MENTORING *Tactics*

This Issue

Frequently Asked Questions About Youth Mentoring

MENTORING

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUTH MENTORING

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PURPOSE

Over the past year, numerous mentoring programs throughout California have frequently asked common questions relating to specific areas of youth mentoring. CARS consultants Dana Goodrow and Jerry Sherk researched these topics and provide a starting point – not necessarily the final answers – for conversation related to these questions. The purpose of this tactic is to address today's frequently asked questions and discuss important information on program design and planning, operations, and evaluation.

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I. PROGRAM DESIGN AND PLANNING

A. STARTING A MENTORING PROGRAM

How much time does it take to get a mentoring program started?

While the length of time to plan and begin a mentoring program depends on a number of key factors, the average minimum time for implementation is typically six months. Although this might seem like a long period of time, a well-designed program will be far more effective than one that is put together quickly. Quality programs reflect the time spent creating a solid program structure.

During the planning phase, planning teams typically focus on the following:

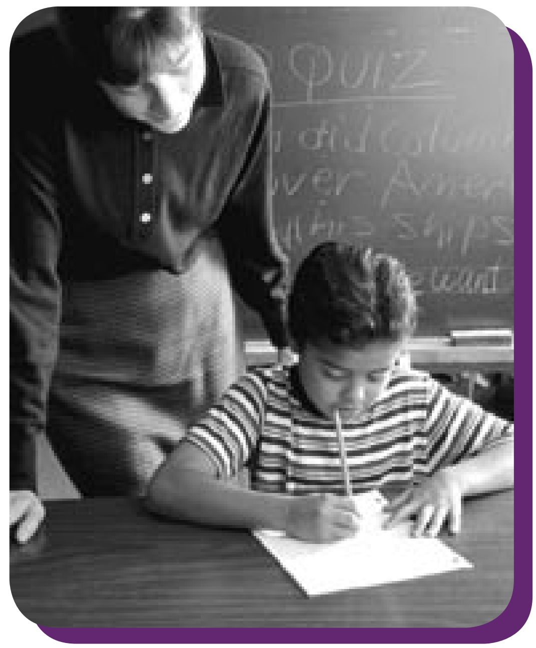
- Hiring staff
- Assembling an advisory team
- Determining the program's mission, goals, and objectives
- Developing program rules and policies
- Designing operational procedures (including steps for recruitment; orientation; screening; training; monitoring; support, recognition, and retention; closure; and evaluation)
- Creating program materials
- Developing plans for participant trainings

Six months is also the approximate period of time necessary for a new staff person to establish a relatively complete picture of how to run a mentoring program.

What are acceptable age differences between mentors and mentees?

Older Mentors: One of the biggest factors in considering an appropriate age difference is the acceptance of the mentor by the mentee. In general, mentees up through the sixth grade are relatively accepting of all ages of mentors. Later on, because of identity issues, stress brought on by puberty, peer pressures, and an evolving discernment, mentees are initially less likely to accept an older mentor – they would prefer to be matched with someone who is "cool." A mentee's acceptance of an older mentor also depends on his or her preparation during the orientation and training: at that time, staff can highlight the benefits of having an older mentor. Should a mentee resist being matched with an older mentor, staff might say, "Why don't you give it a try for a couple of months?" Often, the pair will begin to bond within the first few months.

Peer Mentoring: Age differences are an important consideration in peer mentoring since it would be difficult for a mentor who is close in age to a mentee to retain his or her leadership position. Generally speaking, a two-year age difference is adequate: a high school senior could be effective with a sophomore, a junior with a freshman, and so on. A caution in this area is to make sure that the mentor and mentee are at least two years apart "developmentally." In other words, programs should not match an older but less mature mentor with a younger, more mature mentee.



What are some strategies for "academic" mentoring programs?

It is said that the three most important things in youth mentoring are "relationship, relationship, relationship." During the 2005 Department of Education San Diego Mentoring Conference presented by Evaluation Management, Training Association, Inc. (EMT), prominent mentoring authority Dr. Michael Karcher said, "Let teachers teach, tutors tutor, and mentors mentor." He suggested that one of the most important things a mentor can do is "engage his or her mentee in casual conversations," noting that when a mentee is given an opportunity to bond with their mentor, he or she develops closer relationships with parents and teachers — and that this bonding can eventually have a positive effect on the mentee's grades.

But what should a program do when it is funded for the purpose of improving academics, or when a school's teachers and administrators (and perhaps the mentee's parents) insist on an academic focus? To begin with, programs should strive to educate stakeholders that mentoring is about developing relationships and help them understand that "successful mentors try to develop relationships of trust and respect."[1] Changing the emphasis from "academics" to "relationships" often requires persistence. If possible, involve experts to provide staff development workshops on mentoring.

Next, appeal to common sense. Point out that mentees are voluntary participants: if they do not like what is going on, they will likely leave the program or become disengaged with the program or the mentoring relationship. Sometimes children see academic mentoring as a conspiracy, especially when much of the talk is about relationships but all of the activities center on academics.

If the focus must be on education, suggest recreational activities for the first part of the session (such as ice breakers, board games, sports, or eating pizza). Opening each meeting with a fun, interactive exercise is crucial. Encourage mentors to ask mentees about the types of activities they might enjoy. For those situations focused on academics and tutoring, provide strategies to keep youth engaged and encourage mentors to keep the following in mind:

- Be patient, flexible, and cheerful.
- Take a collaborative approach ("What would you like to work on?").
- Listen carefully to what the mentee is saying, then respond.
- Use simple language and concepts.
- Understand what kind of learner the mentee is (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Most young people learn better by seeing and doing, rather than by listening.
- Never criticize. Instead, be positive and focus on the youth's strengths. ("Great job!" "You're getting it!").

