

Mentors and Youth Development

Caring adults are essential to healthy development. Parents are not the only adults that can take on this role, adults outside of the home or mentors can be very valuable to youth development. Youth that have a positive relationship with a caring adult outside of their home are less likely to display behavioral problems, like bullying, and internalizing behaviors, such as self-harm or depression. Furthermore, their overall well-being is more positive and they are more engaged in school.

The mentoring relationship is a nonprofessional relationship that focuses on providing support and promoting youth assets. There are four different types of mentoring which includes group mentoring, peer mentoring, school-based mentoring and e-mentoring.

Group mentoring is when one or multiple mentors meet with a group of mentees. This is popular among afterschool programs and other recreational programs. Group mentoring is beneficial when resources are limited or recruitment is inconsistent. The group setting also allows for greater diversity and opportunities to collaborate and develop skills for working in a group.

Peer mentoring is mentoring between youth and older youth that usually takes place in a school, which may be delivered one on one or in group settings. Most models of peer mentoring involve a relationship between elementary students and high school or collegiate level students. This model of mentorship provides a unique opportunity for the mentor to develop their own leadership skills. Peer mentoring can also help improve school connectedness.

School-based mentoring is led by volunteers or school personnel in either a one-to-one or group format. This type of mentoring tends to focus on academic improvement, though not always. School-based mentoring is a cost-effective option to improve school connectedness, relationships between staff and students and academic competence.

E-mentoring or online mentoring is mentoring between youth and an adult through online platforms. This form of mentoring is typically for isolated youth as a way to offset barriers due to distance or physical disability. Interaction may take place in real time through video chat or delayed through some type of messaging functionality. Research conducted by the National Mentoring Resource Center shows mixed effectiveness. Future research will explore interaction frequency and other potential factors that could impact e-mentoring, like race and gender.

Mentoring programs can also be designed for targeted youth populations. For example, mentoring programs for youth with mental health concerns are specifically designed to be trauma informed and to reduce problem behaviors. LGBTQI mentoring programs are designed to respond to needs of LGBTQI youth, like potential bullying or conflict within the family. Big Brothers Big Sisters began to develop a pilot program for LGBTQI youth in 2017. Other target populations may include youth of incarcerated parents, immigrant and refugee youth and youth of color.



Not all mentoring programs are created equal. Evidenced-based programs have been evaluated and structured to achieve positive results. Mentors have completed a thorough training and are provided with materials to help them plan activities and progress their mentees' assets. TeamMates, for example, is a school-based mentoring program that uses Gallup Strengths to match mentors and mentees and facilitate meaningful activities. TeamMates and Big Brothers Big Sisters are two examples of evidence-based mentoring programs that are used frequently in Nebraska.

Research of evidenced-based mentoring programs found that youth who meet with a mentor regularly are 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs and 52% less likely than peers to skip a day of school. Youth with mentors also have a "better attitude toward school" and are 55% more likely to enroll in college (mentoring.org). They also are 81% more likely to participate in a sport or extracurricular activity. Mentoring programs have the potential to positively impact any child. If a child is displaying problem behaviors, consider a mentoring program in your area.

If you would like to learn more about the benefits of mentoring or review a database of evidence-based mentoring programs, use the links below.

Sources:

<https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org>

<https://www.mentoring.org>

<https://teammates.org/>

<https://www.childtrends.org/>