

TOOLKIT:

National Mentoring Month



Mentors can give young people the extra encouragement and support they need to be the best they can be in life.

Consider answering the call of National Mentoring Month by either becoming a mentor yourself or, if you are with an organization, supporting the mentoring programs in your community.



For Individuals Who Want to be Mentors

What is a mentor?

A mentor is a caring and committed older individual in a young person's life. By spending a few hours a week sharing activities, listening, encouraging, challenging, and building skills and self-reliance, volunteer mentors can help children from kindergarten through high school achieve success. Research conducted by Private/Public Ventures based on the Big Brothers Big Sisters model (P/PV, 2000) ¹ found that youth who are successfully matched with an adult are 52 percent less likely to skip school, earn slightly higher grades, and feel better about how they are doing in school.

Why mentor?

Consider becoming a mentor if you enjoy spending time with young people and are concerned about their success. Children and youth benefit from a spectrum of community support that includes adult role models from all walks of life. People often become mentors to:

1. Honor important adults who made a difference in their own lives;
2. Gain a sense of fulfillment from helping young people;
3. Help young people increase their school success;
4. Expose young people to career opportunities;
5. Help young people make better life choices.



¹ Grossman, J. B., & Tierney, J. P. (2000). Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. (<http://www.ppv.org/content/mentoring>)

Created by LEARNS, a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Bank Street College of Education. LEARNS is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service to provide training and technical assistance to programs engaged in mentoring, tutoring, and out-of-school time.

For Individuals Who Want to be Mentors (cont.)

How can I find mentoring opportunities?

Opportunities to mentor exist in most local communities. Schools, faith-based organizations, community service, and youth-serving agencies host a range of structured mentoring programs. These programs can provide you with the training and support that will help you serve as an effective mentor. Explore the following links to find mentoring opportunities in your area that match your interests and needs:

- USA Freedom Corps <http://www.volunteer.gov>
- The National Mentoring Partnership <http://www.mentoring.org>
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America <http://www.bbbsa.org>
- MENTORYOUTH.com <http://www.mentoryouth.com>

What qualifications do I need to be a mentor?

Good mentors are people who genuinely enjoy children and youth and like to spend time with them. They have the time and energy to commit to a regular meeting schedule, and they know they can follow through on the commitment. Good mentors are flexible, have healthy boundaries, are patient, and self-aware. They have a good sense of humor, good communication skills, and are enthusiastic about making a difference in the lives of young people.

What is the process for becoming a mentor?

Though the process varies from program to program, it generally begins with an application process which may include a confidentiality statement, a rights and responsibilities form, and an interest checklist, as well as fingerprinting, background check, reference check, and an interview. Some programs require a Tuberculin screening and verification of valid driver's license with proof of insurance. After an orientation to the specifics of your program, you'll be matched with a youth. Depending on the program, this process can take from a few weeks up to a few months.

What activities can I do with a youth?

Mentoring activities also vary from program to program. Though supportive youth-focused relationships form the basis of all effective mentoring efforts, some programs focus on providing homework help or tutoring; others may focus on enrichment activities. Mentors and youth may read together, engage in a service activity, bake cookies, go for a walk, play basketball, visit a museum or the library, tour the local community college, work on homework, construct an airplane model, take a bike ride, learn about other cultures, take up a sport, make a collage, tour a hospital, visit a radio station, pick local fruit at a U-Pick farm, visit a local bank, create a time capsule, do a job shadow, listen to music... the ideas are endless!

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How can I be most effective as a mentor?

Based on a study of Big Brothers Big Sisters, the following strategies help mentors develop trust and build a sustained and effective mentoring relationship. (For more detail, check the resources section below or download *Building Relationships: A Guide for New Mentors*, available online at <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packfour.pdf>.)

- **Be an advocate and a role model.** Your role is not to replace parents or serve as an authority figure.
- **Be consistent and maintain regular contact.** Many young people have been disappointed by adults in their lives. One of the best ways to build trust is to be a patient and regular presence in a young person's life.
- **Set realistic goals and expectations.** Work to build a trusting relationship first. Changes such as improved school performance take time. Achieving short-term goals (e.g., better school attendance) can build confidence and motivation to tackle long term goals.
- **Give your mentee voice and choice in deciding on activities.** Provide a range of activity choices for youth. Youth feel more invested in the relationship if they can exercise some control.
- **Be positive.** Offer frequent encouragement and expressions of direct confidence. Notice and remark on positive behaviors.
- **Let your mentee have control over what the two of you talk about – and how you talk about it.** Be sensitive to the youth's cues. Don't push for confidences or fire too many questions at your mentee.
- **Listen.** "Just listening" is a critical form of emotional support.
- **Respect the trust your mentee places in you.** Respond in ways that show you see your mentee's side of things. Give advice sparingly. Maintain confidentiality.
- **Remember that you are responsible for building the relationship.** Take responsibility for making and maintaining contact. Understand that youth may not give mentors feedback and reassurance, but this does not mean they are not benefiting from the relationship.
- **Have fun together.** With parents' support, mentors can expose young people to a range of new activities that are both fun and educational. Spending time with a mentor should be enjoyable for young people.