B. RECRUITING MENTORS

How can programs recruit enough mentors?

Recruiting can be one of the most challenging aspects of program implementation. Many programs report spending at least 60% of their staff time focused on mentor recruitment.

To recruit a sufficient number of appropriate mentors, program staff should develop an organized recruitment plan. This plan should include the number of mentors needed, the methods staff will use to recruit mentors, and a timeline for the recruiting process. The plan should also include whom the program wants to target as mentors (e.g., retirees, young professionals, or homemakers). When determining whom to recruit, take into account the youth that you will be serving. If you are running a program for children of military families, for example, it might be best to target members of the military as mentors. If you are serving girls who are interested in the field of medicine, it is logical to focus on female physicians. A key to reaching your target audience is to create a message specifically geared to the interests and needs of that audience. If you need to recruit male mentors and want the mentors to range in age from 21 to 45, you need to create a message which suits that population. In this example, the recruitment message might focus on sharing skills and talents, sports and recreation, and job preparedness.

After determining your target audience, decide how many mentors you will need. Keep in mind the 30/30/30 rule: there is an attrition rate of approximately 30% at each step of the recruitment and training process. If you have 100 applicants, about 66 of them will attend training. Of those 66, perhaps 44 will successfully complete the screening process. And of those 44, 15 applicants might actually become mentors. If your program plans to make 30 matches in a year, the 30/30/30 rule suggests that you will need about 200 mentor applications, so plan your recruitment strategy accordingly.

Next, determine where your potential mentors spend their time, then target your advertising appropriately. Be strategic in your recruitment efforts. Advertising in the newspaper, on radio or television, or through flyers might be the best way to reach your target population. Consider putting advertisements or notices in company newsletters. Face-to-face presentations can also be effective. The most important thing is to make the method, message, and venue appropriate to the individuals you are trying to reach.

Finally, track your efforts and results. Keep a record of what recruitment methods you have used and how many applications each produced. If possible, track how many of the inquiries from each venue followed through with the process and actually became mentors. This information will help you identify your most successful recruiting activities and allow you to refine these activities to make them more successful.

Remember that follow-through is as important to getting mentors as the rest of the process. If you receive 30 mentor applications from a recruiting event but do not call these candidates for three weeks, it is unlikely that they will still be enthusiastic about participating in your program. Develop a thorough recruitment process that allows you to track important steps, including making follow-up calls, sending training information, and setting up interviews.

C. MENTOR TRAINING

What is an appropriate length of time for mentor training?

Initial Mentor Training: The length of an initial mentor training can vary greatly from program to program. Often, mentoring agencies do not schedule trainings of adequate length, either because they do not know how to fill up the time or because they do not want to ask for too big of a time commitment from their prospective mentors. Although many mentoring professionals believe that mentors should have at least twelve hours of initial training, in practice, most program's trainings are much shorter. Typically, an initial mentor training for medium-risk youth lasts anywhere from about three to six hours. The amount of training that mentors should receive is largely based on the risk factors of the mentees being served, with some consideration for the knowledge and confidence level of the mentors. Mentors for high-risk youth (such as foster, adjudicated, gang-affiliated, or disabled youth) need more intensive training covering more topic areas … as well as more supervision. For such high-risk populations, mentoring programs should strongly consider at least twelve to fifteen hours of initial training.

Ongoing Mentor Training: If programs are hesitant or unable to provide an adequate amount of initial mentor training, they should provide frequent, mandatory trainings on an ongoing basis. It is most important to ask mentors to attend the first ongoing training after they have been matched, since problems typically arise early in the relationship. Even in programs providing adequate initial training, it is useful to offer ongoing trainings throughout the year. These can be held monthly, every other month, or quarterly. Sometimes referred to as "mentor roundtables," ongoing trainings are opportunities for volunteers to receive support and encouragement from staff and fellow mentors. A good roundtable practice is to ask each mentor to share any "obstacles and successes" they have experienced while working with their mentee. Programs might periodically schedule presenters to speak on pertinent subjects, such as Communication Skills, Confidentiality, or Empowering Your Mentee. These ongoing trainings typically last from one to two hours.

Mentee Trainings: Initial mentee trainings are usually one to two hours long. The purpose of these trainings is to

- "normalize" participation in a mentoring program;
- build a team environment through fun, interactive exercises;
- secure mentee commitments and promote accountability;
- cover program rules, including confidentially, child abuse reporting, and boundary issues;
- teach mentees how to benefit most from a mentoring relationship; and
- develop closer staff/mentee relationships so that mentees will feel comfortable contacting staff when they have a question or concern about their mentor or the program.

D. SCREENING AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

What are the differences between private, federal, and state background checks?

Private Background Checks: There are numerous private companies that promote their criminal background check services. A private background check is generally described as a "name-based" check; as opposed to a fingerprint process, these checks utilize an individual's name and social security number for identification purposes. Unfortunately, this process cannot guarantee whose identity is being screened. In addition to varying in cost, quality, and turn-around time, problems that often arise with private "name-based" screening processes include the following:

- These checks typically only list convictions, not arrests.
- A prospective mentor could provide a false name and social security number.
- These checks typically miss offenses committed prior to a name change, including crimes committed under a woman's maiden name.
- There may be spelling errors or other discrepancies in the criminal record which might then not match with the potential volunteer being screened.
- Because many names are very similar (or are exactly the same), a potential volunteer may be wrongly connected to someone else's criminal record.
- Some companies buy criminal records from states, but not all states sell records to vendors (rendering some records unavailable for name-based checks).

