



The Civic Column

[[Strengthening our community through increased awareness and accountability]]

Report from the Mercyhurst Civic Institute

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The purpose of the Mercyhurst Civic Institute

- Enhance and facilitate citizen participation in decision-making.
- Provide high-quality, objective information to assist local decision-making.
- Convene community forums that encourage reasoned reflection and free and open discussion of regional issues.
- Educate the Erie community and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania about various issues through Institute reports and publications.
- Foster human networks that enhance communication, link resources, strengthen community participation and build social capital.
- Promote research, learning, teaching and service opportunities for the Mercyhurst community.

Enter Mentor, Mentee Better: Get the Most Out of Youth Mentoring

By: Kristen Burillo and Christian Pelfry

Youth mentoring is a broad term that can refer to formal relationships formed through an organized program or to informal relationships that develop naturally between a youth and adult. Mentoring may occur as a one-on-one match or in a group setting. Organizations may utilize mentoring as the sole program component or may include mentoring as one of many approaches to work with youth within a program. Studies typically find that participation in a mentoring relationship is associated with positive outcomes for the youth^{1,2}, though the benefits are only modest^{2,3}. The benefits mentees receive usually increase depending on how many best practice criteria are included within the match^{2,3}. This article will summarize the key recommendations for an optimal mentoring experience and highlight some of the positive outcomes associated with mentoring.



What characteristics or components of mentoring lead to positive youth outcomes?

The Relationship

The relationship that develops between the mentor and mentee is instrumental in achieving positive outcomes^{2,4,5}. When the youth reports a sense of trust and feeling of closeness with their mentor, it is more likely that the youth will experience positive outcomes^{2,5}.

Following a developmental as opposed to a prescriptive approach also results in stronger relationships and thus more likelihood of success. A developmental approach is flexible and youth-centered; the mentor allows the mentee to share in making decisions and choosing activities and goals. A prescriptive approach, however, focuses on the needs and expectations of the mentor^{1,6,7,8}. The longevity of the relationship also impacts outcomes and may be impacted by the previous characteristics as well^{5,9,10}. Studies have found that mentoring relationships lasting for at least one year have better outcomes for youth. Relationships that end prior to six months or have long gaps without contact have shown declines in functioning^{5,9,10,11}. A summary of characteristics of mentoring relationships associated with positive outcomes for youth can be found on the next page.

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Characteristics of Mentoring Relationships Associated with Positive Outcomes for Youth⁵

Active Guidance: Mentor sharing information, providing skill-building opportunities, supporting the development of character and personal values, and offering a broadening perspective on the world; mentor helping youth to set and work toward personally meaningful goals.

Advocacy: Mentor efforts to identify and meet a mentee's needs, such as through facilitating connections to relevant services and resources and introductions to adults who can open doors to opportunities in areas such as education or employment; helping the mentee to become confident and skilled in advocating for himself or herself.

Closeness/Emotion Connection: Mentor and mentee caring for one another and being “bonded,” potentially in a kin-like manner.

Collaborative/developmental orientation: Eliciting and being responsive to a mentee's interests and concerns; recognizing the mentee's contributions and cultivating his or her strengths.

Consistency: Mentor follow-through on expectations for engagement with a mentee, such as how often they spend time together, and mentor demonstrating trustworthiness in terms of living up to promises and expectations established in the mentoring relationship.

Longevity: Mentor and mentee sustaining an active relationship over a substantial period.

Parent Engagement: Active efforts of the mentor to partner with a mentee's primary caregiver in supporting the mentee; seeking out and respecting parental wishes; maintaining appropriate boundaries to avoid disrupting the parent-mentee relationship or the mentor-mentee relationship.

Positive Role Modeling: Mentor serving as an example of how to conduct oneself with personal integrity, look after one's mental and physical health, demonstrate caring and concern for others, etc.

Program Practices

Increasing the strength of the mentor-mentee relationship can be achieved by utilizing specific program practices. The following summarizes the key practices that have been mentioned in the research but is not necessarily an exhaustive list.

Mentor screening: Potential mentors should complete face-to-face interviews with program staff in which the individual's ability to commit to mentoring for a long period of time and their attitude toward mentoring youth is assessed^{10,11}. Reference checks and criminal background checks should also be conducted in order to ensure the safety of the mentee^{6,10}.

