

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

DuBois et al. (2011) *How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence. Psychological Science in the Public Interest.*



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

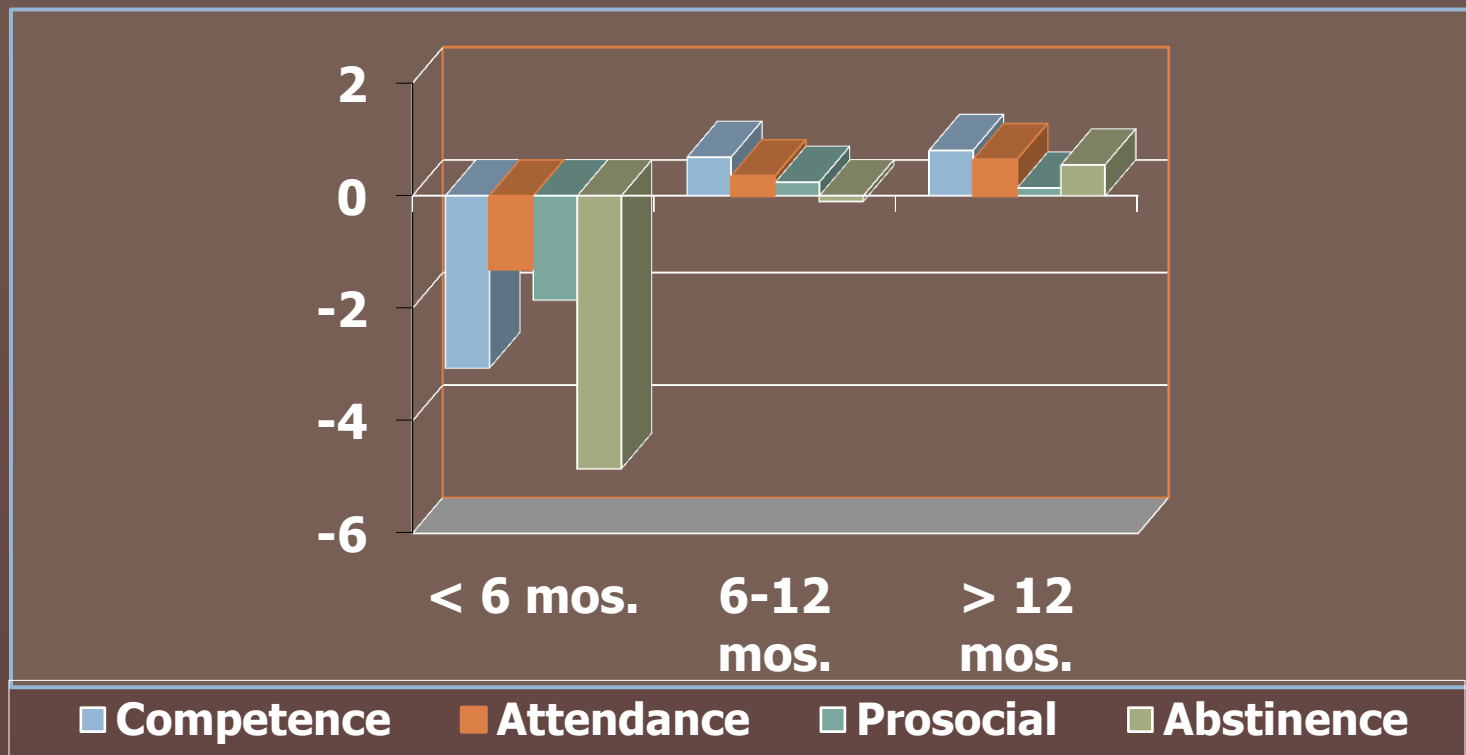
"I didn't by any means think that it would ... be a walk in the park. I just didn't think it would be this hard."

