the site below to see more information on how to work with a student from a troubled home:

- <https://fosteredu.pennfoster.edu/student-motivation-techniques-that-work-for-troubled-teens>

## My student is struggling with self-image

*“Young people have been telling us for quite some time that one of their biggest concerns is body image. For example, in Mission Australia’s National Survey of Young Australians 2010: key and emerging issues, almost one third of the 50,000 respondents indicated that body image was a major concern for them.”* – Government of South Australia Office for Youth:

[http://www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/4460/sizing-up-body-image.pdf](http://www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/4460/sizing-up-body-image.pdf)

- Struggles around body image can be a confronting and tricky topic to navigate as a mentor. As an *iTrack* mentor, counselling your student through these insecurities is something we ask you do not delve deeply into and that you contact your Program Specialist to have a chat about how best to move forward with your student.

Here are some quick tips to use to acknowledge your students while also keeping in mind to move forward onto more positive topics:

- Help them to celebrate their unique qualities: ask your student what they like about themselves and focus on that
- Focus on attributes other than looks: find qualities in your student and communicate to them how you can see how creative, smart, funny, clever etc. they are and talk to them about how far they can go with those skills
- Explain how the media is different to reality: we all know the media shows us an unrealistic view of beauty and body shape and image. Talk with your student about this and help them understand the difference between the media and reality.
- Share your personal experiences and how you overcame them. It is fair to say most of us deal with feeling insecure about our bodies at different times in our lives. Help your student to know they are not alone and encourage healthy habits like eating right and exercise.

To read up a bit more head here:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/jun/11/teaching-resources-body-image-report>

## My student has brought up bullying/is being bullied

*“Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).”*

*Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.”* Definition found at:

<https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/PreventingBullying/STEPS/Pages/Definition.aspx>

As above with body image) Struggles around bullying can be a confronting and tricky topic to navigate. As an iTrack mentor, navigating your student through these issues is something we ask you do not delve deeply into and that you contact your Program Specialist to have a chat about the best ways to move forward with your student.

Here are some quick tips to support your students while keeping in mind to move forward to more positive topics:

1. Manage your reactions. Focus on staying calm. Breathe deeply and listen
2. Talk with your student. Encourage them to speak with an adult at the school or in their life that they trust.





3. Contact and work with your Smith Family Program Specialist to find the best way forward

Check out these videos to gain a fuller understanding of bullying and find some helpful hints in how you, as a mentor, can help communicate about bullying with your student.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oKjW1Oljuw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v405w4OrxDg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtpPB3WL1eQ>

## My student has spoken to me about suicide

Although this is not a common occurrence with our students, we ask that you contact your Smith Family Program Specialist right away in any instance where your student mentions suicide in a personal context.

## What can I expect from *iTrack*?

### *Why was iTrack developed?*

- Many young people disengage from their education during their teenage years. The impact of growing up in disadvantage can create additional barriers that make it even more difficult to remain in school to complete Year 12. Leaving school early affects the future work and study choices available to young people. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to positive role models, including mentors and employment support networks. Positive role models can help students build their aspirations and work towards future study and career goal.

### *What is the main point of iTrack?*

- *iTrack* is an online mentoring program that matches students in Year 9 – 11 to a trained adult mentor who provides guidance and support about study options and post-school career paths. This support will take many different forms, shapes and sizes. Each student is different and has different things happening in their lives and different ideas of what will happen after Year 12. Your role is to meet them at whatever point they are at and support where they need it.



### *“iTrack isn’t really what I expected”*

- Sometimes it can be difficult to navigate the world of online mentoring and it is common for students to bring things to the table that you may not have expected. Each student is different, will communicate in different ways, and want different things for their lives. We encourage you to keep an open mind, check out your mentor handbook for further information, and please give your Smith Family Program Specialist a call at any time to have a chat about your thoughts!

### *Where do I go for help?*

- Please reach out to your Program Specialist for additional assistance. The Program Specialist team can help with just about any question/challenge! We can steer you towards resources, trouble shoot, think of different ways to approach the scenario, and follow-up with targeted student support and care where needed.
- Contact your Program Specialist if you
  - ✓ Can’t log on or have any technical problems during your chat
  - ✓ Are going to be absent or late, and haven't recorded this on the chat platform
  - ✓ Are worried about your student
  - ✓ Want to debrief after a chat session
  - ✓ Are having challenges with your student
  - ✓ Want to discuss anything about the program