My mentee is very quiet; I am not sure how to engage him/her. What should I do?

Silence is not always a bad thing. Is your mentee silent all the time? Are they quiet after you ask certain questions?

*If they are quiet at times after you ask questions* perhaps they are thinking about what you asked. Since you cannot read body language over the phone, it’s ok to inquire about the meaning of the silence. You could say:

- “I’m not sure how to interpret your silence right now…”
- “Are you thinking about what I said?”
- “Are you thinking about what we just talked about?”
- “It sounds like you’re thinking…”

Often, by opening the line of communication further, you will better understand what the silence means, and how to respond.

*If your mentee is quiet all the time*, you may want to consider asking open ended questions rather than Yes/No questions. Yes/No questions are “safe” for them and they may not expand on their response on their own. By asking open ended questions, their response will be broader and will better help you start a conversation. Some examples of open ended questions are, “How does that make you feel?” or “Can you explain a bit more?”

My mentee has diabetes in addition to her kidney disease. I am not diabetic and am not familiar with her treatment for diabetes or the restrictions on diet. What can I do to help support her?

NKF has a variety of brochures about diabetes and kidney disease that we can send to your mentee. You are not a medical professional and do not need to understand everything that is affecting your mentee. It’s okay that your experiences may be similar in some ways but not in others. Each of you has unique experiences with kidney disease. The focus should really be on how to empower your mentee to be his/her own advocate in her healthcare. You could refer them to the educational materials on the Peers Web site (http://www.kidney.org/patients/Peers/) or main NKF Web site (www.kidney.org). Also let the NKF Peers oversight clinician know and she can help provide the person with NKF brochures on diabetes or assist them with finding a local diabetes educator.
My mentee is really overwhelmed with the transplant evaluation process and feels that it is taking longer than it should. She feels like she is not getting the answers that she needs. What can I do to help her?

Often patients feel overwhelmed with new processes when they have no expectations to compare them with. If you have been through the transplant evaluation process already this would be a wonderful way to share your experiences with them to help them gauge what might be expected. Also helping your mentee make a list of questions to ask their doctor or transplant team would help them prepare for their next visit. It may also help them feel more in control and be proactive in their health and treatment.

My mentee feels she is being discriminated against by her unit. Some of the stories she tells make the clinic sound like a terrible place. What can I do?

There are often situations for which you will have no concrete answer. This can feel frustrating for you as well as for your mentee. However, by listening to their concerns and validating their feelings surrounding their experiences you will ultimately be helping them. This situation presents a good opportunity to think about the underlying emotions associated with the story they are telling you. What emotions do you think of when they are describing their experiences? Are you frustrated? Overwhelmed? Disempowered? Angry? Afraid? By discussing these emotions and allowing your mentee to discuss them, it allows them to step back from the situation to gain new clarity. You can also help your mentee think of ways to engage with someone on the medical team to be their advocate. Often problems that arise in units are a result of miscommunication, and having an advocate within the clinic usually helps the patient feel that they have a voice within the medical team. If you are stuck or feel that your mentee is in danger, contact the NKF Peers oversight clinician immediately.

My mentee asked for my personal number and email so that we can communicate after the Peers experience. What should I do?

As you build upon your relationship with your mentee you may begin to feel an emotional attachment which might make you consider providing your personal information to them. However, the Peers program was designed to protect you and your mentee from having to share personal contact information. Therefore, we advise you not to share your contact information. Often this request comes up when you are ready to end the relationship. Your
mentee may be asking partly because they may be expressing their hesitation to let the relationship end. Or it may be a way of expressing their gratitude. You can address these needs by assuring them that if they would like to speak with you again in the future, they can contact the NKF Peers oversight clinician to reconnect. By maintaining this boundary it allows us to track progress and oversee the mentor/mentee relationship which ultimately helps to ensure the success and integrity of the Peers program.

Even though we agree upon times to talk, my mentee always seems to be distracted and in a busy environment when I call. I don’t feel like I have her full attention. What should I do?

If you are having trouble hearing your mentee or don’t feel like your mentee is fully engaged due to background noise or distractions, you should ask them directly about the noise/distraction. You might say “You seem to be busy at the moment. Would you prefer to reschedule and talk at a more convenient time?” or “I’m sorry but I am having difficulty hearing you. Would it be possible for you to move to a quieter area?” Or, “Would you prefer to reschedule at a more convenient time?” If you continue to have problems, speak with the NKF Peers oversight clinician and she can follow up with the mentee to reassess their interest or commitment to the program.

I was matched with my mentee because she is interested in getting a transplant and I recently received one. In our conversations she begins to ask me my opinion on PD. I had a poor experience with PD. I know that this is a good option for some people just not for me. Should I tell her the truth or should I lie?

Being truthful is always best. However, you should reinforce that people have different experiences with kidney disease. Not everyone experiences the same thing whether good or bad. People try different modalities, have different relationships with staff, get different kinds of support from family, etc. It’s important to acknowledge that experts believe PD to be “a good option for some people.” You might touch on the fact that you were on PD but that it wasn’t a preferable modality for you. It might be helpful for them to hear what initially drew you to PD, and why it wasn’t the best for you. Be sure you limit any discussion to your own experience, and reinforce that other people may have different experiences with PD. You should also let the NKF Peers oversight clinician know that your mentee has this new interest because she could offer to connect your mentee with another mentor who
is currently on PD. Often gaining multiple viewpoints helps mentees build their own opinions. It is important to remember that your experience is valuable, whether it was positive or negative. When deciding whether or not to share those experiences, remember to consider the overall benefit to your mentee – i.e., ask yourself, “What about my experience might help them?” What are you hoping they take away from hearing your experience?