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For Individuals Who Want to be Mentors (cont.)

How much money might I be required to spend?

The focus of mentoring is on the quality of the relationship. Mentors are encouraged to provide low-cost or no-cost recreational and learning opportunities for youth. Use money sparingly to avoid setting up monetary expectations that you may be uncomfortable with later. If an activity involves some cost, it is wise to agree beforehand on how much money you will spend. Make sure your mentee's parent/guardian feels comfortable with the activity. Many programs provide discounted tickets to local events and ideas for low-cost activities.

Resources for Mentors

Many resources have been developed for mentors and mentoring organizations. Here are just a few that feature ready-to-use tools, activities, and information specifically for mentors:

- **Building Relationships: A Guide for New Mentors**
<http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packfour.pdf>

Based on an extensive survey of mentors and mentees about their relationships, this guide focuses on 10 effective relationship strategies for mentors.

- **MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership**
<http://www.mentoring.org>

With a Web site that provides mentoring activities, online training, and support, MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership hosts the largest database of mentoring opportunities in the U.S., as well as legislative advocacy and information to encourage adults to serve as mentors.

- **Overcoming Relationship Pitfalls**
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet10.pdf>

Produced by the Mentoring Resource Center, this fact sheet provides an overview of the match life cycle to give new mentors perspective and helpful hints as they build relationships with mentees.

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For Organizations that Want to Become Mentoring Programs

What is a Mentor?

A mentor is a caring and committed adult friend in a young person's life. By spending a few hours a week sharing activities, listening, encouraging, challenging, and enriching a youth's skills and self-reliance, volunteer mentors can help young people from kindergarten through high school achieve academic and personal success. Research conducted by Private/Public Ventures based on the Big Brothers Big Sisters model (P/PV, 2000) found that youth who are successfully matched with an adult are 52 percent less likely to skip school, earn slightly higher grades, and feel better about how they are doing in school.

Considerations for Starting a Mentoring Program

P/PV found that many mentor programs fail due to lack of adequate infrastructure or support for mentor matches. Begin by identifying current mentoring efforts in your area and consider whether your organization can partner with an existing high-quality mentoring program. Before approaching a prospective partner, brainstorm the potential benefits you could offer: clients, recruitment assistance, training opportunities, funding, or in-kind support.

Remember, running a mentoring program requires serious long-term commitment from all involved. A "bad" or poorly-supported mentor match can be worse for children than having no mentor at all. If your organization is small and will rely on volunteers to staff the effort, consider the following tips before starting out:

- Be realistic. Mentoring programs should not be mere "add-ons" to existing programs. They are programs within themselves and require dedicated staff time to create, monitor, and support.
- Understand the cost of mentoring. On average, community-based programs spend \$1,114 per year per youth (P/PV, Contemporary Issues in Mentoring). Depending on the number of mentor-mentee matches you're considering, identify the staff resources you will need for matching, training, and support.
- Think small. Develop a small pilot project with fewer than 15 mentor-mentee matches to start. Starting small will help you refine your services without compromising program quality.

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For Organizations that Want to Become Mentoring Programs (cont.)

Mentor Recruitment

As part of its initiative to ensure a brighter future for America's youth, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is working to significantly increase the number of youth in disadvantaged circumstances who have mentors. Consider partnering with national service programs in your area to enhance your mentor recruitment efforts. Visit the CNCS Web site – <http://www.nationalservice.gov> – for more information. Go to National Service in Your State to identify local contacts: http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/state_profiles.asp.

Because an unsuccessful match can be harmful for youth, effective mentoring programs will want to develop thorough recruitment plans that target the right volunteers for this important work with young people. The following tools may be helpful as your organization considers its approach to mentor recruitment:

