



Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools: An Introductory Guide



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Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools

An Introductory Guide

by Michael Garringer and Patti MacRae,
Mentoring Resource Center

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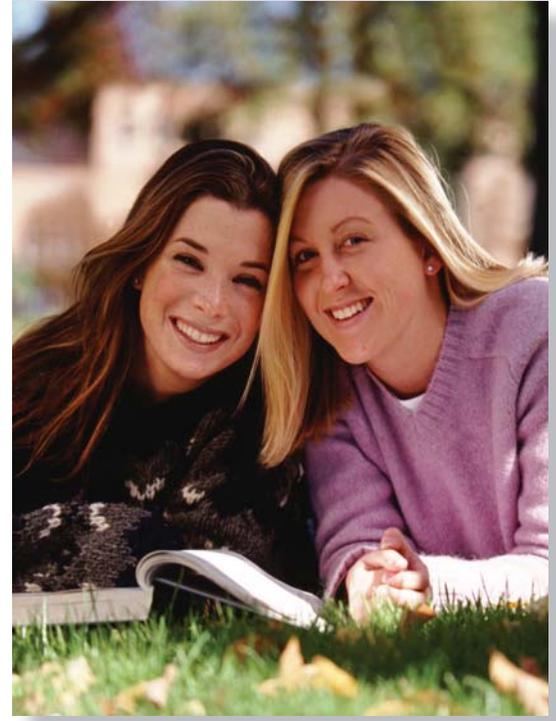
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Introduction

Cross-age peer mentoring programs are an increasingly popular choice for educators and youth development professionals hoping to create positive outcomes for youth. These programs, in which older youth befriend and mentor younger children in a structured environment, are growing in popularity for a number of reasons:

- They can produce a number of positive outcomes for *both* sets of participants (see sidebar on page 3). Cross-age peer programs provide growth and learning opportunities for both mentors and mentees, resulting in a “double impact” that is appealing to schools and districts attempting to support students with limited financial and community resources.
- Fewer resources are needed for recruiting mentors. Peer mentors are recruited from student populations within participating schools, which cuts down on the amount of marketing and outreach usually needed to recruit adult mentors. Since most cross-age peer mentoring programs are based at the school site, fewer financial resources may be needed for recruitment staff or facilities. These programs tend to take advantage of existing resources and school infrastructure.
- They capitalize on the importance of peer relationships for adolescents. Cross-age peer programs take advantage of adolescents’ increasing interest in peer friendships as they enter the teenage years. Mentees’ natural tendency to look up to slightly older youth means that they view their mentor as a role model and someone worth listening to. Peer mentors also benefit from interacting with each other in positive ways through the volunteer experience, often building new relationships beyond their normal circle of friends.
- They can help with transition points in participants’ lives. Mentees in elementary or middle school benefit from having an older student help them through the challenges of moving to a new school and the accompanying changes in social relationships that brings. High school mentors build personal skills and confidence that can help prepare them for their lives after high school. Their involvement in the program can also be a meaningful addition to applications for colleges and future jobs.
- They can be more appealing to parents of mentees, who may feel uncomfortable with an unknown adult becoming involved with their child. Having their child



participate in a school-sanctioned peer mentoring program that often takes place during the day and is supervised by school staff, may feel safer.

This increase in popularity has led to rapid expansion of peer programs around the country. It is now estimated that over 25 percent of all Big Brothers Big Sisters matches are cross-age peer relationships, and over 40 percent of BBBS school-based matches are with high school-aged volunteers (Karcher, 2007). Other school-based programs, such as U.S. Department of Education school-based mentoring grantees, are also turning increasingly to the cross-age peer model. Peer mentoring is clearly a strategy whose time has come.

The promise of the cross-age peer mentoring model is best supported by sound program practice and an understanding of how peer mentoring differs from the traditional adult-youth mentoring model more familiar to schools and youth development programs. This guidebook is intended to provide an introduction to best practices associated with cross-age peer mentoring programs. It draws on research and observed program practices that can lead to successful outcomes, mostly for programs that take place at a school site—although much of the advice could be adapted by community centers or afterschool programs.

No two mentoring programs are alike and there is considerable potential for flexibility in how peer mentoring programs are designed and implemented. Thus, the advice and strategies in this guidebook, and the accompanying Web seminar (<http://www.edmentoring.org/seminar7.html>), are focused on key considerations that will be widely applicable to most peer mentoring programs, regardless of their specific themes, activities, and staffing patterns. In addition to the key considerations highlighted in this guidebook, we have also provided listings of many other resources that can help peer mentoring programs improve overall design, training provided to mentors, and the quality of activities mentors and mentees engage in during meeting times.

Defining Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

Peer helping and tutoring programs have been popular in U.S. schools for decades and are often seen as a great way to build leadership and communication skills in youth while engaging them in academic activities, such as homework completion or test preparation. Peer counseling is another common approach, providing opportunities for students to work with each other in a number of social and emotional areas. While these approaches all have benefits, it is important to distinguish them from cross-age peer mentoring, which has a different emphasis and structure.

Cross-age peer mentoring refers to programs in which an older youth (mentor) is matched with a younger student (mentee) for the purpose of guiding and supporting the mentee in many areas of her academic, social, and emotional development. These programs are “cross-age” because there is a gap between the age of the mentor and mentee, which allows for effective role modeling and positions the mentor as a wiser and older individual, as with adult-youth mentoring. But these programs are also “peer” programs because they focus exclusively on youth-youth relationships.

While other peer programs may include elements of mentoring, cross-age peer mentoring is most defined by the emphasis on the match. **The relationship between mentor and mentee is the primary focus.** The program's goals, objectives, and desired outcomes are achieved through the establishment of trusting, mutually beneficial developmental relationships between mentors and mentees. Because of this emphasis on the relationship, cross-age peer mentoring programs primarily use a one-on-one model, although many also offer opportunities for group activities and interactions.

Although peer mentoring programs may occasionally engage matches in tutoring, homework help, test preparation, or other structured tasks, these activities are secondary to the development of the relationship. This positions cross-age peer mentoring as a broad developmental intervention, as opposed to “goal-oriented efforts aimed primarily at improving academic skills (tutoring), resolving interpersonal problems (peer education; peer assistance), or addressing personal problems (counseling).” The relationship may touch on these, but is not defined by these “narrow goals” (Karcher, 2007).

The most common program structure involves high school youth working with mentees at a feeder middle or elementary school, although some programs draw both mentors and mentees from the same school (for example, high school juniors mentoring incoming freshmen). Relationships tend to last for the whole school year, when possible, and some programs include summer break activities to keep matches engaged and help with school transitions. Ideally, these matches would continue across multiple school years.

