



Putting Youth Development Principles To Work in Mentoring Programs

This is the second in a three-part series of fact sheets on incorporating youth development principles and practices into youth mentoring programs. To provide background to this discussion, you can read the first in the series at: <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet13.pdf>.

As discussed in Fact Sheet 13, *Understanding the Youth Development Model*, youth mentoring is guided by many of the same principles that are at the heart of the youth development approach. For example:

- Mentoring is founded on a strength-based rather than deficit-based approach to helping young people realize their potential, focusing on assets rather than problems.
- Mentoring is based on building supportive relationships between youth and adults, a key component of youth development programs.
- Key outcomes for youth in mentoring programs are in broad, developmental areas such as self-worth, confidence, connectedness to school and community, and gaining and practicing new skills and interests.
- Mentoring usually extends its activities beyond the confines of a structured program, reaching out to the community for opportunities and supports. Even programs that are school based can include community connections through the mentor's own experiences, special events and activities, and partnerships between schools, community organizations, and other services.

Youth mentoring programs also usually have outcomes that reflect some or all of the Five Cs of youth development (see sidebar). Although most mentoring programs have outcomes that are based on *preventing* certain behaviors or increasing a specific skill, they also strive to achieve one or more of the following developmental outcomes:

- Increase competency in such areas as social development, academic achievement, and life skills (*competence*)
- Improved sense of positive self-worth and belief in the future by offering consistent positive encouragement and reinforcement (*confidence*)
- Development of a positive bond with the mentor and, through that relationship, positive relationships with others—teachers, friends, and family—and increased connections to school and community (*connections*)

In addition, depending on the individual relationships formed, mentoring programs may:

- Strengthen character as mentors introduce youth to positive societal and cultural values, hold youth to high expectations of behavior, and model those behaviors (*character*)
- Engage youth in activities that may increase their sense of empathy and caring through others, such as community service projects taken on by matches (*caring and compassion*)

Despite these strong philosophical connections between youth development and mentoring, in practice

The Five C's of Youth Development

- 1 Competence.** Positive view of one's actions in specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational
- 2 Confidence.** The internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy, identity, and belief in the future
- 3 Connection.** Positive bonds with people and institutions – peers, family, school, and community – in which both parties contribute to the relationship
- 4 Character.** Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), spirituality, integrity
- 5 Caring and Compassion.** A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

(Lerner, Fisher and Weinberg, 2000)

mentoring programs may have difficulties implementing strategies that fully embrace a youth development approach. Implementing a comprehensive youth development approach requires an assessment of every aspect your program through a youth development lens. All levels of the organization must understand youth development principles and practices and need to be willing to make both programmatic and policy-level changes. And program staff have to overcome both internal and external barriers that are often beyond their control, such as:

- funding stream requirements that limit programmatic changes
- lack of staff and volunteer training or experience in youth development approaches

- limited community partnerships to support your effort
- lack of buy-in from boards or top executives

Nevertheless, mentoring programs that are able to overcome these barriers and fully adopt youth development approaches are likely to improve their outcomes. While it may not be possible for your program to completely reorganize services and activities, there are many ways in which you can incorporate youth development principles and practices into what you are already doing.

Assessing your program in the context of youth development principles

Mentoring programs are all based on the practice of developing a positive and supportive relationship in order to help youth develop skills, interests, and attributes that will make them successful. But to what extent does your mentoring program actively promote youth development approaches and offer the opportunities and supports that facilitate healthy development? The following questions provide a good starting place for assessing how well your program incorporates youth development approaches into all parts of your program.

Q *Has your mentoring program established goals and outcomes that are based on the five Cs of youth development?*

All OSDFS-funded mentoring programs are working to achieve broad goals established by the Department of Education, including

- improving academic achievement
- improving interpersonal relationships with peers, teachers, other adults, and family members
- reducing school dropout rates
- reducing levels of juvenile delinquency and involvement in gangs

These goals focus on preventing negative behaviors and improving academic skill areas as well as on developing broader competencies such as positive view of self. The specific outcomes and activities your program has established to achieve these broad goals can—and should—be grounded in the Five C’s of youth development. Take some time to review your outcomes to see if they reflect these principles. For example, does the goal of academic improvement include outcomes focused on improving self-confidence and broad skill development in addition to specific academic outcomes such as increased math competencies? Since outcomes also drive activities, emphasizing these developmental outcomes can help everyone involved in your program focus on developmental activities and solutions to achieve the goals you have set.