- **Effective Mentor Recruitment: Getting Organized, Getting Results.**
Topics in this tool include how to develop a recruitment plan tailored to local circumstances and opportunities, established best practices in mentor recruitment, and strategies for solving many common recruitment challenges. Download a free copy at: <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/recruitment.pdf>.
- **Marketing Toolkit for Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools Mentoring Programs.**
Designed to give practitioners ready-to-use files that can be customized to create quality marketing materials, this toolkit includes ideas that can be incorporated into existing marketing efforts, such as brochures, newsletters, and posters. Access the toolkit at: <http://www.edmentoring.org/toolkit>.
- **Marketing for the Recruitment of Mentors: A Guide to Finding and Attracting Volunteers.**
This guide covers the basics of marketing planning, strategies for creating messages that appeal to your audience, and tips and techniques for getting your message to potential volunteers in a variety of formats. Download a free copy at: <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/marketing.pdf>.
- **Recruiting Mentors: A Guide to Finding Volunteers to Work with Youth.**
Drawing on effective practices used by volunteer-based organizations and on research findings about mentoring, this T/TA packet describes recruitment strategies that programs can adapt to meet their particular circumstances. Download a free copy at: <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packthree.pdf>.
- **Mentor Recruitment – Getting Started.** The National Network of Youth Ministries maintains a collection of mentor recruitment resources that can be downloaded or ordered for use in your program. View the available materials at: <http://www.mentoryouth.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/recruitment.gettingstarted>.

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For Organizations that Want to Become Mentoring Programs (cont.)

Elements of Quality Mentoring Programs

MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership has developed Elements of Effective Practice to serve as a guide for developing quality mentoring programs. The Elements address the areas of program design and planning, program management, program operations, and program evaluation. The guidelines for effective program operations are excerpted below. To learn more about the Elements, access the complete list, and download a companion toolkit, visit: http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php.

Elements of effective mentoring **program operations** include the following:

- Recruit mentors, mentees and other volunteers:
 - ◆ Define eligibility for participants, including mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers;
 - ◆ Market the program, and
 - ◆ Conduct awareness and information sessions for potential mentors.
- Screen potential mentors and mentees:
 - ◆ Require written applications;
 - ◆ Conduct reference checks, such as, employment record, character reference, child abuse registry, driving record and criminal record checks;
 - ◆ Conduct face-to-face interviews, and
 - ◆ Hold orientations.
- Orient and train mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers;
 - ◆ Provide an overview of the program;
 - ◆ Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations, and
 - ◆ Discuss how to handle a variety of situations.
- Match mentors and mentees:
 - ◆ Use established criteria;
 - ◆ Arrange an introduction between mentors and mentees, and
 - ◆ Ensure mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers understand and agree to the terms and conditions of program participation.
- Bring mentors and mentees together for mentoring sessions that fall within the program parameters:
 - ◆ Provide safe locations and circumstances, and
 - ◆ Provide resources and materials for activities.
- Provide ongoing support, supervision and monitoring of mentoring relationships:
 - ◆ Offer continuing training opportunities for program participants;
 - ◆ Communicate regularly with participants and offer support;
 - ◆ Help mentors and mentees define next steps for achieving mentee goals;
 - ◆ Bring mentors together to share ideas and support;
 - ◆ Establish a process to manage grievances, resolve issues and offer positive feedback;
 - ◆ Assist mentors and mentees whose relationship is not working out, and
 - ◆ Assure that appropriate documentation is done on a regular basis.

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For Organizations that Want to Become Mentoring Programs (cont.)

Elements of effective mentoring **program operations** include the following (cont.):

- Recognize the contribution of all program participants:
 - ◆ Sponsor recognition events;
 - ◆ Make the community aware of the contributions made by mentors, mentees, supporters and funders;
 - ◆ Actively solicit feedback from mentors and mentees regarding their experiences, and
 - ◆ Use information to refine program and retain mentors.
- Help mentors and mentees reach closure:
 - ◆ Conduct private, confidential interviews with mentors and mentees, and
 - ◆ Ensure mentors, mentees and parent/caregivers understand program policy regarding meeting outside the program.

Help for Establishing and Running a Quality Mentor Program

Several organizations and Web sites exist to help new mentoring programs with various aspects of program development. Here are a few of the most comprehensive resources:

1. Resources for Program Start-Up, Best Practices, Evaluation, and Sustainability

- **Evaluation, Management, and Training (EMT)**
<http://www.emt.org/publications.html>
One of the leading research organizations in the field of mentoring. The Web site features no-cost downloadable resources on mentoring topics such as program start-up, sustainability, best practices, marketing, mentoring special populations, and training.
- **MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership**
<http://www.mentoring.org>
The largest database of mentoring opportunities in the U.S., as well as support, resources, legislative advocacy, and information to strengthen youth mentoring programs and encourage adults to serve as mentors.

2. Resources for Training and Supporting Program Staff and Mentors

- **LEARNS**
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/sites/learns>
The Corporation for National and Community Service Training and Technical Assistance Provider for mentoring grantees offers free print and downloadable resources, training, and technical assistance via phone and e-mail to help programs with all aspects of effective volunteer management.

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For Organizations that Want to Become Mentoring Programs (cont.)