Matches in these school-based programs primarily meet at the school site and often have access to school resources, such as the library, cafeteria, and gymnasium. Many programs

What Can Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Achieve?

One of the main appeals of peer mentoring is that it can produce a range of positive outcomes for both older peer mentors and their younger mentees. While the research on peer mentoring programs is less extensive than on adult-youth models, a number of key research findings speak to the power of a peer mentoring approach:

- For mentees, these programs have shown a positive impact on...
 - Connectedness to school and peers
 - Feelings of competency and self-efficacy
 - Grades and academic achievement
 - Prosocial behavior and attitudes
- For mentors, there have been reported improvements in...
 - Connectedness to school
 - Self-esteem
 - Empathy and moral reasoning
 - Intrapersonal communication and conflict resolution skills
 - Relationships with parents

Research indicates that cross-age matches often meet for more time and more frequently than adult-youth mentoring relationships, and there is some evidence that they may have a greater impact on mentees' feelings of connectedness to school than adult-youth mentoring.

Analysis of the research also indicates that the impacts, for both mentors and mentees, may be more pronounced if mentors are of high school age and if there is at least a two-year age difference between mentor and mentee (hence, the importance of a cross-age peer model in which there is some developmental hierarchy between mentor and mentee) (Karcher, 2007).

In order to achieve the positive outcomes noted above, programs must pay close attention to program structures and practices that support peer mentors as they work with their mentees.

also conduct group activities, both on campus and in the community. Because providing structured activities has proven effective in afterschool settings (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), many programs use a set curriculum or activity guide and most provide some planned activities in a youth-development context (see next section for further discussion). Most often, however, the emphasis remains on fun and personal interaction.

This model of cross-age peer mentoring has proven to be highly effective in developing mentors and mentees alike. The rest of this guide explores strategies for creating and enhancing peer mentoring programs that fit this definition.

1. Considerations for Program Design

While programs have an almost endless variety of themes and activities to choose from, the following practices are considered hallmarks of any quality cross-age peer mentoring program.

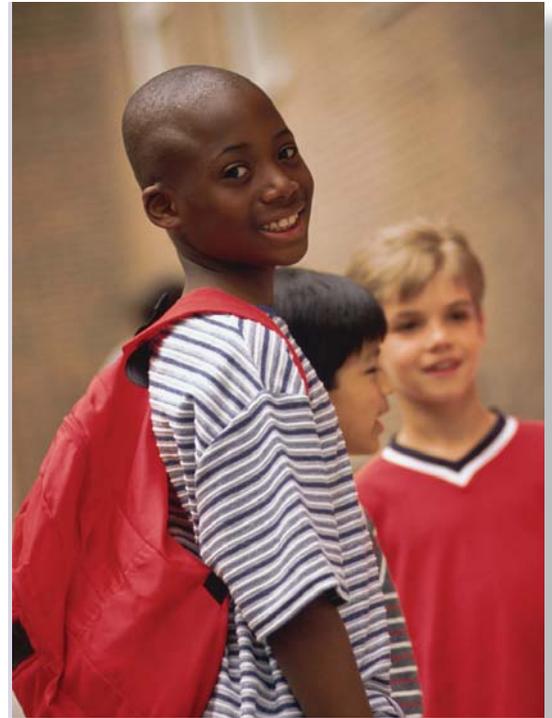
The cross-age peer mentoring model is a good fit for your goals.

Peer mentoring is neither easy nor applicable to all situations. Your program's goals, the population of mentees you are planning to serve, logistical issues facing your school district, and other factors should be considered before deciding to implement a cross-age peer mentoring model. The most effective programs are those in which school district and program staff understand what the peer mentoring program is intended to achieve and what it will take to make it work. See Karcher (2007) for some excellent tools that can help you determine if a cross-age peer mentoring model fits with your goals and setting.

Program outcomes are defined and supported by a logic model.

Once you have established your underlying goals for choosing this model, all your programmatic decisions should be based on achieving them. The best way to ensure that your goals are met is to develop a logic model that shows exactly how the mentoring relationships, and the activities you implement, will achieve the desired outcomes. For example, if your program aims to increase college attendance for mentors, while reducing substance abuse among mentees, the logic model will clearly describe how your program will produce those outcomes. A logic model is a road map to your program's success that can:

- Identify specific activities, or even a whole curriculum, that can have an impact on identified youth needs.
- Determine what partnerships and resources are needed to support your goals. If you are hoping to improve grades and academic achievement, then access to the school library, tutors, computer labs, and other resources are a must. A program designed to increase career exploration may need to partner with local businesses and colleges. A logic model can identify the resources needed to align your end with your means.
- Clarify the data you need to collect for program evaluation purposes and how you will collect it. A program hoping to impact mentees' sense of connectedness to



school will need to identify or create a tool that measures feelings of connectedness. The program must also clarify partnerships and staff roles to ensure timely access to pieces of critical data.

Figure 1 represents the common categories detailed in most logic models. For more information on logic models and their use in program design and decision making, see the Mentoring Resource Center publication *Using Mentoring Research Findings To Build Effective Programs*, available at: http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/using_research_book.pdf.

Need 	Resources/ Inputs 	Activities 	Outputs 	Intermediate outcomes (1–5 years) 	Impact/long- term outcomes 
The problem(s) your program will address	Program ingredients, such as funds, staff, volunteers, partners, etc.	Specific activities and services the program will provide	Specific evidence of services provided (numbers)	Positive changes that will take place as a result of services	Lasting and significant results of your program over the long term

Figure 1. Elements of a Basic Logic Model

Matches must have a developmental focus.

As mentioned previously, cross-age peer mentoring programs are most successful when they take a developmental, rather than an instructive or prescriptive approach. Developmental mentoring emphasizes the “Five Cs” of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (see sidebar, next page). Peer mentors can help mentees in each of these areas, in addition to gaining benefits in these categories themselves. When training your peer mentors, and choosing activities for mentoring pairs, keep the Five Cs in mind, as they can ensure participants have many paths to personal growth.

No matter what the goals of your program are, the best way to achieve them is by allowing the development of a strong personal connection between mentor and mentee. While having some structured activities can help bring focus to the match and support your specific outcomes (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), having too many activities, especially those that are purely focused on academics, can inhibit the development of the relationship and ultimately reduce the program’s impact. Matches need time and freedom to form their relationships by engaging each other in ways that are fun, creative, and unique to each participant.

School administration strongly supports the program.

Buy-in from the top is critical to any aspect of school programming. Cross-age peer mentoring programs in school settings must have the support of principals and other administrators. Getting support from and the active participation of teachers, counselors, and other school staff is much easier if school leaders promote the program. Administrators can also be instrumental in securing school resources and forging partnerships with key community resources. They are also necessary players in developing formal policies and procedures that govern program operations.

