



Mentoring

Resources

The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention helps people learn about the benefits of and opportunities for mentoring.
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp/mentoring>

National Mentoring Partnership, 1400 I Street, N.W., Suite 850, Washington, D. C. 20005, 202-729-4345; Fax: 202-729-4341; <http://www.mentoring.org>

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 230 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107; 215-567-7000; Fax: 215-567-0394; E-mail: national@bbbsa.org;
<http://www.bbbsa.org>

YMCA of the USA, Association Advancement, 101 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606; 312-977-0031;
www.ymca.net

Yes, You can: A Guide for Establishing Mentoring, Programs to Prepare Youth for College, Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C. 20202-8173; 800-USA-LEARN; E-mail: Partner@ed.gov;
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/YesYouCan>

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Monroe County, Inc., 418 S. Walnut Street., Bloomington, IN 47403; Mail: P.O. Box 2534, Bloomington, IN 47402; 812-334-2828; Fax: 812-334-1718; E-mail: bbbs@bloomington.in.us;
<http://www.bloomington.in.us/~bbbs/>

National Mentoring Center, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S. W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204; 800-547-6339; E-mail: mentorcenter@nwrel.org;
<http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring>

Rotary Reader: A Progressive Mentoring Program, Grades K-5;
<http://www.rotaryreader.org>

Pals Mentoring Program, Pal, c/o: Marinette County Department of Health and Human Services, 2500 Hall Avenue, Suite 8, Marinette, WI 54143; 715-732-7799;

The California Mentor Foundation
100 Main Street, Tiburon, CA 94920
415-789-1007; Fax: 415-789-1008
info@calmentor.com
<http://www.calmentor.org/index.fsp>

Recent episodes of violence have taught us that alienation can be deadly. When students lack proper supervision and guidance from an adult, they appear to be more at-risk for a variety of problems. A mentor can reconnect at-risk students with adults, peers, schools, and the community through a supportive one-to-one relationship. This relationship gives at-risk students opportunities to explore their own aspirations as well as improve their academic achievement, behavior, and self-esteem.

What is Mentoring?

In mentoring, an adult or older peer is paired with an at-risk student to provide educational, social, and personal support. Some programs recruit mentors from community agencies such as Rotary Club, Lions Club, or Kiwanis while others utilize teachers or older students. A mentoring program can provide role models for at-risk students and educate them about the dangers and negative consequences of violence and drug use. Mentoring can also help children to improve academic performance in school through a reading program or after-school tutoring. In addition, mentors can motivate students to set goals and increase self-esteem by participating in community service. Finally, mentors can prepare children for the future by sharing work experiences, exploring career options, and discussing future plans.

A mentor and the at-risk student typically meet one to two times a week for 3-5 hours, and engage in a variety of activities including tutoring, discussion, field trips, or community services. As important as any activity, however, is the opportunity for the at-risk student to develop a trusting relationship with an adult. Mentors share real life experiences and provide extra attention and support to children and youth who might not otherwise have the opportunity to discuss their ambitions, problems, or concerns. For example, in one program, children visited a nearby college to meet with college students and professors. In another program, the mentees toured their mentors' work places for a day to learn about career opportunities.

What Do We Know About Mentoring?

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is the most well known community-based mentoring program in the U.S. Adults apply to the program to be mentors and meet regularly with a child between 6 and 18. National evaluations have cited Big Brothers Big Sisters of America as being among those programs most promising for reducing school violence. An 18-month study of eight sites found that youth in the mentoring program were less likely to start using drugs or alcohol or to hit someone, and had improved school attendance, attitudes, and performance, as well as peer and family relationships (McGill, Mihalic, & Grotper, 1997).

School-based mentoring programs, in which teachers or school administrators volunteer to be mentors, have also demonstrated improvements in the academic performance and behavior of at-risk students. In a Maryland middle school, each teacher served as a mentor for one or two at-risk students. By the end of the second year, two-thirds of the school's staff were involved in mentoring. The school reported improvements in attendance, fewer suspensions, and improved outcomes on statewide assessment in reading and writing (White-Hood, 1993). Project REACH in Reston, Virginia also used school personnel, such as teachers

and bus drivers, as mentors.

