Current Trends and Issues in Youth Mentoring

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Youth Mentoring Movement

- Exponential growth
- Increasing diversity of programs
- General acceptance mentoring is beneficial
A Robust Finding

Among children and adolescents at risk for developing psychological difficulties, one good relationship with an adult, not necessarily a parent, is associated with greater psychological health.
Positive Youth Development

- Six Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, contribution
- Sustained positive adult-youth relations
  - Mentoring key resource

“Development, it turns out, occurs through this process of progressively more complex exchange between a child and somebody else—especially somebody who's crazy about that child.”

Urie Bronfenbrenner
Mentoring *Does* Make a Difference

- Improvements in
  - Multiple developmental domains (i.e., social, emotional, cognitive, academic)
  - Attitudes, behaviors, performance

- Can make things better *and* prevent them from getting worse

- Broad and flexible approach
  - Across ages
  - Multiple formats – one-to-one, group, peer

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Help Them Get There
Be a Mentor

You don't need special skills to be a mentor. You just need to listen, show that you care, and share your experience. Becoming a mentor is one of the best investments you can make for the future. Just imagine how you’ll feel when graduation day arrives.
A Tale of Two Relationships

Tiffany and Elizabeth
8-year Match

“I was like a terrible kid. ... I was like wicked bad. Take tempers and stuff... I wouldn’t let kids touch me, talk to me, say hi to me or nothing. ...... I didn’t like teachers, I’d give them attitudes. Yell at them and stuff. ..... .... and then ... in 6th grade I started getting like honors and stuff. And doing wicked good...”

“I’m glad she’s my Big Sister. I don’t know what I would do if she wasn’t and I don’t want to know.”

Eugene
1st Match: 2 months

“we just kept on callin’ and callin’, and nobody answered. So. We just gave up on him.... My mom said, ‘It’s okay. It’s not your fault’” “So, I was like really devastated” “cause he was like really keepin’ in touch with me, like most of the time. ... he said exactly six weeks.”

2nd Match 1 year later: 3 visits

“I was like, really, really so angry ... I really had wanted to hit him but I was like, Naw, don’t hit him ‘cause it might be somebody else.”
What Accounts for the Difference?
What I’ve Learned - So Far

8 Lessons
1. Mentoring is harder than we thought

- As many as 1/3 – 1/2 of matches end early

“I didn’t by any means think that it would ... be a walk in the park. I just didn’t think it would be this hard.”
2. Mentoring relationships are *real* relationships

- When they go well, can make all the difference
- Don’t always go well
- Some people are better at them than others
- People tend not to ask for help - until it is too late
- Mentoring relationships end
  - Real consequences
  - Most people are bad at saying goodbye
- Not interchangeable
Real Consequences

- Early endings associated with poorer youth outcomes
- Higher risk youth tend to have shorter relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Matches Ended</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned and Completed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Not Completed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Plan - Agency Ended</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, Walsh, & Drew, in progress)
Two Strikes

- 12-year-old boy matched with second mentor
  - 1st abandoned him, 2nd moved out of the area for work
- Strong match
  - Close connection, good good-bye
- Mentee shows signs of loss
  - Depressed mood, poor school performance
- Mother’s assessment:
  - “Smiling” until mentor left, then “just broke down”
  - “heartbroken” when abandoned by first mentor
  - Now, “don’t want to do the program no more.”

(Spencer et al., in progress)
Re-Matching

- National study BBBS school-based programs
- Only youth in intact matches improved
  - Re-matched youth experienced negative impacts
  - No impact for youth not re-matched
- Authors conclude:
  - Multiple short matches not same as one longer match
  - Raise concerns about viewing relationships as inter-changeable

(Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012)
3. Quality matters

- Continuous
  - 1 year or more
  - School-based – continue into 2\textsuperscript{nd} year

- Consistent

- Connected
  - Shared interests (\textit{doubles} effect size)
  - Youth feels “close” to mentor; sees mentor as significant adult

- Collaborative
  - Developmental or youth driven
  - Structure and support
4. Fun Matters

- Kids just want to have fun - adults often don’t get that
5. No mentoring relationship is an island

- Embedded within larger familial, community, and cultural contexts – for both mentors and youth
6. Program Practices Matter - A Lot


![Chart showing the size of effect on youth outcomes for empirically-based and theory-based practices](chart.png)
Program Practices

- **Screening**
  - Mentors: safe, time, commitment, talents
  - Youth: needs best match services, interested

- **Training**
  - What to expect, what’s expected of them, tools for success

- **Matching**
  - Shared interests
  - Preferences

- **Structure**
  - Expectations
  - Mentors supported
    - Build strong ties
    - Teaching, advocacy roles