Prematch Training: Mentors who participate in prematch training have a greater level of confidence in their ability to form a positive and meaningful relationship with a mentee¹². Training should help the mentor identify his or her motivations and goals as well as modify any unrealistic or developmentally inappropriate expectations so that the needs of the mentee will be met^{10,13}. Additionally, training should guide the mentor in developing positive relationship behaviors such as empathy, active listening, problem solving, and authenticity^{5,10}. The mentor should also become familiar with the policies and procedures of the program¹¹. Mentors who attended fewer than two hours of prematch orientation or training reported the lowest levels of relationship quality, whereas those attending six or more hours

of prematch training reported having the strongest relationships with their mentee⁶.

Postmatch monitoring, training and support: Mentors who receive continued training and staff support at least once a month (and possibly more frequently at the beginning of the match) tend to meet more regularly with their mentee^{6,11}. Ongoing training also allows the mentor to practice and develop mentoring skills¹¹. Assessing each individual relationship on a regular basis helps to ensure that matches are going well and that the mentee's needs are being met^{10,11,14}.

Engaging in social activities: Mentees who engage in social activities with their mentor had closer and more supportive relationships with their mentors than mentees who do not engage in social activities. Allowing the youth to direct the choice of activities is important^{8,11}. Programs that provide structured activities, monthly community event calendars, or tickets to events are associated with more positive outcomes¹¹. Importantly, mentees who spent a lot of time in social activities with their mentors reported gains in career-related information and knowledge at a level similar to mentees whose time with a mentor was

primarily focused on receiving career-based information⁶.

Matching: Mentors and mentees who share similar interests have stronger relationships^{6,10}. The mentor's interpersonal skills should also be considered when making a match¹⁰. Other characteristics, such as race, have not been found to have a significant impact on the success of the mentoring relationship¹⁰. Once a potential match has been identified, it is recommended that the mentor and mentee have a formal meeting to determine if they both feel comfortable with the match¹¹.

Expectations of frequent meetings and long-lasting relationships: Perhaps not surprisingly, mentors and mentees who meet often and over extended periods of time have stronger relationships and thus better outcomes^{6,8,10}. Frequent, sustained contact allows the mentor to engage in a greater number of activities with the mentee, to have more opportunities for offering support to the mentee, and to become included in the mentee's social network⁸. It is recommended that matches meet at least weekly in person, with phone contact occurring between face-to-face meetings as well¹¹. Mentoring

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Program Practices, cont.

relationships that lasted at least 12 months result in better outcomes for youth, while relationships that ended prior to 6 months or have long gaps without contact have declines in several areas of functioning^{9,10,11}. It is recommended that the mentor takes the initiative to establish the contact¹¹.

Formal Closure of Mentoring Relationships:

Providing a sense of closure is important, and programs should assist the mentor in ending the relationship on a positive note^{5,10,11}. The last meeting should be a special activity and should include time to reflect on the relationship¹⁰. A graduation night may be held¹⁰. It is also recommended that the program hold an exit interview with both the mentor and mentee to mark the end of the relationship as well as to obtain feedback on the program¹⁰.

Positive Outcomes

Numerous studies of various mentoring programs as well as natural mentoring relationships have been conducted. While a full description of each study's methodology and findings is beyond the scope of this publication, the following summary highlights the positive impact that mentoring has on youth.

- Youth participating in mentoring relationships have experienced improved educational achievement, including fewer unexcused absences from school, a greater likelihood of pursuing higher education, and better attitudes toward school^{7,15}.
- Some mentoring relationships may improve the youth's work readiness skills. Activities that youth engage in with their mentor may directly affect skills. Their likelihood of finding successful employment may also be indirectly impacted by increased self-confidence and improved attitudes about the future¹⁶. Youth participating in mentoring relationships have also been more likely to be work ten or more hours a week¹⁷.

Special Populations

While some formal mentoring programs are open to any youth regardless of their situation, other mentoring programs are focused on working only with specific populations. The following list provides some examples of the special populations that may be targeted and at least one source for more information.