Federal and State Background Checks: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) uses a fingerprint process, and this check is the most comprehensive screening process available since it surveys criminal databases from each state. The records accessed consist of federal crimes plus approximately 70% to 90% of each state's criminal database. Because some misdemeanors and other minor offenses are not present in the FBI's database, mentoring programs may wish to conduct both the FBI and their own state's background check. Each state's criminal background check procedure is conducted differently: some are fingerprint-based, some are name-based, some report only convictions, others include arrests. A list of contact information can be found on the State Criminal History Record Repositories Web site (listed in the **Resources** section of this tactic).

How does a program screen out pedophiles?

Mentoring programs can begin to address this issue by following the mentoring field's Recommended Best Practices for screening. This includes a fingerprint and criminal background check, personal interviews, reference checks, Department of Motor Vehicle records, and proof of insurance. Although requiring criminal fingerprint background checks is a must, these checks are not necessarily effective in screening out pedophiles since most pedophiles have never been caught molesting. Even if they have been caught, their charges are typically reduced to misdemeanors. According to a 2004 story by the Dallas Morning News, an alarmingly large percentage of criminal records are not even entered into databases, even several years after a conviction. This article stated that Texas had only 69% of complete criminal records for 2002; for 2001, it had only 60%. Even more surprising was that Texas was performing better than most states since "the FBI estimates that slightly fewer than half of convictions make it into a national database."[2]

A major concern to volunteer programs is that pedophiles blend in with the general population and are not easily identifiable by any physical, psychological, or behavioral characteristics. Although not foolproof, reference checks are important in screening out pedophiles. For this reason, staff should call and talk to references rather than merely sending letters. Some programs are creative with their reference checks. One organization asks the potential volunteer's references to provide the name of another acquaintance, and then they also interview that individual. A useful last question to ask during the reference check interview is, "Would you let this person mentor your child?"

During the screening process, if staff have any doubts about a specific person, they should always err on the side of safety and not allow them into the program.

Child predators look for certain opportunities or "relaxed conditions" that will allow them to prey on vulnerable children. Implementation of the following may discourage pedophiles from entering programs or will hinder their ability to access children:

- During mentor interviews and trainings, be clear about the consequences of molestation.
- Depending on your program design, consider developing program rules which state that mentors and mentees can never be alone together.
- Include and enforce rules on boundary issues, particularly gift-giving, spending too much time together, and touching.
- Consider discouraging or prohibiting mentor/mentee activities that can provide opportunities for predators to act, such as overnight activities or staying out late at night.
- Emphasize the importance of following all program rules and policies asking mentees to let staff know if their mentor is breaking program rules.
- Consistently monitor participants, and frequently interview mentees (while they are not in the presence of their mentor).
- Make sure that at least one staff member has developed a relationship with each mentee, so that every child will feel comfortable talking to a staff person if they feel troubled or uneasy about anything happening with their mentor.
- Sometimes staff will hold a pre-match event for the purposes of seeing which mentors and mentees gravitate towards each other. Be aware that a child predator will see this as an opportunity to connect with the most vulnerable child in your program.
- Be especially cautious while matching any mentee who has a disability since these young people tend to be more vulnerable to predators.
- Consider developing a "two-by-two" model, where two mentors and two mentees are paired (and therefore a mentee is never alone with his or her mentor).
- Depending on the age of your mentors and the expertise of your staff, consider providing training to mentees and their parents about how to identify and resist child predators. Then be sure to inform mentor applicants that your participants receive this training.

E. BOUNDARY ISSUES

How should mentoring programs address boundary issues?

The term "boundary" refers to the healthy space or separation between individuals. As the goal of mentors and mentees should be to "develop relationships of trust and respect" with each other, participants should refrain from taking advantage of, manipulating, controlling, or trying to inappropriately influence their counterpart in any way. Maintaining good boundaries also means that everyone abides by a program's rules. To begin to address boundary issues, it is helpful if several individuals (such as an advisory team) meet before the program begins to define boundary rules. It can be helpful for a new program to review an existing program's trainings, policy and procedure manuals, or parent packets to see what specific boundary issues they have identified and how they have been addressed.

Gifts: One of the most common boundary problems occurs when a mentor spends a large amount of money on or gives expensive gifts to his or her mentee. When this occurs, the mentee can begin to see the mentor as a person to "get stuff from," rather than someone with whom they can develop a relationship. A mentor's generosity can also evoke jealousy and anger from the mentee's parents or from other mentees in the same program.

Personal Agendas: Some volunteers want to work with children because of their own personal agendas, be it faith, politics, or some other passion. During recruiting, screening, and training, let applicants know that the role of a mentor is not to convert mentees to their religion, political party, or special way of seeing the world: their primary task is to develop a caring, supportive mentoring relationship.

Confidentiality: Many programs also see "confidentiality" as a boundary issue. Staff should establish detailed confidentiality guidelines and fully train mentors, mentees, and parents on this subject. Program staff need to hold all participants accountable for these program rules. Failure to do so can cause chaos within a program. For example, during a mentor roundtable, a mentor may talk about an expensive gift he recently gave his mentee. If program staff fail to address this situation, then the message to all the program's mentors is, "Even though there are program rules, staff doesn't enforce them — so anything goes."

Programs can help prevent boundary issues from arising by providing training and orientation to mentors, mentees, and parents or guardians before the match is made, as well as by describing the program's expectations in writing. For example, the following mentor contract excerpt offers one method of addressing the "gifts" boundary issue: "I agree to not to give my mentee or his/her family member gifts, money, or favors or to receive gifts, money, or favors from my mentee or his/her family. Should I have a question about this issue, I will contact my Program Coordinator for guidance."