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



How Matches Ended	Number of Cases
Planned and Completed	20
Planned Not Completed	8
No Plan - Agency Ended	20



(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 interchangeable



3. Quality matters

- Continuous

- 1 year or more
- School-based – continue into 2nd year

- Consistent

- Connected

- Shared interests (*doubles* effect size)
- Youth feels “close” to mentor; sees mentor as significant adult

- Collaborative

- Developmental or youth driven
- Structure and support

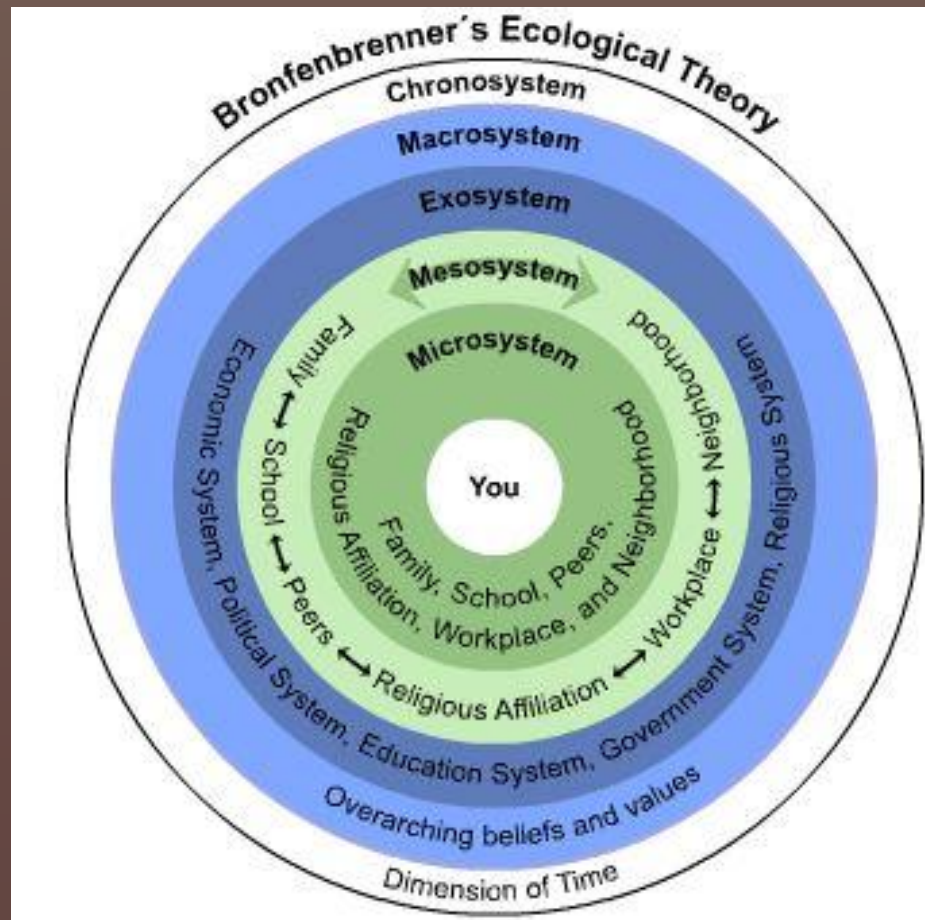
4. Fun Matters

- Kids just want to have fun - adults often don't get that



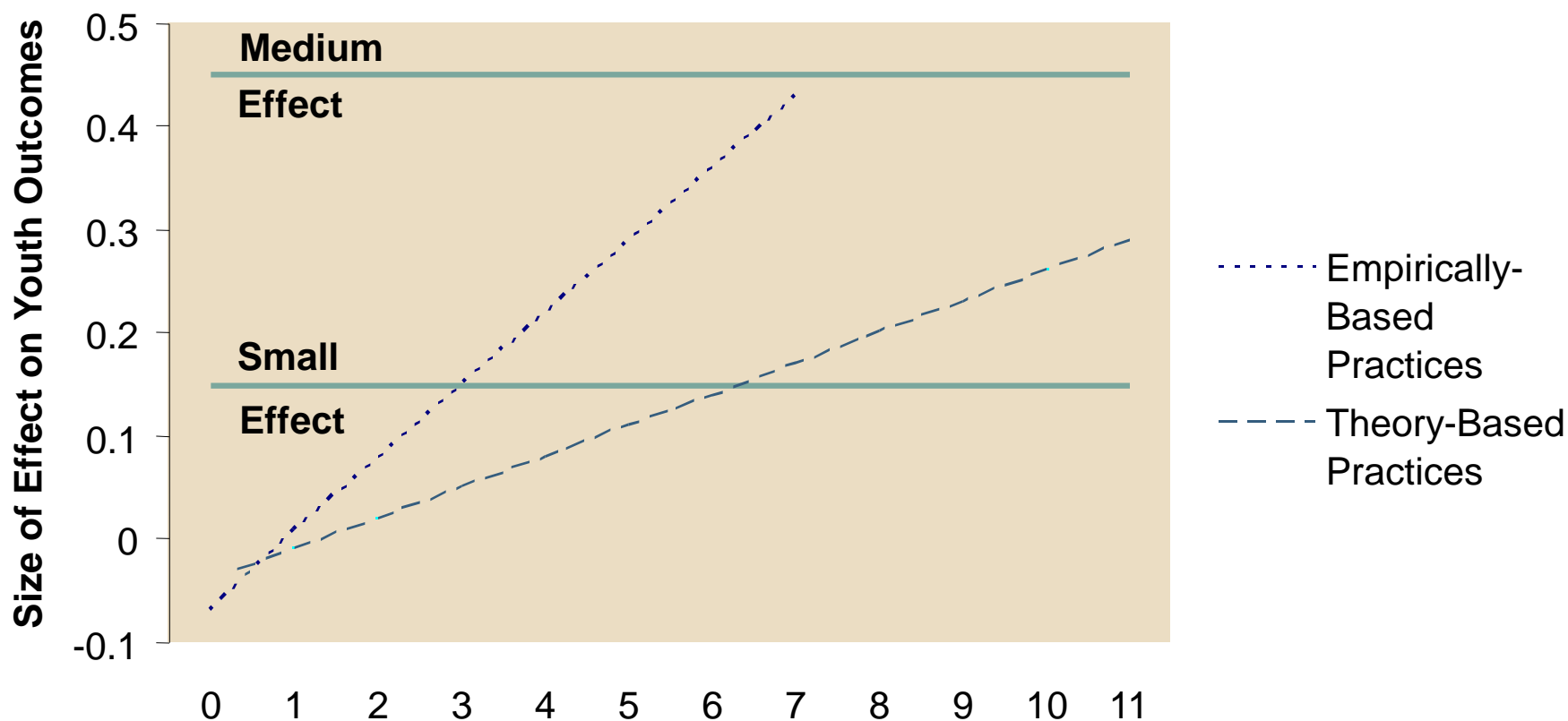
5. No mentoring relationship is an island

- Embedded within larger familial, community, and cultural contexts – for both mentors and youth



6. Program Practices Matter - A Lot

Rhodes & DuBois, 2006. *Understanding and Facilitating the Youth Mentoring Movement*, <http://www.srcd.org/spr.html>



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

Motivation and Skills Mentor: Time of Match	Relationship Quality Youth: 6 Months	
Motivation: Learning and New Understanding	Alliance - Task	.52*
Attachment: Comfort with Intimacy	Alliance - Task	.35*
Attachment: Anxiety	Alliance - Task	-.34**
Perspective Taking	Empathy	.31**
	Positive Regard	.33***

(Spencer, et al, 2010. Poster presented at APHA Annual Meeting)

Mentor Motivation, Expectations and Relationship Quality

Mentor Motivation: Time of Match	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Giving back” “making a difference”• Expecting to build close, meaningful connection	
Relationship Quality : 6 Months	Lower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More invested in having self-interests fulfilled• Bothered by initial expectations not being met• Expressing dissatisfaction with relationship - e.g., feeling underappreciated by mentees• Greater distress about challenges encountered
	Higher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Readjusted initial expectations• Focused on trying to get to know mentee, figuring out how best to connect

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 sinceI 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?