Other examples of developmental outcomes include:

- Increased connectedness to school
- Involvement in and connections to community life
- Development of personal goals
- Development of positive peer relationships
- Increased life skill development in such areas as problem solving and social skills
- Improved ability to resist peer pressure and identify consequences of actions

By increasing your program’s emphasis on positive developmental outcomes and activities, you can enrich your services and ultimately make your program more successful. (Be sure to check with your OSDFS program officer before making any significant changes to your model and approach.)

Q *Does the environment of the program convey messages of youth as resources rather than problems, and provide culturally appropriate services and supports, clear guidelines for behavior, a strong sense of safety and belonging, and opportunities for youth voices to be heard?*

No matter what you tell mentees about your program, it’s what they see, hear, and feel when they walk

Assessing Your Youth Development Environment

- Does your environment show positive images of young people from all backgrounds on your walls, with information provided in formats and language that is youth-centered?
- Is staffing adequate to maintain a strong sense of safety?
- Do youth feel comfortable approaching adults, asking questions, making suggestions?
- Are staff and volunteers welcoming and respectful?
- Are guidelines for behavior and other program information posted so everyone knows what to expect?
- Are guidelines enforced consistently?
- Do young people participate in creating guidelines, activities, youth-focused materials, or other information?
- Does the facility have a place for youth to share information about events or activities, poems, stories, and other appropriate materials?
- Do youth have opportunities to make choices, even as they apply for the program?
- Are families welcomed and encouraged to participate?

(Lerner, Fisher and Weinberg, 2000)

through your doors or have their first meeting with a mentor that will stay with them. Both the physical environment of your program and the attitude and demeanor of staff and volunteers are important in conveying positive, supportive, and respectful messages to young people. Finding ways to ensure

that youth feel valued, included, and connected to your program will help them become more self assured and confident in their abilities. Use a checklist like the one on this page (See sidebar) to assess your program's environment and think about how you can make your program more inclusive. Ask youth and mentors to help you assess the space, gather their ideas for improvements, and involve them in implementing these ideas.

Q *Does initial and ongoing training provide mentors with skills that will help them understand the youth development approach, including open communication, shared decision-making and goal-setting, and building on the youth's strengths?*

Mentors are at the heart of your program, so the information and messages you convey to them about your program's philosophy and approach to working with youth is all-important. Most programs provide initial training that covers open communication, goal setting techniques, and other strength-based approaches. But training time may be limited and with so much to cover it can be difficult to include comprehensive training on youth development approaches. If your training does not include information, guidance and handouts on youth assets, developmental activities, encouraging youth involvement and leadership, and other information on youth development practices, it may be time to rework your training curriculum. Mentors also need ongoing training to help them process the developing relationship and learn additional positive approaches. The sidebar suggests topics for training mentors on youth development approaches.

Q *Does your program provide matches with opportunities that promote youth skill building, community participation, and experiences that help mentors and mentees work together on a goal or project?*

Community partnerships – both formal and informal – are a critical piece of implementing a youth development approach. No single program can offer everything youth need to thrive and grow; by engaging partners and others in your community you can offer many more opportunities and supports for your

Mentor Training in Youth Development Practices

Review your training curriculum to see how well it reflects a positive youth development approach. Mentors may need considerable guidance in understanding how to give their mentees real and meaningful opportunities to make decisions, set goals, contribute to their community, and learn from both their successes and their failures.

Important training topics related to youth development include:

- Developmental stages of youth
- Overview of the Five C's of youth development
- Helping mentees develop leadership skills
- Accessing your community for opportunities and supports
- Developing active listening skills
- Helping students develop skills outside the classroom
- Talking about diversity and culture with mentees
- Shared decision-making strategies that help mentees feel empowered
- How to encourage positive family and peer relationships
- Setting developmentally appropriate limits
- Modeling positive values, morals, and social norms

There are many online and print resources that you can draw from to develop training handouts and activities that reflect youth development principles. (See the resource list on p. 6)

matches that will enrich their experiences and help strengthen their relationships. Spend some time assessing your current and potential partners to see how they can help you more fully implement the Five C's of youth development. Think about organizations, businesses, and individuals outside of the traditional youth-serving community that could offer their support as well. Examples include:

- Businesses willing to host matches for a tour or set up a job shadowing activity
- Volunteer centers that have projects suitable for matches to do together
- Parks and recreation programs that could offer free classes for youth
- Community agencies that need youth to participate on advisory boards
- Mental health centers and other organizations that serve youth and families
- Senior citizens who have a skill they'd like to share with matches
- College students who need internship opportunities and could set up a special activity with matches, such as a photo or video project

Involve youth as you develop these resources by asking them what kinds of opportunities they'd like to have available. And once you have set up all these opportunities, make sure that mentors let their mentees take the lead in deciding what they would like to do, providing tools and training to mentors on how to help youth make decisions and set goals.