Other ways that programs can promote healthy boundaries include the following:

- Mentors should be required to obtain parent/guardian permission ahead of time to pick up their mentees (as well as get approval for the specific activity).
- Mentors should not become too close to the mentees' parents or guardians since mentors need to be advocates for the youth, not their parents or guardians. Becoming too familiar can cause a mentee to see their mentor as just another authority figure.
- Mentors should not include the mentee's friends or family in outings. This is not only a safety and liability issue, but bringing others along can dilute the mentor/mentee relationship.
- Mentors should not be allowed to do favors for their mentee's family, such as transporting a family member to the store or to their work.
- If driving mentees is allowed, programs should establish transportation guidelines. For example, "Do not transport your mentee across county lines."
- Mentors and mentees should generally meet in pubic places with others around. In particular, mentors and mentees should spend very little time (if any) in each other's homes.
- Mentors should not be allowed to spend an extraordinary amount of time with their mentees (such as meeting four times a week). Programs should also establish a curfew (e.g., "Mentees need to be home by 8:30 p.m.").
- If phone contact is allowed by the program, come to an agreement on what time of the day is appropriate and how often.
- Mentors should not delve too deeply into their own personal issues. Such "self-disclosure" not only takes the focus off of the mentee, but the mentee might feel that his or her mentor is unstable if the mentor dwells on the turmoil in his or her life. Programs should provide mentors with this rule of thumb: if it feels really good to get something 'off your chest,' you better hold back.
- Mentors are not counselors. Programs should discourage "mentee disclosure" or having mentors probe deeply into the personal issues of their mentees.

F. MATCH TO STAFF RATIO

What is a proper staff to match ratio?

"Staff to match ratio" refers to the specific number of matches monitored by one staff person. The reason for keeping the ratio relatively low is so that staff can develop a relationship with each person involved in the program. If a participant feels like he or she has a good relationship with a staff member, that mentor or mentee is more likely to contact the staff member with questions or problems. In general, one staff person for every 30 matches is an appropriate ratio. (This mirrors the maximum recommended classroom size for teachers and caseload for social workers.) Programs should also recognize that 30 matches involves 30 mentees plus 30 mentors. If parents or guardians are added to the formula, 30 matches could involve as many as 120 people. However, when establishing this ratio and setting a program's structure, there are factors which may increase or decrease the staff-to-match ratio:

• *Risk Factors for Mentees:* Mentoring high-risk youth increases the need for additional staff as each risk factor increases the potential for challenges: mentors for high-risk youth require significantly more staff time for training and ongoing support than mentors of moderate- or low-risk youth.

• *On-Site or Off-Site Activities:* Conducting all match activities onsite allows programs to increase the number of matches per staff person since monitoring matches, problem-solving, and even ongoing training is typically more easily coordinated. If match activities are conducted at a school site, recreational center, or other community-based organization, then counselors, administrators, or other employees at the site might be able to assist the mentoring program staff, such as by signing in participants or reporting difficulties.

G. MENTORING HIGH-RISK YOUTH

What are some strategies to retain mentors who work with high-risk, transient mentee populations?

This question becomes more relevant as programs attempt to mentor children of prisoners, adjudicated youth, foster youth, gang-affiliated youth, or other high-risk, transient populations. The fear for these programs is that, should mentees leave the program, mentors may become dejected and leave as well.

Begin by trying to recruit highly motivated and dedicated mentors, and be perfectly clear about the difficulty of mentoring the target population. Some programs even present mentoring as a challenge:

- "This type of mentoring is not for the faint of heart."
- "It's likely that your mentee will leave the relationship, but this doesn't mean that you will have been a failure."
- "If you are in this to feel good about yourself because of the immediate changes you will make with your mentee, you might be disappointed."

Another strategy is to ask mentors to make a commitment to the mission of the program or to their own personal mission to be of service. Let them know that if their mentee leaves (which is likely), your hope is that they will accept a match with another mentee.

With either strategy, it is very important to train mentors effectively. Mentors preparing to work with high-risk populations must receive a minimum of twelve hours of pre-match training. Comprehensive training will help mentors better understand the population with whom they will be working, as well as strategies to keep mentees involved in the relationship.

Because they require a special type of mentor, programs for high-risk youth often make a small number of matches. For example, they might set their goal on making ten matches (instead of fifty). When beginning a new program for high-risk youth, it would be advisable to begin with a small pilot effort. After several months of implementation, the program will be in a better position to establish appropriate match and service goals.

And, of course, programs should treat mentors like heroes and praise them frequently: the effectiveness of a heartfelt "thank you" can be surprising.

II. PROGRAM OPERATIONS

A. MAKING AND SUPPORTING THE MATCH

When is a match a match?

Mentoring programs should have a clear structure and process for establishing mentor/mentee matches. A match should be considered a match only after the process is complete. At a minimum, the pre-match process should include the following:

• Screening of the mentor and the mentee

❖ Mentor screening should include an application, a background check (fingerprints and a Sexual Offender Registry check), reference checks, an interview, and other program-specific requirements (for example, in a community-based program where the mentor will be transporting the mentee, a driving record check and proof of insurance should be required).

❖ Mentee screening should include an interview to determine motivation and feasibility for participating in the program, as well as an assessment to determine if the mentee is appropriate for mentoring services.

• Training both the mentor and mentee, with an orientation for the mentee's parents or guardians

• Careful consideration of personalities, interests, hobbies, and goals of both the mentor and mentee to determine the best pairing. Geographic proximity is often an important consideration.

• A staff-facilitated match meeting where the mentor, mentee, and his or her parent or guardian review program rules and expectations and use activities to get to know one another.