Children of incarcerated parents

- Adalist-Estrin, A. (2006). Providing support to adolescent children with incarcerated parents. *The Prevention Researcher*, 13(2), 7-10.
- Jarjoura, G.R., DuBois, D.L., Shlafer, R.J., & Haight, K.A. (2013). *Mentoring children of incarcerated parents: A synthesis of research and input from the listening session held by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Public Engagement*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Shlafer, R.J. (2009). Mentoring children with incarcerated parents: Implications for research, practice, and policy. *Family Relations*, 58(5), 507-519.

Children in foster care

- Ahrens, K.R., DuBois, D.L., Richardson, L.P., Fan, M.Y., & Lozano, P. (2008). Youth in foster care with adult mentors during adolescence have improved adult outcomes. *Pediatrics* 121(2), 246-252.
- Mech, E.V., Pride, J.A., & Rycraft, J.R. (1995). Mentors for adolescents in foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 12(4).
- Spencer, R. (2010). Mentoring for young people leaving foster care: Promise and potential pitfalls. *Social Work*, 55(3), 225-234.

Children in the juvenile justice system

- Miller, J.M., et al. (2012). Referring youth in juvenile justice settings to mentoring programs: Effective strategies and practices to improving the mentoring experience for at-risk and high-risk youth. Retrieved March 6, 2013, from <http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/Journal%20Article.pdf>.
- Mecartney, C.A., et al. (1994). *Mentoring in the juvenile justice system: Findings from two pilot programs*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

Immigrant children

- Yeh, C.J., Ching, A.M., Okubo, Y., & Luthar, S.S. (2007). Development of a mentoring program for Chinese immigrant adolescents' cultural adjustment. *Adolescence*, 42(168), 733-747.

At-risk children

- Bauldry, S., & Hartman, T.A. (2004). *Promise and challenge of mentoring high-risk youth: Findings from the National Faith-based Initiative*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
- Keating, L.M., Tomisima, M.A., Foster, S. & Alessandri, M. (2002). The effects of a mentoring program on at-risk youth. *Adolescence*, 37(148), 717-734.
- Grossman, J.B., & Garry, E.M. (1997). *Mentoring—A proven delinquency prevention strategy*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

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- Mentored youth have been less likely to initiate drug use and less likely to initiate alcohol use during the study period⁷.
- Mentored youth are more likely to resist negative influences and less likely to take risks^{7,16}. They are less likely to engage in some negative behaviors, such as committing a major offense (for those who had prior offenses), hitting someone, carrying a weapon, bullying, lying, or being a member of a gang^{7,16}.
- Participating in mentoring promotes positive social attitudes and relationships. Depending on the study, mentored youth were found to trust their parents more, communicate better with their parents, perceive more emotional support from peers, have more positive attitudes toward the elderly, and display more helping behaviors⁷.
- Mentored youth have been shown to engage in more physical activity and use birth control more often than non-mentored youth¹⁷.

References

1. Hamilton, M.A., & Hamilton, S.F. (2005). *Mentoring*. Ithaca, NY: Family Life Development Center.
2. Rhodes, J.E., & DuBois, D.L. (2008). Mentoring relationships and programs for youth. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17, 254-258.
3. DuBois, D.L., Holloway, B.E., Valentine, J.C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2), 157-197.
4. DuBois, D.L., & Neville, H.A. (1997). Youth mentoring: Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 25(3), 227-234.
5. Jarjoura, G.R., DuBois, D.L., Shlafer, R.J., & Haight, K.A. (2013). *Mentoring children of incarcerated parents*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
6. Herrera, C., Sipe, C. L., & McClanahan, W. S. (2000, April). *Mentoring school-age children: Relationship development in community-based and school-based programs*. Alexandria, VA: MENTOR.
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8. Rhodes, J. (2007). *Fostering close and effective relationships in youth mentoring programs*. Alexandria, VA: MENTOR.
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11. Miller, A. (2007). Best practices for formal youth mentoring. In T. D. Allen & L. T. Eby (Eds.), *The Blackwell handbook of mentoring: A multiple perspective approach* (pp. 307-324). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
12. Parra, G.R., DuBois, D.L., Neville, H.A., Pugh-Lilly, A.O., & Povinelli, N. (2002). Mentoring relationships for youth: Investigation of a process-oriented model. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(4), 367-388.
13. Spencer, R. (2007). "It's not what I expected": A qualitative study of youth mentoring and relationship failures. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22(4), 331-354.
14. Deutsch, N.L., & Spencer, R. (2009). Capturing the magic: Assessing the quality of youth mentoring relationships. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 121, 47-70.
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17. DuBois, D.L., & Silverthorn, N. (2005, March). Natural mentoring relationships and adolescent health: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(3), 518-524.