Be prepared to educate school administrators and other school staff on the effectiveness of a developmental rather than prescriptive approach to achieving academic and social outcomes. Asking administrators to serve on your program's advisory committee can also help ensure their support and understanding of program goals.

Roles and responsibilities of all staff and partners are clearly defined.

Implementing a peer mentoring program in a school setting requires the coordination and cooperation of many individual players. Program staff, teachers, administrators, parents, counselors, and youth participants all need well-defined roles that allow them to support the program and individual mentoring relationships.

The most critical role is that of the **site coordinator**, who is primarily responsible for recruiting participants, training mentors, and supervising matches. Emerging research indicates that supervision and ongoing support may be particularly important in fostering the success of peer mentoring relationships. (Herrera, Kauh, Cooney, Grossman, & McMaken, 2008). A dedicated site coordinator can ensure that the program is functioning smoothly and that matches have access to advice and other support that can help them work through any relationship difficulties.

Teachers, counselors, and other school staff also have important roles to play, such as referring mentors or mentees or providing matches with access to resources, space, or supplies. These individuals can be helpful in reporting positive program impacts on student behavior, classroom participation, or grades. Giving teachers an active, helpful role in the program will ensure broad support throughout the school.

If your program is a partnership between a community-based mentoring program and a school site, define roles and responsibilities clearly. The worksheets in Appendix A of this guide can help your program clarify roles of key stakeholders and appropriately assign tasks related to program management, implementation, and evaluation.

What Are the Five Cs of Youth Development?

The Five Cs are a general framework highlighting the critical areas in which all young people need to develop. Peer mentoring relationships can benefit tremendously from a framework designed to provide opportunities for both mentors and mentees in each of these areas:

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

For more information on youth development in the context of school-based mentoring, see the following MRC Fact Sheets:

- *Understanding the Youth Development Model*
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet13.pdf>
- *Putting Youth Development Principles to Work in Mentoring Programs*
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet14.pdf>
- *A Mentor's Guide to Youth Development*
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet15.pdf>

The risks of a cross-age peer mentoring model are understood and accounted for.

While there is tremendous potential for success with cross-age peer mentoring, there are also risks involved. Emerging research indicates that programs must pay attention to several critical areas if they are to reach their goals. Among the risks that must be accounted for in a peer mentoring model:

- **Mentors and mentees may not fully understand their roles**—Being a “wise and trusted” source of guidance is not an easy role for a teenager. Adult mentors are successful, in part, because they often have life experience and knowledge that provide both wisdom they can share with a mentee and context for their role as a support to youth. Typically, peer mentors do not have such life experience to draw on. They will need extra training on the role of a mentor, tips for being supportive to others, and instructions on where to turn for help with problems that are beyond their power to address. Program expectations that might be obvious to an adult may need to be spelled out to youth early and often, such as the importance of timeliness or the need to call in if they are unable to make a meeting.

Mentees may not understand how a mentor can help them reach their goals, feel awkward or intimidated working with a slightly older student, or feel that a referral to the program is a form of punishment. They need thorough pre-match orientation to get them off to a good start. Both mentors and mentees need a lot of explanation from the program about exactly how they will be working together and what they can achieve with their mentoring relationship.

- **Peer mentors can sometimes provide negative role modeling**—High school-age mentors can be very influential figures for younger students, who often look up to these older peers in ways that they would not look up to an adult mentor. This is a powerful role for teenagers to fill and there is always the danger that they will model negative behaviors and attitudes for their mentee. The last thing you want in your program are mentors who, intentionally or not, encourage the very antisocial or delinquent behaviors your program hopes to address, a circumstance some researchers have termed “deviancy training” (Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000). Thorough screening, ongoing training and support, regular check-ins with mentor and mentee, and match supervision can help alleviate these problems.
- **Peer mentoring relationships may struggle with consistency and quality**—The social dynamics of peer relationships give mentors the power to do both great good and great harm to the mentees with whom they are working. It can be traumatic to mentees when mentors fail to show up for meetings or appear indifferent to them. Mentees may feel rejected, and there is considerable potential for them to internalize negative feelings about themselves or the program. Program staff must always explain to mentees why their mentor is unable to make a scheduled meeting. Mentors who consistently miss meetings need reminders about the importance of consistent participation. And if mentors need to drop out of the program, for whatever

reason, a termination activity can minimize any negative feelings and help both mentor and mentee find closure about the relationship.

Relationship *quality* can also be a concern in peer mentoring programs. As with adult mentors, peer mentors can feel overwhelmed by the problems and needs of the youth they are working with. Because of their lack of life experience, they may not have answers to tough questions or know how to provide appropriate help. Mentors and mentees may have personality conflicts they are unable to voice to staff, or they may dislike program activities and respond by acting out or failing to participate. Supervisory staff need to be able to perceive these sometimes subtle problems and help matches work through them.

A cross-age peer mentoring relationship is a powerful form of youth development, but one that cannot be left to its own devices. When young people are helping other young people, program staff must provide extra context, structure, and support. Strategies for providing proper mentor screening, increased participant training, engaging activities, and extensive ongoing match supervision are addressed in the remaining sections of this guidebook.

2. Participant Recruitment, Screening, and Selection

Once you have decided to implement a cross-age peer mentoring model in your school district, you will need to build a program that will achieve its outcomes and is developmentally appropriate for the mentors and mentees you plan to engage. Key ingredients for any successful mentoring program are:

- Effective recruitment of mentors and mentees
- Thorough volunteer screening and selection
- Quality initial and ongoing training
- A rich array of match activities
- Regular supervision and support

Your program can draw on the many useful resources on establishing a traditional school-based mentoring program that are already available in the mentoring field. However, there are numerous subtle—and some not so subtle—differences between adult-youth and peer mentoring, and the activities and procedures you develop must be customized to meet the specific needs and developmental stages of the youth who are serving as mentors.

This section offers guidance for recruiting and selecting peer mentors and the mentees they will be working with. In sections 3 and 4 we will look at key considerations for training and supporting mentors and developing quality match activities.

Recruiting Youth To Be Mentors

Peer mentoring programs have a wonderful advantage over those that rely on adult volunteers: a constant supply of potential mentors to draw from. Your recruitment tactics can focus on how to attract those students who are best suited to become successful peer mentors—and for whom the mentoring experience will benefit their own skills and development. The following areas are especially important in the context of your youthful volunteers.

Establish criteria for mentor selection.