Only once these tasks are completed can a match be considered a mentoring match.

Research has shown that matches are more effective if they last at least a calendar year (twelve months) or, if necessary, a school year (nine months). The mentor and mentee must meet on a regular basis. Different types of mentoring programs utilize different mentor-to-mentee ratios. Traditional mentoring is 1:1, while group mentoring might use 1:4 or 2:5 mentor-mentee ratios.

When should matches be counted for reporting purposes?

Because many mentoring programs do not limit their matches to the fiscal calendar, it is not unusual to have matches that begin in one fiscal year and end in another. This leads to the challenge of determining when matches should be counted and how they should be reported. **To maintain the integrity of the program, it is important that each match be counted only once.** To ensure that this happens, program staff should consider using one or more of the following strategies:

• Count the match in the quarter in which it was made. Do not count it again unless there is a report component that allows for duplicated matches (i.e., the report asks for the number of unduplicated matches made, as well as the number of current matches).

• When asked for completions, count the completed matches in the quarter in which the pair left the program. This means that some matches will be initiated in one fiscal year, with their completion being recorded in the next. Make sure that your funders are aware of this issue and understand how you are determining your numbers.

• Pick one point during the fiscal year to use as your reporting period. This will capture each match and completion just once. The drawback with this method is that matches which terminate early may be lost.

In any case, it is important that programs have a good method of recording matches. A database is the best way to capture the information needed for reporting, offering a reliable way to account for each match, particularly if the program is audited. In addition, maintaining accurate records in a searchable database is useful for writing proposals since a review of your data can help identify program capacity, the level of services offered, and beneficiaries.

What are the best matching strategies to use?

The National Mentoring Partnership offers Recommended Best Practices for Mentoring Programs which provide details on appropriate steps in making a match (please see the **Resources** section of this tactic). An effective matching strategy typically involves interviews and observations, allowing staff to gather information on the interests, career goals, hobbies, and overall personalities of both mentors and mentees. This information allows staff to focus on the following strategies:

• Match mentors and mentees who have common interests. For example, if a mentee loves to roller-skate, a program may watch for a mentor who can share in that activity. Likewise, if a mentor is an artist, he or she may work well with a mentee who enjoys art. This practice will help jump-start the relationship and give the pair something to focus on as they get to know one another.

• Although it can be difficult to fully assess an individual's personality during the screening process, look for traits such as whether an individual is outgoing or shy, meek or assertive. Using this information and 'gut instincts,' staff can determine who should be paired. In some instances, a program may want two shy people together. For other matches, a shy person might be best supported by a more outgoing individual.

• Geographic location is an important factor. Especially in areas where traffic can be a problem, try to match participants who live relatively close to each another. On the mentor application or during the screening process, ask how far a mentor is willing to drive to see his or her mentee. Making matches that are geographically suited decreases the burden of mentoring, thereby increasing the potential for the success of the match.

• Some programs have pre-match activities to see who gravitates toward each other. This kind of event could be a party where prospective mentors and mentees mingle and form connections. There are pros and cons to this strategy. It is possible that more than one mentee will bond to a mentor, resulting in hurt feelings when the mentor is assigned to one or the other. Another possibility is that a mentee does not connect with anyone, increasing possible feelings of alienation. If programs choose to have such an event, prepare staff to handle these situations and "work the crowd," ensuring that each mentor and mentee has the chance to socialize. Also carefully monitor this process to ensure the safety of mentees and the appropriateness of mentors, remembering that pedophiles generally seek out the most vulnerable mentees.

• Once the staff has decided on a match, it is recommended that this decision be confirmed by all participants.

- ❖ First, contact the mentor and tell them a few details about the young person, leaving out the mentee's name until the mentor has agreed to the match. When giving information about the mentee, try to balance the mentor's need for certain information with the mentee's right to privacy. For example, if the mentee has been a victim of sexual assault, it is important to tell the mentor that there may be issues in this area without disclosing too much information, such as details or the nature of the assault.
- ❖ Once the mentor has agreed to the match, contact the mentee's parent or guardian and tell them about the mentor.
- ❖ Finally, when both the mentor and the family have agreed, contact the mentee and describe his or her mentor. It is important that this be the last step so that the mentee does not learn about a prospective mentor only to have the mentor decline the match.

• There are various ways of introducing a match. Some programs arrange a meeting at the mentee's home where staff facilitate introductions, review program rules and regulations, and let the mentee and mentor get to know one another. Other programs have a match party where the mentor-mentee pairs (and sometimes even parents or guardians) come together for a fun event that includes ice-breakers and getting-to-know-you activities.

What leads to long-term matches?

The groundwork for the creation of long-term, successful matches starts at the very beginning of the program. This begins with ensuring that all staff are well-trained on mentoring issues and that initial mentor trainings thoroughly cover the issues facing the population to be served. Program staff should be sure to follow the Recommended Best Practices for Mentoring Programs, all of which are critical to ensuring successful matches (please see the **Resources** section of this tactic).

Both mentors and mentees should be screened to make sure they are appropriate for the program. Appropriateness includes that

- They are motivated to be a part of the program and that they are participating of their own free will,
- They have realistic expectations of the program and their role in it,
- They have realistic expectations about their mentor or mentee, and
- They meet the screening requirements of the program (such as no criminal background, for example).

Once the screening process is complete, program staff should carefully consider factors such as common interests, goals, and hobbies as they strive to make the best match for everyone. Ensuring that the mentor and mentee have something in common can help make the beginning phase of the program more comfortable, giving the pair something to focus on as their relationship develops.

