

What research tells us about effective youth mentoring programs

A *WHAT WORKS, WISCONSIN* FACT SHEET

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Program Design and Content

- ◆ **Frequent contacts between mentors and mentees are important** – The strongest effects for mentoring are found for those who meet an hour or more per week.
- ◆ **Mentors need to make a long term commitment to mentoring** – Relationships 1 year or longer are most likely to lead to positive outcomes in youth; progressively fewer positive effects are found in mentoring relationships that last between 6 and 12 months; negative effects in youth (e.g., drops in self esteem and perceived school competence) have been found in relationships that ended within 6 months.
- ◆ **Regular participation in structured activities can lead to stronger mentoring relationships** – Mentoring relationships characterized by moderate to high levels of structured activities have been found to be most successful.
- ◆ **Discussion of personal relationships and social issues can lead to closer mentor-youth relationships and more positive outcomes for youth.**
- ◆ **Mentors who develop relationships with key persons in the youth's life, especially parents, can increase the likelihood of the mentoring relationship having a positive impact.**

Program Relevance

- ◆ **Screening academically at-risk students so that mentors can better understand the risks their mentees face can help target needed academic activities.**
 - ◆ **Activities should be appropriate to the mentee's age** – For instance, younger children enjoy fun physical activities and rule-based play. However, they may have difficulty articulating the activities they enjoy so adults may need to help identify them. Teens enjoy activities that let them interact with their peers and provide opportunities to test out new abilities and take risks.
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- ◆ **The success of the mentoring relationship can be increased through careful screening and matching of the mentor and youth.**
- ◆ **Matching by race, culture and ethnicity can be helpful but is not necessary for positive relationships.**
- ◆ **Matching on interests, skills and personality can lead to closer and longer-lasting relationships.**
- ◆ **Youth from higher risk environments have been found to benefit more from mentoring than youth from lower risk environments or youth whose risk status is a function of a psychological or behavioral disorder.**
- ◆ **Boys and girls have different expectations about the mentoring relationship** – Girls do better in relationship-based mentoring while boys do better in activity-based mentoring.

Program Delivery

- ◆ **Mentors with backgrounds in helping roles or professions have been found to be more effective.**
- ◆ **For school based mentoring programs, having the support of the school is important** – Mentoring relationships benefit when schools provide program resources such as a place to meet, liaison staff and access to evaluation.
- ◆ **Strong mentor-youth relationships are key** – Such relationships are characterized by authenticity, empathy, collaboration and companionship.
- ◆ **Well trained mentors are more effective** – Factors that have been found to increase mentor effectiveness include:
 - An understanding of the developmental issues that their mentee is experiencing.
 - An understanding of the familial, cultural and community context in which their mentee lives.
 - Having realistic expectations about the mentoring process and its outcomes.
 - Training in relationship building.
 - Training opportunities that are ongoing, not just at the beginning of the program.
- ◆ **Supervision by program staff increases the duration and success of mentoring relationships** – Supervision may be even more important with cross-age peer mentors than adult mentors.
- ◆ **Adequate training of program staff can help ensure appropriate supervision and support of matches and enhance their success.**

Program Assessment and Quality Assurance

- ◆ Poorly implemented programs may not only be ineffective, but can lead to adverse effects on youth.
- ◆ Programs that adhere to recommended guidelines for effective mentoring practice have been found to be more effective.
- ◆ There is currently very little research on the effectiveness of cross-age peer mentoring programs.

References

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