Before beginning a recruitment campaign use your goals and objectives to establish criteria for mentor selection, especially if you plan to target a special population to serve as



mentors. These selection criteria will help you determine your recruitment strategy by specifically targeting the populations of youth you hope to attract.

Start with basic criteria, such as age and year in school. As mentioned in section 1, an age difference of at least two years and/or two grades between mentor and mentee is considered an important factor in maintaining boundaries in the relationship. There is also some evidence that high school mentors are more effective than middle schoolers, as they may be developmentally more prepared to use good judgment, maintain boundaries, and be a “wise and trusted friend.” (Karcher, 2007)

Availability is another important basic criterion. Youth should be available to participate in match meetings, initial and ongoing training, and other activities. While no youth is likely to be available for every activity, choosing youth who are not overcommitted can help ensure that they will follow through with their commitments to the program.

Overall match duration is also an important consideration. Some programs exclude high school seniors because they are unable to continue beyond the end of the school year and may be overloaded with activities and planning for their own futures.

Beyond these basic criteria, consider the following additional characteristics:

- **A high level of “social interest”**—This is generally indicated by a positive attitude, optimism, genuine desire to be helpful, and empathy. You may include past experience in a helping role as one of your criteria, or seek this information through teacher or counselor recommendations.
- **School performance**—There is no evidence that straight-A students make better mentors than those with average grades. However, consistent attendance, passing grades, and participation in school activities indicate stability and a positive connection to school and community.
- **Special skills**—Although most mentoring programs do not require any special skills, there may be situations in which a special skill would be beneficial, such as the ability to speak a second language, strong abilities in a particular subject area, or experience with a special population of children.
- **Providing opportunities for at-risk youth**—Many programs include outcomes for the youth who will serve as mentors. They may recruit youth from specific target populations—underachieving or disconnected youth, for example—who will benefit from the mentoring experience. In these cases, selection criteria should be carefully crafted to reflect the youth you want to have as mentors. Teacher and counselor recommendations are especially useful in these programs.

Develop a recruitment plan that reflects your program purpose and criteria. Once you know who you want to serve as mentors, map out a simple plan for recruitment. The details of your plan will depend on the size of your program, number and type of students you want to recruit, and the eligibility criteria you have selected.

If your program is small or you want to select from a specific pool of students, focus most of your recruitment efforts on working with counseling and teaching staff who can make recommendations based on their knowledge of individual students. If, however, you want to attract a larger pool of students and are more flexible about who can participate, a more general approach may be sufficient.

Develop simple but effective recruitment messages and materials that will help you “sell” your program. Remember that you may have multiple audiences, such as counseling and teaching staff, parents, and students themselves. Have young people help develop your recruitment materials. Work with your school art departments to get students involved in developing posters and flyers. Ask students for feedback about your materials: Are they clear and understandable? Do they appeal to young people? Would they make the student want to participate?

For more information...

See the handouts from the MRC Web Seminar, “Peer Mentoring: Recruiting, Training, and Ensuring Longevity,” for additional mentor and mentee recruitment information.

<http://www.edmentoring.org/seminar7.html>

The Mentoring Resource Center publication *Effective Mentor Recruitment: Getting Organized, Getting Results* also offers advice and worksheets that can help you put together a recruitment plan and develop recruitment messages.

<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/recruitment.pdf>

All recruitment materials should include the following:

- General eligibility, such as age, school class, and any other basic requirements
- The amount of time commitment expected
- Minimum requirements or special skills needed, such as experience, minimum grade point average, or the ability to speak a language other than English
- Benefits of participation, such as building a college or employment résumé, getting class credit, learning new skills, increased social status, and having fun

Some common ways to recruit students include:

- Providing teachers and counselors with clear information about the program that they can use to inform students and to make their own recommendations.
- Using the school’s daily announcement system to post a message about the program, followed by an informational meeting at lunch or after school.
- Putting notices in PTA newsletters or other materials that are sent to parents and enlist parent involvement in your program.
- Making presentations in relevant classes, such as leadership, health, or civics classes, or any class that includes a service-learning component.

- Putting up posters in the counseling center or other approved locations, with information about where to apply.
- Promoting your program to service clubs and other student groups.
- Placing a regular advertisement in the school newspaper or having the newspaper staff interview the site coordinator or a current mentor.

Develop application materials before soliciting volunteers, including:

- A simple application form
- Parental notification and permissions
- Format for letters of reference
- Program information
- Mentor job description
- List of the steps in the application process

Finally, remember one of the most effective forms of volunteer recruitment: Ask them directly! Youth who are personally asked to serve will feel pleased you have singled them out.

Recruiting Mentees

The first step in recruiting mentees is the same as in recruiting mentors: Identify the target population(s) you want to serve. This may be driven in part by criteria established by your funding stream, as in the case of U.S. Department of Education mentoring programs, and in part by the issues your school district wishes to address through mentoring, such as reducing dropout rates or improving academic achievement.

An additional consideration is to select mentees you believe will benefit most from having older peers, rather than adults, as mentors. Peer mentors may be able to work well with youth from difficult circumstances or with special needs but can be more frustrated and discouraged than adult mentors by mentees who are anti-social, frequently act out, or reject their efforts to form a relationship (Karcher, 2005). These youth may be better served by older, more experienced adult mentors. Choosing mentees who are reasonably social and would likely thrive on positive attention from an older peer will help get matches off to a good start.

Once you have identified the population you plan to serve, obtaining referrals should not be difficult if your program has developed positive relationships with counselors and other personnel in the schools you have targeted. Provide them with materials that clearly state the goals and objectives of the program and specifics about the population of students you want to serve, as well as information about:

- The positive developmental outcomes of peer mentoring, such as improved self-esteem, connectedness to school, positive outlook for the future, and coping skills
- The types of activities your matches will be engaged in, how often they will meet, and how you recruit, train, and support mentors
- Where activities will be located and how they are supervised

A profile of a peer mentor, perhaps written by one of your mentors, may also be helpful.

Be sure to involve parents in your mentee recruitment activities. Work with each school to develop multiple ways to inform parents about your program, emphasizing the positive benefits of pairing their child with an older student and the safety of the well-supervised school-based setting. Send messages home in new student packets and PTA newsletters, and have presentations or information tables at parent nights and other events.

Screening Peer Mentors

Screening, like recruitment, should reflect the objectives of your program. You may be looking for youth who will benefit most from the mentoring experience in terms of their own development. However, you must also choose mentors you can trust, who are not likely to be a negative influence, who can offer a positive experience to the mentee, and who are likely to be committed to the program and their mentee for the required length of time. Developing a screening process that uses a variety of tools and activities to assess applicants will help you find mentors who meet these basic criteria.

