



UNH Center on
Adolescence

Mentoring Youth

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Close relationships with others are critical to the healthy development of youth. Research indicates that connecting youth with others, particularly with caring adults, can provide the support that adolescents need to respond positively to the challenges they experience and to take advantage of opportunities that will be beneficial to them (Sipe, 2002). There are many definitions of mentoring, but there appears to be a consensus about three core elements in mentoring relationships: 1) the mentor has greater experience or wisdom than the mentee, 2) the mentor offers guidance to facilitate the development of the mentee, and 3) there is an emotional bond characterized by a sense of trust between the mentor and mentee (DuBois & Karcher, 2005).

FAST FACTS ABOUT MENTORING

- Trust is the key element in effective mentoring relationships, so the mentor who focuses on building trust and becoming friends with their mentee is more successful than those mentors who are goal-oriented and try to change the youth with whom they work (Sipe, 2002).
- Research indicates that mentoring commitments should last for at least a year to be effective (Weinberger, 2005).
- Involving families of the mentees can strengthen the effectiveness of mentoring programs (Sipe, 2002, Weinberger, 2005).
- Ongoing training, structured activities, expectations for frequent contact, support and involvement of parents, and monitoring of program implementation are associated with more positive outcomes in formal mentoring programs (Stutkas & Kanti, 2005).
- It is important to screen out mentors who may end the mentoring relationship prematurely, because of the potential damage a severed relationship may have for youth involved (Darling, 2005).
- Cross-race/ethnicity matches appear viable, but interests of the mentors/mentees, the cultural sensitivity of the mentor, and the mentee's level of cultural identity and degree of mistrust of cross-race relationships should be considered (Sanchez & Colon, 2005).
- Most formal mentoring programs have difficulty attracting male mentors, and programs may want to investigate whether recruitment strategies or type of program suppress number of male volunteers (Bogat & Liang, 2005).
- There is currently little research available to indicate whether same-gender or cross-gender mentor relationships are more effective ((Bogat & Liang, 2005).

TYPES OF MENTORING PROGRAMS

There are many different types of mentoring programs designed to facilitate youth development in a variety of ways (Weinberger, 2005):

- Traditional mentoring programs match one youth and one adult.
- Group mentoring links one adult with up to four young people.
- Team mentoring involves several adults working with small groups of young people, ideally with a ratio of no more than four youth to one adult.
- Peer mentoring connects caring youth with other adolescents.
- E-mentoring functions via email and the internet.
- Mentoring programs may be stand-alone initiatives or may be part of other programs.

WHICH YOUTH BENEFIT MOST?

Although all youth can benefit from relationships with caring adults, mentoring relationships may be particularly useful for groups facing special challenges such as:

- Youth with Chronic Health Problems
- Youth with Disabilities
- Youth in, or Transitioning from, Foster Care
- Youth in the Juvenile Justice System
- Pregnant and Parenting Teens
- Youth in Single Parent Families
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender Youth
- Youth with Academic Problems

CRITICAL COMPONENTS FOR EFFECTIVE MENTORING PROGRAMS

Some mentoring relationships develop spontaneously, but formal mentoring programs are often created to link youth with adults or older peers. There is a growing body of research that can provide guidance in developing effective mentoring programs. Based on her review of the research on mentoring, Cynthia Sipe (2002) found that three components are particularly important in developing successful mentoring programs: screening, orientation and training, and ongoing supervision and support.

- ❖ Screening is a process that ensures the suitability of the adult to be a mentor and provides protection for both the youth and the program. Screening should include contacting references, criminal background checks, review of the child abuse registry, a review of driving records, and an interview the potential mentor. Answers to the following questions will provide important information to determine whether the mentoring relationship is likely to be successful.
 - Is the potential mentor ready to make a commitment to meet regularly with youth?
 - What are the motivations of the potential mentor?
 - Does the potential mentor have realistic expectations?
 - Does the potential mentor have the financial resources to support an active relationship?
 - Is the mentor focused on developing a trusting relationship rather than changing youth with whom they are matched.

- ❖ Orientation and training is critical to prepare mentors for their new roles because they:
 - Help mentors develop realistic expectations and focus on developing good relationships.
 - Explain programs procedures and requirements.
 - Provide information on adolescent development and how best to communicate with youth.
 - Provide information about the youth with whom mentor will work.
 - Provide training about problems mentors frequently encounter and strategies for addressing them.
- ❖ Ongoing supervision and support increases the likelihood of successful outcomes.
 - Supported mentors are more likely to meet regularly with their mentees and be satisfied with their relationships.
 - Early support for mentors is important in ensuring that the mentoring relationship continues.
 - Mentor support groups can be useful, but experienced, professional oversight is needed so unproductive approaches to dealing with challenges in mentoring relationships are not reinforced.
 - Mentors involved with youth with greater challenges and those involved with cross-race matches may need more preparation and ongoing support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PROGRAMS

- Establish program goals and objectives so there is a clear direction for the program which can be easily communicated. Having clear goals helps specify measurable outcomes to assist in program evaluation to determine effectiveness (Weinberger, 2005).
- Identify the target population of youth to be served so that the program can be structured to meet their interests and needs and the desired outcomes for the participating youth can be specified (Weinberger, 2005).
- Use members of existing social networks to recruit mentors, providing information about potential benefits, potential difficulties and the supports offered to overcome any problems (Stutkas & Kanti, 2005).
- Screen mentors carefully to maximize the likelihood of success.
- Match mentors and mentees carefully based on shared interests, values, and personalities (Weinberger, 2005).
- Provide comprehensive training and orientation for mentors early in their service and ongoing training and support throughout their involvement (Stutkas & Kanti, 2005).
- Provide cultural competency training to mentors and staff so that they know how to adequately provide feedback that will contribute to the positive development of the mentee and contribute to the establishment of trust between mentor/mentee ((Sanchez & Colon, 2005).
- Evaluate the mentoring program by monitoring key process variables and contract with local researchers to conduct outcome evaluations (Grossman, 2005).

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