2. Resources for Training and Supporting Program Staff and Mentors (cont.)

- **National Mentoring Center (NMC)**

<http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring>

Created in 1998 by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency the NMC provides dedicated training and technical assistance to youth mentoring programs across the country to ensure that they deliver the best possible services to youth. In 2004, funding from the U.S. Department of Education allowed NMC to expand its services to include school-based youth mentoring programs. The NMC offers an array of no-cost, downloadable, research-based training curricula and tools and hosts the Mentor Exchange listserv.

3. Resources for School-Based Mentoring and Mentoring School-Age Children

- **Making the Grade: A Guide to Incorporating Academic Achievement Into Mentoring Programs and Relationships**

http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/making_the_grade.pdf

Designed to help program coordinators structure services to encourage academic development in school-based mentoring programs and partner more effectively with schools, the guide also provides staff with useful training content to give mentors the skills and understanding they need to help facilitate student learning and academic performance.

- **The ABCs of School-Based Mentoring**

<http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/packets.html>

A 100-page guide to developing, promoting, and strengthening a school-based youth mentoring program is available in two sections for easier downloading. Part 1 is the main text; Part 2 is an Appendix of sample forms that programs can use as they implement the program.

- **School-Based Mentoring: A Closer Look**

http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/180_publication.pdf

This new report further examines some of the issues explored in P/PV's earlier school-based research, such as the characteristics of mentor-youth matches, the quality of those relationships, and the benefits for participants.

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For Organizations that Want to Become Mentoring Programs (cont.)

4. Resources for Faith-Based and Community Mentoring

- **Public/Private Ventures (P/PV)**

<http://www.ppv.org/content/faith1.html>

P/PV has produced some of the most valuable research-based products in the field of mentoring, including documents on the effects of faith initiatives on high-risk youth. Most of the information is available for download at no cost. P/PV resources are required reading for anyone thinking about starting or running a mentoring program. Together with its Amachi program (<http://www.amachimentoring.org>), P/PV is also the Corporation for National and Community Service's Training and Technical Assistance Provider for Faith- and Community-Based Initiatives and Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents.

- **MENTORYOUTH.com**

<http://www.mentoryouth.com>

A project of the National Network of Youth Ministries and funded by the Department of Justice, MENTORYOUTH.com works to recruit and refer Christian adults, and the community as a whole, to mentoring programs in their local communities.

- **USA Freedom Corps**

<http://www.volunteer.gov>

USA Freedom Corps is a coordinating council housed at the White House and chaired by President George W. Bush. The council works to strengthen our nation's culture of service and help find opportunities for every American to start volunteering. The Web site offers opportunities for mentoring in community and faith-based organizations.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What types of mentoring programs exist?

Several types of mentoring programs exist. Community-based models, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, allow mentors and mentees to spend time together doing activities in the community, such as going to the park, visiting a local university, or attending a sporting event. School-based mentoring takes place in a school setting. Mentors and mentees may have lunch together, work on school projects or homework, or play games. Site-based mentoring is similar to school-based mentoring; mentors and mentees meet at a specific site, such as a YMCA or Boys and Girls Club, to participate in fun activities together. E-mentoring is a relatively new model in which a mentoring relationship is conducted via the Internet. Other models include faith-based, group, and workplace mentoring.

How do I recruit more male volunteers?

If you want to recruit a specific population of mentors, your recruitment plan must be targeted toward that population. For example, use men as part of the recruitment team, use photos of men in promotional materials, and develop a catchy message aimed at men. When speaking to organizations or groups, have a male staff person or volunteer present the information from his perspective. Finally, go to the places in your community where men traditionally congregate, such as fraternal organizations, military bases, barbershops, and sporting events. For more ideas read: Recruiting Male Volunteers: A Guide Based on Exploratory Research from the Corporation for National and Community Service:

<http://www.energizeinc.com/download/blackman.pdf>

How do we conduct background checks on our volunteers?

Appropriate volunteer screening is a critical element of any mentoring program. There are a variety of ways to conduct criminal background checks, depending on your program needs and the state you live in. There are many levels of criminal history, such as: convictions, arrests, deferred adjudication, warrants/warrants, juvenile records, child abuse reports, and sexual offender registries.

Organizations providing mentor services must create criteria for selection or rejection of potential volunteers before they begin the background check process. Check with your partner organization, funding agency, and/or school district to ensure compliance with specific requirements. Youth-serving organizations generally agree that individuals should be permanently disqualified from holding positions that require substantial contact with children if their criminal records include any of the following: past history of sexual abuse of children, conviction for any crime involving children, history of any violence or sexually exploitive behavior.

MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership makes affordable nationwide FBI fingerprint-based background checks available to any mentoring program in the country via SafetyNET.

For more information, visit:

<http://apps.mentoring.org/safetynet/index.adp>

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