Criminal records checks—a primary method of screening adult mentors—are not generally possible when screening peer mentors because juvenile court records are sealed. You must be creative in finding other ways to screen young people to determine that they will provide a positive, safe, and healthy role model for younger children. Here are some suggestions:

Start with the basics.

Use the basic eligibility criteria your program has established to screen out obviously ineligible students: those who do not meet your minimum requirements, such as age, year in school, availability, and basic interest. Try to refer students who are not eligible to other volunteer or personal development opportunities they can pursue.

Review applications, personal statements, references, and counselor and teacher recommendations.

These will offer a more in-depth view of the young person and in some cases reveal strengths or abilities that official records will not. Ask your applicants to complete a brief statement explaining why they are interested in being a mentor and what life experiences would make them right for the role. Counselor, teacher, or other references can help you determine if the young person has been the recipient of mentoring or tutoring, has taken on family responsibilities, or has overcome personal challenges in his or her life.

Use the records available to you.

Gather records that can help you assess the applicant's strengths and appropriateness. Look for evidence of experience, maturity, good judgment, consistency and follow-through, social skills, confidence, and potential leadership abilities, using any or all of the following as needed. Remember that you will need permission from both student and parent to access some of these records:

- **Grade reports:** general ability to keep up with schoolwork, particular academic strengths or weaknesses, and any serious academic issues that might inhibit their ability to serve as mentors.
- **Attendance records:** significant patterns of absences, especially unexcused.
- **Involvement in extracurricular activities:** the overcommitted student is not necessarily the best mentor, but some involvement in school-sponsored, afterschool, or nonschool activities can indicate social connectedness and interest in school or community. These activities also usually involve the development of skills in working with others cooperatively and being responsible.
- **Paid or unpaid employment history:** successfully holding a job, whether paid or volunteer, indicates the ability to follow instructions, be responsible, and feel self-confident. Experience working in "people-helping" roles or in positions that require independent judgment or leadership may be especially helpful.

Interview prospective mentors.

While these screening tools can provide useful facts about your prospective mentors, a personal interview is likely to be one of your best screening strategies. Think about what you want to ask, but keep the conversation open-ended. Questions about personal goals, interests, involvement in activities or jobs they've held are all useful. Make sure interviewees have a chance to ask their own questions as well.

Include a group activity as part of screening.

Consider holding an informational session or brief program orientation prior to final selection and matching. Include group activities to learn about how prospective mentors interact in group situations, natural talents and skills, and other attributes. This can also help you later as you match mentors with their mentees.

Make your selections in a timely manner.

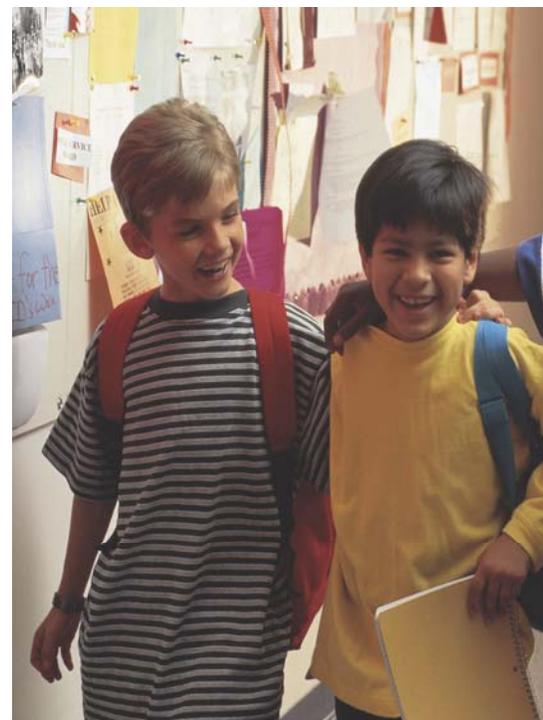
Streamline your screening and selection as much as possible so youth are not kept waiting for weeks to find out if they have been selected. Notify all youth, not just the ones you accept, and try to give personal feedback to those you don't select, with suggestions on other volunteer activities to pursue.

3. Training Peer Mentors

Recent research indicates that the training of peer mentors is an important ingredient in program success (Herrera et al., 2008). Cross-age peer mentors need significant explanation of the purpose of the program and their role as a mentor, as well as opportunities to practice new skills they will bring to bear on the mentoring relationship. Adequate training helps ensure that mentors take a developmental approach to working with their mentees and that they will seek help when they encounter problems beyond their abilities to address. Proper training also decreases the likelihood of mentors engaging in negative behavior or causing harm to mentees, whether intentionally or not.

Many resources in the field of mentoring are available on the topic of training mentors (see sidebar on page 20 for a listing of several publications). Refer to these resources when building your peer mentor training for general advice on building an agenda, accommodating different learning styles, planning your event, and other effective training techniques.

However, training peer mentors requires some different approaches in order to be successful. The information presented below offers some general guidelines for training youth, tips for putting together a quality training, and training topics that should be covered. The resources listed on pages 25–27 provide a host of activities geared to youth that can help you craft a rich training program.



Guiding Principles for Training Youth

The following guiding principles (adapted from Taylor, 2003) can help ensure that your training sessions and materials are appropriate for peer mentors:

- **Use shorter activities than when training adult mentors**—Educators working with adolescents agree that short, interactive activities work best to keep adolescents engaged. Individual activities should be no more than 30–50 minutes long. Break your agenda or lesson plan into smaller sections, as appropriate. If one of your training goals involves an especially complex skill or a difficult concept, such as demonstrating effective communication principles, try dividing the topic into several cumulative activities (e.g., introductory lecture presentation, followed by a small-group exercise, then role playing).
- **Use a variety of activities and approaches**—Youth learn best through a blend of group and individual activities, exercises, and discussion opportunities. To the

degree possible, use the lecture format sparingly and broken up with interaction. See the sidebar on the opposite page for a list of activities and strategies to consider for training agendas.

How long should youth training sessions be?

There are no hard and fast rules about how long peer mentor training should be, but most educators agree that adolescents respond best when training is brief, fast-paced, interactive, and fun. Some peer mentoring professionals believe training should last no more than one or two hours, while others feel a daylong training works if it includes many different kinds of activities, opportunities for interaction and movement, and breaks. Younger adolescents usually need shorter sessions while older youth (15 and up) may be able to handle an interactive, daylong training. When building your agenda, decide what you need to cover, how much time you need, and how you can break down the information into manageable sessions.