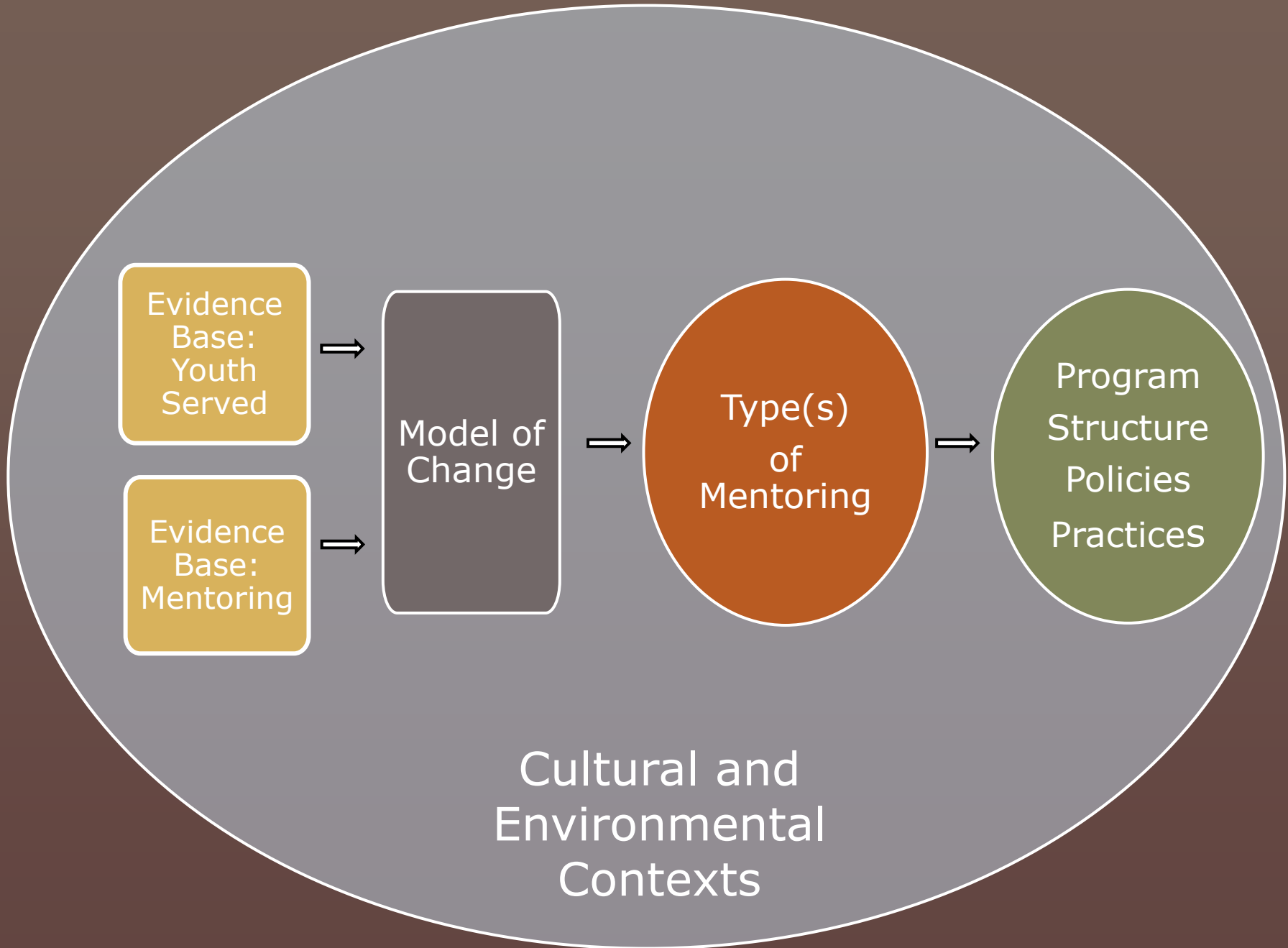
- Mentoring *does* work – when done well
 - Benchmarks, best practices
- Strengthens outcomes across multiple domains
- Doing better with higher-risk youth – e.g., academic failure, delinquent behavior or discipline problems at school
- Power of informal mentoring relationships
 - Youth with fewer resources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



Evidence Base:
Youth Served

Evidence Base:
Mentoring

Model of Change

Type(s)
of
Mentoring

Program Structure
Policies
Practices

Cultural and
Environmental
Contexts

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)
- 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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