After the match is made, the primary factor in ensuring success is a strong monitoring system. Mentors and mentees who feel that they have someone they can rely on for support (or someone to go to when things go wrong) feel better about program involvement. Program staff should contact both the mentor and the mentee at least once per month or more often when dealing with high-risk youth populations. Program staff should make sure that they ask mentees how the match is going when they are not in the presence of their mentor. Monitoring may include face-to-face supervision, group meetings, phone conversations, or written reports.

Beyond best practices, there are several tools which staff can implement to support the development of stronger, more sustainable matches:

- Make sure that every facet of the program is carefully planned and described in training manuals and program materials.
- Convey accurate descriptions of the program and its rules and commitments to potential participants during recruitment, orientations, screening, and trainings (this leads to realistic expectations).
- Keep the focus of the program on "relationship" (and not academic achievement, pregnancy prevention, or drug avoidance, for example). Focusing on the relationship will prevent the mentee from feeling as if the mentor is simply another adult trying to control him or her.
- Strive to develop close relationships with each and every one of the program's mentees and mentors. When this occurs, participants are more likely to feel comfortable contacting staff when questions or concerns arise. Such relationships prevent program 'dropouts' by encouraging mentors and mentees to contact staff when they encounter difficulties. And staff interactions with mentors can serve as a model for mentors interacting with their mentees.
- Monitor matches frequently and consistently.
- Enforce all program rules and immediately follow up on any missed mandatory training or session. When program rules are not enforced, it can be a signal to participants that their commitment is optional.
- If a program coordinator leaves, the new staff person should contact each participant immediately to provide continuity and reassure mentors and mentees that there is a caring individual overseeing the program.
- Build a team atmosphere for participants through celebrations, field trips, and activities.
- Provide satisfaction surveys after trainings and events. Consider using interviews, empowering participants by using their feedback to make changes in the program.
- Develop a recognition and retention plan, including ceremonies and other incentives to show mentees and mentors that their participation is valued. This retention plan should include consistent "thank-yous" to show staff appreciation for mentor participation.

What type of after-match support should mentoring programs offer?

While "monitoring" means checking in with each participant, the term "support" refers to ongoing training and problem-solving of issues that arise in the match. Research shows that programs which do not provide on-going support are less effective. In fact, unsupported relationships often do more harm than good to mentees since matches which are not adequately supported tend to terminate early. In programs without on-going support, mentors and mentees have no designated person to contact when problems arise, and mentors sometimes feel a lack of accountability to their mentee or to the program. Without both monitoring and support, matches tend to fail. On-going support includes mentor and mentee supervision, mentor reports, ongoing training, regular communication, and sometimes community referrals.

Supervision: For mentor and mentee supervision, research shows that face-to-face supervision is best, with phone supervision as a secondary option. Face-to-face mentor supervision could include monthly mentor roundtables, group trainings, one-on-one supervision with a staff person, or group supervision without training. Face-to-face mentee supervision can include home visits or school meetings. Group activities or outings can sometimes be used as supervision because of the opportunity for staff to observe a match and trouble-shoot challenges. Staff should be trained on how to deal with issues that arise during these meetings so they can provide guidance and support to mentors and mentees.

Reports: Mentor reports should be completed monthly or weekly, depending on the program structure. Reports should include the date and length of meeting times, activities at each meeting, and a checklist of program goals accomplished or addressed during the reporting period. Written reports are a useful supplement to in-person supervision, and such reports provide program staff with a record of activities and the progress of each match.

Ongoing Training: Mentor roundtables can serve as face-to-face supervision in addition to on-going training. During these session, programs can address important issues (such as communication skills, goal-setting, or decision-making) in greater depth than at the initial training. Since problems typically arise early within a match, programs should consider requiring mentors to attend a certain number of these ongoing trainings at the start of their relationship to ensure that they are as prepared as possible to work with their mentee.

Communication: It is important for staff to communicate with both mentors and mentees. Sometimes a mentor and a mentee will have very different perspectives on how their relationship is going. Contacting both parties allows staff to intervene in problems to avoid possible early termination. Staff should let mentors and mentees know that they can call them for any reason at any time. When staff make themselves available, programs tend to receive information earlier, rather than later, regarding potential match problems. Parents and guardians should also have staff contact information so that they can call with concerns. In addition to ensuring relationship success, communication with mentees is a crucial safety issue: checking in with mentees helps in monitoring for inappropriate mentor behaviors or potential abuse; not doing so provides 'free range' to child predators.

Referrals: Sometimes staff will discover that a mentee is facing problems that go beyond the scope of what the mentoring program can address. In these cases, a referral should be made to another program so that the mentee and his or her family can receive the assistance they need. To make these referrals, programs should ensure that staff members are familiar with local resources and have current contact information for the program to which a mentee or family is referred. These might include referrals for counseling, anger management services, housing or food assistance, domestic violence intervention, or legal services. Mentors should be trained to identify mentee needs and should know the process for informing staff about those needs. Referrals should generally be made by program staff (not mentors) since staff should be better trained to locate appropriate community resources.

B. DEVELOPING PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

What activities should mentoring programs include?

Program activities differ widely, based on the goals of each program. For example, a mentoring program designed to prevent high school drop-outs might include activities geared toward academic and social success at school, while a program to reduce gang participation might have activities more suited to pro-social attachments, community involvement, and leadership skills. Program staff should research the types of activities and curricula that will help fulfill their program's goals and objectives. A good place to start is the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), a searchable online database of studies conducted on youth intervention and education programs (listed in the **Resources** section of this tactic). Other options include local universities, community colleges, or city libraries. Most libraries have databases that will allow searches of their collection and those of other libraries. Other places to seek information on mentoring activities include

- bookstores (under "Education"),
- Amazon.com and other Web sites (under "Children – Education – Games – Activities "), or
- other mentoring and youth program staff.