- **Provide plenty of time for questions and answers**—Youth are often shy about admitting they don't know something, so simply asking if there are any questions may not yield many responses. Find creative ways to elicit questions, such as offering prizes for the best question, or having an anonymous question box available throughout the session.
- **Tailor training activities and materials to reflect the characteristics of your program participants**—Activities and handouts should reflect the characteristics of your mentors, such as their developmental stage, level of academic achievement, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. Use language that reflects the age and developmental levels of mentors, and avoid acronyms and jargon unless you are prepared to define them. Print materials should use larger fonts and illustrations that reflect the ages, diversity, and interests of participants.
- **Provide ongoing training to reinforce key concepts and introduce new ones**—Adolescents need consistent reinforcement, encouragement, and praise as they practice what they have learned. By providing an initial session followed by regular opportunities to debrief and learn new concepts, peer mentors have a chance to process what they have learned so they are ready to take in new information. As they gain practical experience, they will be better able to relate the information you provide to the work they are doing.

Planning Your Training

Planning a training event for youth follows the same steps as planning any mentor training session, with a few distinctions to accommodate the age of your participants. Whether you are a seasoned trainer or a novice, you may want to review one of the online guides on training mentors listed in the sidebar on page 20 before you begin.

Developing a well-planned training session is especially important when working with youth, who are often quick to lose interest or become distracted when sessions are disorganized, unclear, or seem like a “waste of time.” If you have all your plans in order, details worked out, and plenty of helpers on hand, you can devote your energies on the day of the event to keeping them engaged and focused.

The following tips (adapted from Taylor, 2003) address specific considerations for planning and conducting training for youth.

Before the Session:

- Select a date for training and arrange for a comfortable, welcoming space that has plenty of room to spread out, break into small groups, and engage in physical activity. Make sure training dates don't interfere with other important school events, such as sports, dances, vacations, or testing days.
- Secure parental approval for youth to attend if the training event is to be held after school or on a non-school day. Enlisting parental permission can also help ensure that participants arrive on time.
- Determine if there is a role for parents of mentors. Parents may be able to act as volunteer helpers, or you may wish to have a brief session with them explaining the goals of the program. Make sure parents all have basic program and contact information.
- Arrange for refreshments. Feeding youth is important! Be sure to have plenty of healthy snacks and beverages on hand, and arrange for breakfast or lunch if your session is more than a few hours long. Pausing for refreshments is also a good way to break up the day and gives participants a chance to socialize.
- Arrange for incentives/prizes appropriate for the activities you are conducting. Youth love to get stuff, even if the items are small or silly. They are motivated by competition and appreciate the recognition that getting a prize can bring.
- Consider your participant-to-adult ratio. It's a good idea to involve more adults than are actually needed to present the training. This allows adequate supervision and observation of the participants. The observations of the adults can yield useful information that can be used in making matches with mentees.

When training peer mentors choose a compelling mixture of:

- Short lectures
- Sharing of life experiences
- Panel discussions
- Guided discussions
- Guest presenters
- Videos
- Interactive exercises
- Story telling
- Artwork
- Handouts
- Small-group discussion (2–3 youth)
- Role plays and vignettes
- Quizzes and games (with incentives for winners)
- Use of newsprint or dry erase boards
- Fill-in-the-blank worksheets
- Overheads or slides

During the Session:

- Start on time. If you are worried that stragglers may come in late, start with warm-up activities that youth can jump into as they arrive, but don't have youth sitting around waiting with nothing to do.

- Have youth set ground rules for the day together and post them around the room. Use these as reminders as needed to keep the group focused and respectful.
- Give youth responsibilities for how the day is going and seek their input during the session. Make sure they know you respect and value them and their opinions. Give individuals leadership roles throughout the training.
- Use staff and volunteers to keep an eye on how youth are responding. Watch to see who is “okay” and who isn’t throughout the training, and if someone is having trouble, find out the issue and address the need in a quiet and respectful way.
- For middle and high school youth, do not run longer than 40–50 minutes without a break (sooner, if you see that the group needs one). For younger students, don’t go longer than 30 minutes without a break.
- Give out certificates for successful participation. Youth appreciate having something to take away with them.
- If the session is held after school or on the weekend, make sure everyone has a way home.

General mentor training resources available online

Preparing Participants for Mentoring: The US Department of Education Mentoring Program’s Guide to Initial Training of Volunteers, Youth, and Parents
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/training.pdf>

Ongoing Training for Mentors: 12 Interactive Sessions for U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Programs
http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/ongoing_training.pdf

Training New Mentors: Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities
<http://gwired.gwu.edu/hamfish/merlin-cgi/p/downloadFile/d/20697/n/off/other/1/name/trainingpdf/>

A more comprehensive listing of downloadable training resources and curricula can be found on the MRC Web site at:
http://www.edmentoring.org/online_res3.html

After the Session:

- Make follow-up phone calls or e-mails to mentors to find out if they have any questions or concerns about being in the program. What did they find useful about the training? What did they feel was not useful? Did the training raise any doubts or fears about assuming a mentoring role?
- As soon as possible, schedule a time to meet with your mentors as a group. This could be scheduled during the training if all mentors will be selected and matched, or could be scheduled once all matches are made but before their first meetings. Ongoing meetings are important to conduct additional training and lend support.

Building Your Training Agenda

Trainers have considerable flexibility when it comes to what topics they cover during peer mentor training, but there are two broad areas that youth will need training in: 1) program orientation and guidelines, and 2) skills for the mentoring relationship. You can break your training into several shorter sessions or build a daylong event if your mentors are developmentally ready for a longer session.

At a minimum, initial training should cover an introduction to your program and basic communication topics that will give mentors practical skills right away as their relationships get started. The remaining skill development topics can then be covered throughout the school year, either on a preset schedule or as the need arises. If you decide to hold a daylong training, remember the tips on designing training for youth discussed earlier. Don't cram too much information into the day, and use follow-up sessions to reinforce key concepts after mentors have had a chance to apply skills to real situations.

See the sidebar on page 22 for a sample agenda of an initial peer mentor training. A blank worksheet for building a peer mentor training agenda is provided in Appendix B.

Essential elements for training peer mentors

- Agree on ground rules at the beginning of the training.
- Make the training fun and flexible, yet educational.
- Enrich the training with a range of hands-on activities in which participants "learn by doing."
- Debrief at the end of each activity, but keep it short as participants' attention will wander after about 10 minutes.
- Encourage participants to ask questions, express concerns, and experiment while risking failure as a way of preparing themselves for the mentoring journey.

Adapted, with permission, from Cox, R. (2006). *Expanding the spirit of mentoring: Simple steps and fun activities for a flourishing peer mentor or peer support programme*. Invercargill, New Zealand: Essential Resources.