Mentoring relationships included tutoring, monitoring student progress, and sharing recreational activities; mentors also acted as liaisons between home and school. Students who were mentored showed a 62% reduction in D's or F's, and showed improvements in a number of behaviors, including participation in class, classroom behavior, and interaction with peers (Blum & Jones, 1993).

Community members can also be a part of a school-based mentoring program. Students at Windermere Boulevard School in New York were matched with local Rotary Club members through a mentor program, in which they met once a week in school to read together, discuss plans, and engage in field trips. Both the mentors and mentees reported high satisfaction and a desire to continue the mentoring program (Terry, 1999).

Community-based mentoring programs, in which mentors are recruited from community organizations, can be especially effective for students who are the most at-risk. Community-based mentoring programs have been effective in reducing drug use among children. An assessment of the Woodrock Youth Development Project (YDP) showed that peer mentoring can be an important component of a drug prevention program to reduce drug usage among children (LoScuito & Hilbert, 1999). Finally, a well-designed mentoring program can reduce violent attitudes and behavior among children. In the Children Teaching Children (CTC) program, teenagers were recruited to teach young children on topics such as gangs, violence, and alternatives. Even in an inner city neighborhood dominated by gang violence, the mentoring program was able to demonstrate positive effects (Sheehan, DiCara, LeBailly, & Christoffel, 1999).

Making Mentoring Work

The success of a mentoring program depends largely upon the involvement and dedication of the mentors, mentees, family members, schools, and the community.

Recruiting and Selection of Mentors. Clearly, there can be no effective mentoring without quality mentors. Many programs recruit their mentors from teachers, older peers, or members from the community. Most programs hold an individual or group orientation meeting to inform mentors of the expectations of the program and the responsibilities of being a mentor. When starting a mentoring program, organizers should consider what characteristics are essential in mentors, how mentors will be screened, and how mentors and participating students will be matched.

Commitment to the Mentoring Relationship. The most important predictor of effectiveness for mentoring may well be commitment to the relationship. The beneficial effects of mentoring appear to increase the more frequently the mentor and student interact; some programs have reported that a relationship of at least a year must be in place before significant changes can be observed (Lee, 1999). Thus, effective programs make expectations about the mentoring relationship clear. How often will mentors and mentees be expected to meet and over

what period of time? Whom should mentors call if they are forced to miss a meeting?

Training and Ongoing Support. Training of mentors is an essential part of a successful mentoring program. Mentors must know how to build a trusting relationship, understand personal biases, and assist in mentees' learning in order to communicate with mentees effectively. To keep track of the progress of the mentoring relationship, mentors can be trained to document meetings and activities with their students by keeping journals. Since many children who will be mentored are likely to have some emotional or behavioral difficulties, it is also important to have ongoing meetings with school professionals or among the mentors themselves to provide feedback and to deal with difficult situations. What should the mentor do when the mentoring relationship becomes unpleasant? In what types of activities is it appropriate for the mentors and mentees to engage? Ongoing meetings can provide suggestions that can assist mentors in improving the quality of the mentoring relationship.

Conclusion

Mentoring can be a cost-effective way to help students before alienation escalates into violence or disruption. A well-designed and implemented mentoring program can provide at-risk students with alternatives in which mentors support students and help them to improve academic achievement, learn pro-social skills, establish goals, and increase self-esteem. The mentoring experience gives volunteers the opportunity to give back to the community and help at-risk children reconnect with their school and community. Furthermore, mentoring can strengthen the bond among schools, families, and community members. Effective mentoring programs demand time, dedication, and long term commitment from the participants. To ensure the success of the program, a suitable mentor must be matched with a student, and mentors must be appropriately trained. Most importantly, ongoing meetings with school professionals to deal with interpersonal problems and provide feedback can give mentors the knowledge they need in order to make the mentoring relationship succeed.

Russell Skiba and Tony Wu, February, 2000

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About the Safe and Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing prevention-based approaches to school safety, discipline reform and behavior improvement in schools.

Websites: <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/> or <http://www.unl.edu/srs/> Or Contact:

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