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Across Ages Mentoring Program

The Across Ages Mentoring Program seeks primarily to limit drug and alcohol abuse among at-risk youth. The program pairs mentors over age 55 with youth ages 10 to 13 to provide a grandparent-like mentor relationship. The program also includes family activities that involve the youth, his/her parents, and the mentor. The mentors and youth meet once a week for at least two hours to participate in structured activities, community service projects, and goal-setting. Mentors go through at least 10 hours of training before being matched with a youth and commit to at least one year of participation as a mentor. Participating youth are also trained before being matched.² The program places high value on emotional connections, consistency, positive role modeling, and consistency during the mentor-mentee meetings.⁵

The program is considered a “model program” by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Evidence shows that participants in the Across Ages Mentoring Program:

- Were less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- Had more positive understanding and attitudes toward drugs and alcohol
- Improved their sense of well-being
- Improved their attitudes toward elders in their community
- Were less likely to have school-related behavioral issues

For more information on proven benefits of the Across Ages Mentoring Program, consult the following resources:

- Aseltine, R.H., Dupre, M., & Lamlein, P. (2000). Mentoring as a drug prevention strategy: An evaluation of Across Ages. *Adolescent Family Health*, 1(1), 11-20.
- LoSciuto, L., Rajala, A., Townsend, T.N., & Taylor, A.S. (1996). An outcome evaluation of Across Ages: An intergenerational mentoring approach to drug prevention. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 11(1), 116-129.
- Taylor, A.S., Losciuto, L., Fox, M., Hilbert, S.M., & Sonkowsky, M. (2008). The mentoring factor: Evaluation of the Across Ages' intergenerational approach to drug abuse prevention. *Child & Youth Services*, 20(1), 77-99.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

The Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Program has operated for over 100 years in the United States, with local organizations in all 50 states serving over 250,000 youths nationwide. This evidence-based program pairs youth with a one-on-one volunteer mentor of a similar background who serves as a role model. These two individuals meet about two to four times per month for three to four hours a time over the course of no less than one year. During that time, the pair can engage in activities of their choosing. The youth who participate come primarily from single-parent households and are ages 6 to 18. Case workers monitor the development of the mentor-mentee relationship on a monthly basis. BBBS places emphasis on a mentor-mentee relationship exhibiting active guidance, advocacy, longevity, and positive role modeling.⁵ The program hopes that the mentoring relationship leads to educational success, avoidance of risky behaviors, greater confidence, and healthier relationships for the mentee. Evidence shows that BBBS provides quantifiable benefits to participating youth. Since the first study in 1995, analysis of the BBBS program has consistently proven that participants are:

- Less likely to initiate drug use
- Less likely to hit someone
- Less likely to initiate alcohol use
- Less likely to skip school or classes

Big Brothers Big Sisters in Erie County, PA

Locally, BBBS is operated at Family Services of Northwestern Pennsylvania. In order to become a client, or “little,” the child must be between ages 6 and 13 and a resident of Erie County. The program is designed to service vulnerable children and their families in need of social support. Volunteers must also be a resident of Erie County; be over age 19; have a valid driver's license and proof of car insurance; complete an application, assessment, and training process; commit to volunteering for one year; and receive Act 33/34 clearances.

There were 152 matches active as of July 1, 2014, with 128 children on a waiting list for a match. Local outcomes indicated that 94% of “littles” maintained or improved academic performance and 96% of “littles” improved or showed no decline in relationships with family, among other positive findings.

For more information on the proven benefits of the BBBS Program, consult the following resources:

- Furano, K., Roaf, P.A., Styles, M.B., & Branch, A.Y. (1993). *Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A study of program practices*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
- Herrera, C., Grossman, J.B., Kauh, T.J., & McMaken, J. (2011). Mentoring in schools: An impact study of Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring. *Child Development*, 82(1), 346-361.
- Morrow, K.V. & Styles, M.B. (1995). *Building relationships with youth in program settings: A study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
- Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B., & Resch, N.L. (1995). *Making a difference: An impact study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.