Q *Do young people have meaningful opportunities within the program to help plan and carry out activities and services, give input on what's working and what could use improvement, act as leaders, help other young people in the program, and make other contributions?*

While mentoring is first and foremost a one-to-one relationship between mentor and mentee, the young

people in your program are likely to feel more connected to the program if they have a role in making it successful. Look at the ways youth are already involved in your program. Are youth serving on your advisory board or committees? Do they have a voice in setting up activities? Have you asked them to help decorate your physical space or help design your brochures? Finding ways to get youth involved in meaningful ways can help encourage leadership development and increase youths' sense of belonging, both as part of your program

and a member of the larger community. Just asking youth for their opinions and taking them seriously is a step in the right direction, but real youth involvement takes time, commitment, and willingness to entrust leadership and decision-making to youth.

The next fact sheet in this series on youth development will provide practical ideas, activities, and tips for mentors to help them implement positive youth development approaches with their mentees.

Help is always available through the Mentoring Resource Center

In addition to the youth development resources listed below, the MRC can provide additional resources and individualized technical assistance to help OSDFS-funded programs incorporate best practices in mentoring into their programs. Contact the MRC at 1-877-579-4788, or visit the Web site at <http://www.edmentoring.org>

Online Resources

An assessment questionnaire for organizations developed in 1996 by The National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (NCFY) offers a useful tool to help assess readiness to implement a youth development approach. No longer available through NCFY, it can be found at the Web site of Connecticut for Community Youth Development (CCYD) as part of a general discussion of youth development: http://www.opm.state.ct.us/pdpd1/grants/CCYD/Youth_Development.htm

The Washington Youth Voice Handbook is published by Common Action, a national nonprofit dedicated to engaging young people and adults to solve problems together in communities. If you are ready to delve into creating new opportunities for youth voices to be heard, this manual offers a wealth of information, including assessment tools, training outlines and examples of successful programs. Download for free at: <http://www.commonaction.org/publications.htm>

Act for Youth, based in Ithaca, New York, works to strengthen community partnerships that promote positive youth development and prevent risky and unhealthy behaviors among young people, aged 10 to 19. Their Web site has numerous helpful resources and links on youth development and related topics. <http://www.actforyouth.net/>

Positive Youth Development Resource Manual, by J. Dotterweich, J., published by Act For Youth in 2006, is a comprehensive guide full of information, handouts, Power Point presentations and other useful materials on youth development that could be easily adapted for mentor, staff, and community training. Downloadable for free at: <http://www.actforyouth.net/?ydManual>

The CYD Journal, published by the Institute for Just Communities and the Center for Youth Development, promotes youth and adults working together in partnership to create just, safe, and healthy communities. The journal offers thought-provoking articles by leading youth development experts. Both current and archived issues may be downloaded for free at <http://www.cydjournal.org/>

The National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) is a free information service for communities, organizations, and individuals interested in developing new and effective strategies for supporting young people and their families. For resources on youth development, go to <http://www.ncfy.com/yd/index.html>

Ongoing Training for Mentors: Twelve Interactive Sessions for U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Programs, a publication of the Mentoring Resource Center, includes training sessions on goal setting and how to plan activities together. Downloadable for free at: http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/ongoing_training.pdf

Youth Development Guide: Engaging young people in after school programming, a publication of the Community Network for Youth Development, provides practical advice on strengthening practices and policies in after school programs to support learning and young people’s healthy development. Chapters provide specific approaches, tools and tips for incorporating youth development into programs and services. Downloadable for free at: http://www.cnyd.org/trainingtools/CNYD_YD_Guide.pdf

The Mentoring Fact Sheet is published by:

U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center
 771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2
 Folsom, CA 95630
 MRC Hotline: 1 (877) 579-4788, fax: (916) 983-6693
 E-mail: edmentoring@emt.org
 Web: <http://www.edmentoring.org>

This publication was funded by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED04CO0091/0001 with EMT Associates, Inc. The contracting officer’s representative was Bryan Williams. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government. This publication also contains hyperlinks and URLs for information created and maintained by private organizations. This information is provided for the reader’s convenience. The U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for controlling or guaranteeing the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information or a hyperlink or URL does not reflect the importance of the organization, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered.