General Orientation and Training Topics

These training topics are designed to give your peer mentors grounding in your program's philosophy and the information they need to participate effectively in the program. During your initial mentor training, it is important that you cover:

History and mission of the program—This should be a brief overview of how the program began and what it hopes to achieve for students.

Goals of mentoring (in general) and specific goals of the program—Your peer mentors will appreciate learning how mentoring relationships can support both mentors and mentees. The concept of mentoring may be unfamiliar to them and some discussion about what mentoring can accomplish will help them understand why the program is structured the way it is. You may want to talk about someone who was a mentor in your own past, or ask students to think about mentors they currently have. Outlining program-specific goals helps further frame the experience. Include plenty of time for questions on this topic.

The role of mentors and mentees—In cross-age peer mentoring programs, it is critical that both sets of participants understand their roles. Mentors need to know the types of support they will be expected to provide, as well as the limitations of that support, so they

Sample Peer Mentor Training Agenda

Welcome, Introductions

- Introduce program – who are we?
- Introduce staff and provide contact information (phone, e-mail)

Ice-Breaker/Warm up—getting to know each other

What Is a Mentor?

- Roles of a Mentor (who has mentored you?)
- Brainstorm: a mentor is... a mentor is not...

(break)

Building Relationships

- Getting to know your mentee
- What you will do together

Effective Communication, Confidentiality, and Boundaries

Program Policies, Procedures, and Activities

Questions and Wrap-Up, Evaluations, Next Steps

do not feel overwhelmed by their new role. Mentees also need to understand their obligations in making the match function effectively.

Ground rules and expectations for mentors—Communicating clear behavioral expectations for peer mentors is a very important aspect of peer mentor training. Peer mentors can cause great harm to the youth they are working with if they skip meetings, act inappropriately, or have to drop out of the program because of conflicting commitments. Thoroughly review the expectations you have of mentors, both in terms of time commitment and conduct. Check in with mentors individually after this training to be sure they are still on board and are able to meet your expectations.

The role of program staff, teachers, counselors, and others—Peer mentors are less likely to feel overwhelmed if they understand the roles and responsibilities of the adults running the program and how other school personnel can support them.

Characteristics of mentees—Cover both the broad developmental characteristics of the age group your mentors will be working with and any special characteristics of the mentees specific to your program.

Understanding the mentoring relationship cycle—Mentoring professionals know that match relationships develop, grow, mature, and ultimately decline over time. Providing peer mentors with this information not only helps them understand that changes in their relationship with their mentee are normal and expected, but

also drives home the need to maintain their friendship over time. This information also provides a context for dealing with changes in the relationship and the behaviors of their mentees over time. Revisit these relationship stages as they experience them firsthand and provide ongoing support as needed.

Program schedule and activities—Review scheduled match meeting times and locations (be sure to cover any breaks in the schedule, such as school holidays). If there is a procedure for checking in when mentors arrive on campus or meet with their mentee, make sure it is clearly understood. Review any other logistics about participation, such as transportation, reporting on match meetings, and the timeline for ongoing training.

Review the types of activities that are available for matches to do together. Peer mentors might have a hard time understanding how they will be spending their time with mentees. Whether you simply provide a variety of games and recreational activities or implement a set curriculum with structured meeting times, covering the “what” of the mentoring relationship will put mentors at ease about how their participation looks in practice.

Confidentiality and when to share information with staff—Peer mentors are less likely than adults to understand their responsibilities regarding confidentiality. Gossip and unnecessary disclosure of personal information shared by mentees can be a major concern in peer mentoring programs, especially if mentors and mentees attend the same school. Explain the role of confidentiality in building trust and explore the types of personal information that a mentee might disclose as the relationship develops. Clarify what information or circumstances require mentors to break that confidentiality and seek out a staff member for guidance. Make sure your peer mentors understand the line between when to keep a secret and when help should be sought.

Gather all this general program information, along with ground rules and staff contact information, into a *Mentor Handbook* that participants can keep with them and reference throughout the year.

Skill Development Topics

Peer mentors bring a wealth of natural enthusiasm to your mentoring program. You selected these youth because they exhibited characteristics suggesting they would be able to develop positive relationships. But they are also likely to be relatively inexperienced in working with youth, especially in one-to-one situations, and will be eager to learn new skills to help them feel more confident. Include training on skills that can help mentors develop their relationship with their mentee and become more confident with their new role.

Mentor training in many of these specific skill areas is important for all mentors, whether youth or adult, so you may already have some materials you can use and adapt for young people. If not, numerous mentor training resources are available for you to use and adapt with your peer mentor audience (see the resources list beginning on page 25). Build in many opportunities for role playing and trying out the skills you want to convey. Reinforce your training throughout the year by praising mentors and encouraging them as they try out these new skills with their mentees and others.

Common areas of skill development training for peer mentors include:

Leadership Development—Peer mentors working with younger students are likely to be thrust into leadership roles. They will be looked up to by mentees and will be in the position of offering advice and guidance. They may also be asked to encourage other teens to become peer mentors, and even to speak in public about the program. Some youth have natural talent for taking charge and being assertive, while others prefer not to call attention to themselves and hesitate to take initiative. Providing training on how to be an effective leader can help natural leaders harness their abilities and encourage shy youth to develop self-confidence.

Leadership training for peer mentors can encompass a broad range of topics: understanding qualities that make strong leaders, assertiveness and decision making, identifying personal values, working as part of a team, public speaking, managing conflict, and more.

Goal setting—While the primary role for peer mentors will be to establish a positive, developmental relationship, they may also be responsible for establishing goals with their mentee. Some may be mutual goals, such as agreeing to learn a new skill or to do a service project together, while others may involve encouraging the mentee to improve in a specific academic or behavioral area. In addition, peer mentors may set their own goals for what they want to get out of the experience of mentoring. Both mentors and mentees can benefit from some basic training and practical tools to help them set goals and track their progress.

Establishing and maintaining boundaries—Maintaining boundaries may be one of the most difficult issues facing peer mentors. Some will be only a few years older than their mentees and may even know them in other contexts, especially in smaller communities, making it feel strange at first to establish “rules” around their relationship. Peer mentors may be tempted to cross boundaries in a misguided effort to deepen the relationship or to inappropriately exert influence over their mentee. Train mentors about the importance of setting boundaries, how boundaries can help them build a safe and trusting relationship, and how they can keep them on track to achieve positive outcomes.

In addition to this training on boundaries, peer programs should supervise match activities and check in frequently to make sure that boundary issues are not emerging (see the sidebar on match supervision on the next page).

Listening and communication skills—Perhaps the most important characteristic of a good mentor is the ability to listen and communicate effectively, so providing peer mentors with a solid foundation in communication skills is essential. Training peer mentors on such skills as focused listening, asking open ended questions, paraphrasing for meaning, nonjudgmental responding, and reflecting, can help them get to know their mentee better and establish a strong relationship.