Regardless of the exact activities/curricula chosen, research has shown that the most effective mentoring programs include the following elements:

- The mentee has some voice in determining activities. Giving the mentee an opportunity for input ensures that he or she can choose activities that interest them and helps the youth feel that they are a relevant part of the program.
- Activities are learning- and relationship-based. There should be a specific focus to the activities the program promotes, and all of them should involve some form of relationship-strengthening. This capitalizes on the nature of mentoring and helps strengthen the bond between mentor and mentee.
- Activities are interactive and enjoyable. Even when a match is working on goals, there should be some element of fun. Programs should remember that mentees are children, and children (even older ones) like to play. It is vital to encourage mentors to include fun in every outing.
- Some activities are unstructured. While there is a time for structured activities, especially in school-based settings, there should also be opportunities for unstructured activities like recreation, play, and time to just talk. Keeping participants too busy with structured activities minimizes opportunities for mentors and mentees to get to know one another and develop their relationships.
- In group mentoring programs, it is helpful to provide a consistent time and a safe process for each mentee to share about his or her week. This allows mentees an opportunity to express themselves, to be heard, to get praise for their successes, and to receive help with any problems that they might be having.

Finally, the most important activity a mentor and mentee will engage in is building a trusting relationship. This should be the main goal of the program, and all chosen activities should be a means to this end.

III. PROGRAM EVALUATION

A. EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

How can I measure factors that my program is not explicitly designed to address? For example, is there a strategy that would allow me to show that my high school drop-out program also reduces delinquency?

Mentoring programs have been shown to have a positive impact on a broad range of behaviors. Some of these effects may be intentional (i.e., addressing the issue for which program staff created the program), while others are "side effects" of the mentoring relationship. There are several ways to demonstrate these impacts, including literature reviews, logic models, and enhanced evaluation.

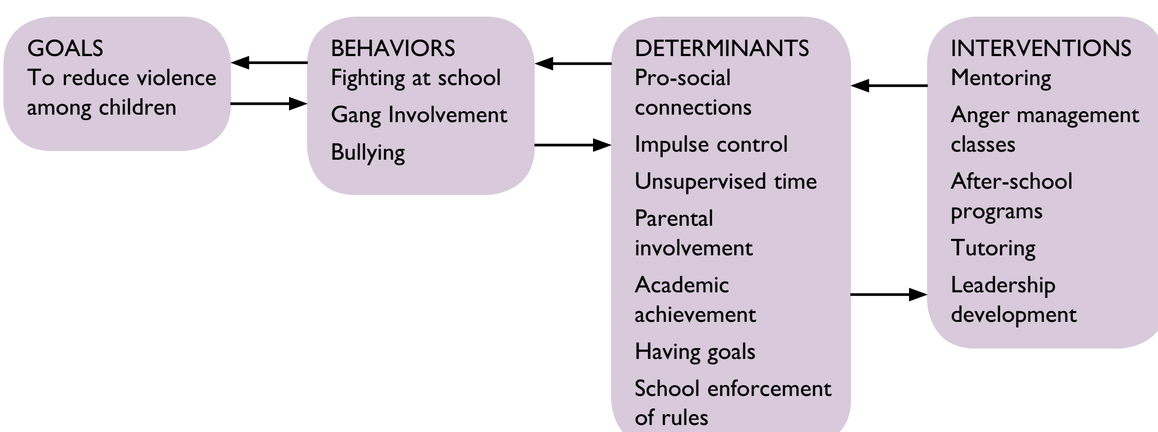
Literature Reviews: It is important for program evaluators and staff to understand the links between mentoring and specific youth challenges. For example, the coordinator of a program designed to reduce teen pregnancy may be well aware of research indicating the effectiveness of mentoring to address that issue. He or she should also be aware the research has found this same program structure to improve academic outcomes. Coordinators, program staff, and evaluators should familiarize themselves with current mentoring research through the following:

- Conducting periodic literature searches on mentoring through the Internet or their local library;
- Visiting Web sites such as the National Mentoring Partnership, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), the Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS), or Web sites of organizations which address youth-focused issues (see the **Resources** section of this tactic). For example, the teen pregnancy prevention program above might regularly visit the Web sites of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, as well as the Alan Guttmacher Institute.
- Joining listservs that disseminate information on research and best practices. Professional organizations and membership organizations can direct programs to appropriate listservs within a program area.

Logic Models: Once staff understand the link between the program and the behaviors the mentoring program can impact, a program may consider constructing a logic model. Logic models help clarify the goals of a program and define activities to meet those goals. There are several versions of logic models available by typing "logic model" into a Web search engine. Information may also be obtained through local or university libraries. An example of the Behaviors, Determinants, and Intervention (BDI) logic model is provided below.[3]

The BDI logic model identifies the determinants of the behavior that the program is trying to change. In this example, the program has the goal of reducing youth violence. The program staff must ask, "What behaviors have to change to reduce youth violence?" Once they choose the behaviors, staff then identify the factors that determine the behaviors they are trying to impact. These behaviors are called determinants. Programs must verify that the determinants are supported by their research on the issue being addressed. Logic follows, then, that by addressing the determinants of the behaviors, programs can work to change behaviors. The program shown here, then, should be trying to impact academic performance, provide structured time, and encourage pro-social relationships. Using this model in the reverse direction, a program that is designed to increase academic achievement, for example, would be able to show that they are also addressing youth violence. Once a program has a logic model and literature in place, it is easier to show funders and other stakeholders how the changes being effected in the program directly relate to the targeted behaviors or goals of the grant. For example, if a funder wants to see impacts on violent behavior but the program's curriculum does not directly address violence, staff can draw the link between what the program does address (such as job readiness or academic performance) in order to show that improving academic performance helps to reduce violence.

SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL



Enhanced Evaluation: Depending on the level of data needed, staff may justify program effects solely through literature, or the program might decide to create instruments that measure the different effects of the program. Staff could create a survey, for example, that measures how many discipline referrals a child received while in the program or find an instrument that can measure self-esteem. These could be given to program participants as pre- and post-surveys: participants would take the survey at the start of the program and again at the end to measure any differences that could have been caused by participating.

A key is to know, from the start, whether your program structure supports the goals and mission of a funding source. Before even applying for a grant, program staff should create a logic model and conduct a literature search to ensure that their program meets the funder's criteria. Many organizations make the mistake of trying to make their programs and agencies fit funding specifications, rather than making sure that any funding that is sought fits the agency mission and goals.

B. EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Are there existing evaluation instruments/ measures available for mentoring programs?

There are many types of evaluations available for mentoring programs to use. A few are specific to mentoring, while others are more general and can be used by a variety of youth programs. Some instruments are available through program model/curriculum developers, and others are available to the general public through the Internet or libraries. (For additional information on evaluation tools, please refer to the **Resources** section of this tactic.) When seeking an evaluation tool for your program, keep the following details in mind:

- Many evaluations are not free. Make sure that the instrument you choose is for public use, or go through the proper channels to avoid copyright infringements.
- Look for an instrument that is easily quantifiable, meaning that the results can be turned into numerical data. Quantifiable instruments have pre-set answers from which users can choose, as in the following three examples:

How many times did you get sent to the principal's office in the last month?
___ Never ___ Once ___ Two to four times
___ More than four times

Please rate your experience in this program, with 1 being great and 5 being terrible.

What were your grades on your last report card?
___ Mostly A's ___ A's and B's ___ C's and D's
___ Mostly F's

- While case studies, narratives, anecdotes, and other non-quantifiable evaluation measures can be very valuable to a program, it is important that some measures can be turned into numbers, as in the examples above. To get a mixture of information for determining the effectiveness of your program, select tools that use both scales or numbers (called Likert scales) and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are those which invite participants to fill in the blanks or make comments. These are especially valuable on satisfaction surveys, but they are hard to record and analyze. Examples of open-ended questions include the following:
  - What did you like most about the program?
  - Describe your mentoring experience.
  - What suggestions do you have to improve the program?
- Consider using more than one instrument. For example, if you have a pre- and post-survey tool that is all scaled questions, include a satisfaction survey to collect more open-ended responses.
- Make sure that the questions on the instrument are capturing the changes in behavior, knowledge, or attitude that your program is trying to impact. If you have a school-based academic program, for example, make sure the survey asks about school attachment, relationships with teachers, comfort with coursework, and other indicators that lead to academic success.

Programs can also create their own tools using templates or other instruments as examples. In this way, programs can clearly define what they are looking to track, then collect that information. When creating an instrument, programs should consider having it reviewed by a professional evaluator to make sure it will yield valid responses. Many programs hire an outside evaluator to create an instrument and then analyze data on the program.

IV. SUMMARY

Relative to other disciplines such as social work or counseling, youth mentoring is still in its "pioneering stage" and therefore mentoring "best practices" are constantly evolving. The purpose of this tactic is to describe some of the strategies that seasoned mentoring programs have found to be successful. Whether starting a new program or enhancing an ongoing mentoring effort, this publication is a tool that provides program staff with current strategies in key areas. These ideas and suggestions will assist programs in developing services which allow staff to effectively serve mentees, their parents or guardians, and mentors. Please refer to this tactic for support and guidance and share it with others who are committed to serving youth by developing structured mentoring programs.

V. RESOURCES

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS)
www.carsmentoring.org

Education Resource Information Center (ERIC)
www.eric.ed.gov

National Mentoring Center
www.nwrel.org/mentoring/

National Mentoring Partnership
www.mentoring.org

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV)
http://www.ppv.org/index.asp

State Criminal History Record Repositories
http://www94311.temp.w1.com/csb/csb
crim.htm#apndxb

EVALUATION TOOLS

National Mentoring Center
http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/evaluation.html

National Mentoring Partnership
http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/
evaluation.php

The Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org/research/knowledge/
MakingEvaluationIntegral.html

MENTORING PUBLICATIONS

Best Practice for Mentoring Programs
www.emt.org/userfiles/BestPractices.pdf

Creating and Sustaining a Winning Match
http://emt.org/userfiles/MatchSeries2.pdf

Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring:
A Guidebook for Program Development
www.nwrel.org/mentoring/foundations.html

Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual
www.nwrel.org/mentoring/policy_manual.html

Starting a Mentoring Program
www.emt.org/userfiles/StartMentWeb.pdf

When Stakes are High: Research-Based Mentoring for Youth with Multiple Risk Factors
www.emt.org/userfiles/WhenStakesAreHigh.pdf

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3 *Kirby, D. (2001). BDI Logic Models: A Useful Tool for Designing, Strengthening, and Evaluating Programs to Reduce Adolescent Pregnancy. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates.*

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MENTORING *Tactics*

Mentoring is an effective and increasingly popular approach for creating positive change in young people's lives. Early results from mentoring programs are promising, suggesting that positive, consistent attention from an adult, even a non-relative, can create change.

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Additional copies of this publication are available upon request or online at:
www.carsmentoring.org

Mentoring Tactics is published periodically by CARS under its Mentoring Project contract with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. The purpose of this publication is to help agencies, coalitions, communities and programs in the mentoring field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

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