- **Monitoring and Support**
  - Regular contact with mentors, youth, parents
  - Resources, training
  - Proactive: assess quality, respond

- **Closure**
  - Clear procedures
  - Exit interviews
7. Mentors Matter

- Experience with youth
- Developmental or youth driven approach
  - Youth input
  - Promotes youth in his/her own endeavors
  - Focus on relationship rather than changing youth
  - Structure and support
- Positive attitudes about youth
- Committed, consistent, empathic

(Spencer, 2012)
## Mentor Motivation, Skills and Relationship Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation and Skills</th>
<th>Relationship Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor: Time of Match</strong></td>
<td><strong>Youth: 6 Months</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation: Learning and New Understanding</td>
<td>Alliance - Task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment: Comfort with Intimacy</td>
<td>Alliance - Task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment: Anxiety</td>
<td>Alliance - Task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspective Taking</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
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<td>Positive Regard</td>
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## Mentor Motivation, Expectations and Relationship Quality

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<tr>
<th>Mentor Motivation: Time of Match</th>
<th>Relationship Quality: 6 Months</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor Motivation:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lower</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Giving back” “making a difference”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expecting to build close, meaningful connection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Quality:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Higher</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Months</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lower</strong></td>
<td>More invested in having self-interests fulfilled</td>
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<td>Bothered by initial expectations not being met</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expressing dissatisfaction with relationship - e.g., feeling underappreciated by mentees</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater distress about challenges encountered</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Higher</strong></td>
<td>Readjusted initial expectations</td>
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<td>Focused on trying to get to know mentee, figuring out how best to connect</td>
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Cultural Differences

Race and Ethnicity
- Some openness to and respect for differences
- Overlooking differences
- Differences as “deficits”

Social Class
- Sensitivity to class differences
- Minimizing class differences
- Differences viewed as deficits

(Spencer, Lewis, & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2007)
Youth Initiated Mentoring

- Youth select mentors from within existing networks
- Development of trust
- Meaningfulness of advice and guidance

“I’ve known him ever since ....I could hardly talk....He’s been a family friend all of my life. .... just know some person all your life, .... you sorta kinda trust ‘em, with what they’re sayin’ an’ everything.”

“I’m sure I wouldn’t have ...... opened up to him as easily.... Would’a’ took longer...versus right away.”

(Schwartz et al., under revision; Spencer et al., under review)
8. Mentoring higher risk youth can be especially challenging.
Realizing the Promise?

- Mentoring *does* work – when done well
  - Benchmarks, best practices
- Strengthens outcomes across multiple domains
- Doing better with higher-risk youth – e.g., academic failure, delinquent behavior or discipline problems at school
- Power of informal mentoring relationships
  - Youth with fewer resources likely to benefit more

(DuBois et al., 2011; Erikson & Elder, 2009)
But We’re Not There Yet!

- Benefits of mentoring remain modest
  - Lack of discernible improvement over 10 years
  - Many programs still likely providing little to no post-match support
  - Are benefits sustained?

- Too many relationships are inconsistent and/or end early

- Still not reaching youth with higher levels of environmental and individual vulnerabilities

(DuBois et al., 2011)
Type(s) of Mentoring

Evidence Base: Youth Served
Evidence Base: Mentoring

Model of Change

Cultural and Environmental Contexts

Program Structure Policies Practices
Adoption and Foster Care (AFC) Mentoring

- **Goal:** Long-term community-based one-to-one mentoring relationships
- Adapting Elements of Effective Practice specifically to foster care youth ([www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org))
- Require 1 year commitment
  - Screen out mentors whose lives look too busy or unpredictable in the next 1 ½ years
  - Assess capacity for emotional connection and good communication
- Train mentors
- Monitor matches
- Clear closure practices that are followed
- Always seeking diversified funding
What Programs Can Do

- Employ intentional, evidence-based models
- Select the best mentors
  - Prior experience
  - Positive attitudes about youth
  - Good at relationships
  - Screen for qualities needed to meet program expectations
  - Beggars can and should be choosers!
- Match mentors and youth with shared interests, perceived similarities
What Programs Can Do (cont.)

- Prepare and support mentors
  - Build strong relationships
    - Cultural awareness and responsiveness
  - Be guides and advocates
    - Don’t equate these efforts with instituting curriculum
  - Engage effectively with mentees’ families
- Proactively monitor and support matches
- Find ways to reduce early endings
  - Resist temptation to view mentors as interchangeable
- Do not sacrifice quality for scale
Keep the promises we make to youth!
Thank you!

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