Problem-solving skills—At some point in the match relationship, peer mentors will likely be asked by their mentee to help them out with a problem. This helping role can be highly rewarding for peer mentors, but without some basic knowledge of how to be an effective helper they may become frustrated and discouraged. Provide training and practice activities in such skills as being nonjudgmental, clarifying the issues, decision-making processes, and offering alternatives. The training you provide on listening and communication will also help them in this role.

Depending on the objectives and focus of your program, peer mentors may also need training on specific topics of a sensitive nature, such as how to help mentees resist negative peer pressure, handle family discord, or deal with bullying. Programs serving a special target population, such as youth with disabilities or English language learners, or who have a specific focus, such as reducing school violence, may also need to provide specialized training. As you meet with mentors for ongoing support, include time for them to talk about issues that come up with mentees. Their experiences and concerns can help drive the selection of ongoing training activities.

Print Resources for Orienting and Training Peer Mentors

The following resources contain a wealth of content and activities that can be used to prepare peer mentors (and perhaps mentees) for the mentoring journey before them. These titles are available from their respective publishers, although many are also available to U.S. Department of Education grantees on loan from the Mentoring Resource Center Lending Library (http://www.edmentoring.org/lending_library.html). Other mentoring programs can access these resources through the National Mentoring Center's interlibrary loan system (visit <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/library.php> for details).

Most of these titles cover multiple training topics. Some provide text that can easily be converted into handouts or slides, while others offer ready-to-use training activities, role plays, and other assignments that can be done individually or in groups.

Please remember to respect any copyright restrictions when adapting content from these or other training guidebooks for use in your own program.

An Asset Builder's Guide to Training Peer Helpers: Fifteen Sessions on Communication, Assertiveness, and Decision-Making Skills by Barbara B. Varenhorst, 2003. Published by Search Institute (ISBN: 978-1-57482-724-8)

This resource provides an asset-based framework for training peer mentors, covering the mentor's roles and responsibilities, as well as skills for helping others develop and build on their own assets in areas such as dealing with peer pressure, making good choices, and communicating effectively.

The Importance of Match Supervision

Emerging research suggests that match supervision and support may be essential to youth's receipt of several program benefits (Herrera et al., 2008). Peer mentors may be less likely to ask for help with a problem than adult mentors. Because of the potential for negative role modeling, program staff need to be keenly aware of what's happening with matches. The following principles, adapted to meet your program's particular needs, will help you maintain appropriate supervision of matches:

- Check in individually with mentors and mentees at least once a month (more often is better). This is best done face-to-face, although e-mail and phone contact can suffice on occasion.
- Have mentors fill out a match activity log that explains how they spent their time with the mentee. A sample of such a log can be found online at: <http://www.michaelkarcher.com/survey/pdf/SMILEMentorActivitiesLog.pdf>.

The data collected on these types of logs can be helpful for program evaluation, as well.

- Check in with parents of mentees once a month for the first few months, then once a semester/quarter thereafter.
- Periodically check in with teachers and other school staff who observe matches or interact with the students throughout the day.
- Provide individual support, problem solving, and conflict resolution to mentors and mentees as needed.
- Use the information gathered during these various check-ins to determine the frequency and content of your ongoing training to mentors.

Becoming a Friendly Helper: A Handbook for Student Facilitators (Revised Edition)

by Robert D. Myrick and Robert P. Bowman, 2004. Published by Educational Media Corporation (ISBN: 978-1-93057-231-7)

This resource is designed to train elementary age peer helpers, so some of the content may need to be adapted for training high school youth for the role. However, the handbook does have concrete advice for working with elementary students, and specific chapters address concepts such as generating helpful responses to questions, giving positive feedback, and joint problem solving.

Building Everyday Leadership in All Teens: Promoting Attitudes and Actions for Respect and Success. A Curriculum Guide for Teachers and Youth Workers by Mar-

iam G. MacGregor, 2007. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-1-57542-213-8)

This resource can give peer mentors many of the skills they will need to work effectively with diverse mentees across a wide spectrum of issues. Training sessions include topics such as what it means to be a leader, how to work with others, ethical decision making, risk taking, team building, effective communication, creative thinking, and more. It also can be used in conjunction with individualized **Guidebooks for Teens** (ISBN: 978-1-57542-212-1) for additional assignments as they move through the training sessions.

Expanding the Spirit of Mentoring: Simple Steps and Fun Activities for a Flourishing Peer Mentor or Peer Support Programme by Robin Cox, 2006. Published by Essential

Resources (ISBN: 978-1-877390-85-2)

This resource from New Zealand offers a number of ready-to-use training activities on the concepts of team building, communication, and helping other students build strengths.

Kids Helping Kids: A Peer Helping and Peer Mediation Training Manual for Elementary and Middle School Teachers and Counsellors (2nd Edition) by Trevor Cole, 1999.

Published by Peer Resources (ISBN: 978-1-89589-044-0)

This 160-page training manual provides dozens of activities on topics such as helping and attending skills, setting boundaries, and handling difficult situations. It also offers a lot of good content on setting up and managing a peer helping program, as well as a large collection of handouts and tip sheets that can be used independent of the training activities.

Making Choices: Life Skills for Adolescents by Mary Halter and Barbara Fierro Lang, 1994. Published by Advocacy Press (ISBN: 978-0-91165-549-0)

This full curriculum provides multiple lessons in each of a dozen topic areas, such as cultural diversity, self-esteem, personal integrity, family relations, personal health, and career exploration. These lessons can be a great way to provide older youth with the skills, mind set, and values needed to assist younger students. An accompanying **Workbook** (ISBN: 978-0-91165-537-7) provides youth with opportunities for reflection and critical thinking as they move through the curriculum.

Meaningful Mentoring: A Handbook for Effective Strategies, Projects, and Activities. Helping You Become a Co-Pilot in a Child's Life (Grades K–5) by Robert P. Bowman

and Susan C. Bowman, 1997. Published by YouthLight Inc. (ISBN: 978-1-88963-604-7)

This revised version of the classic “Becoming a Co-Pilot” series provides a wealth of content for preparing mentors, both peer and adult, for working with elementary-age students. It also offers many “lessons” that mentors can do with their mentee once matched.

For programs serving older mentees, there is **another version** of this handbook for serving youth in grades 6–12. (ISBN: 978-1-88963-605-4)

Mentoring for Meaningful Results: Asset-Building Tips, Tools, and Activities for Youth and Adults by Kristie Probst, 2006. Published by Search Institute (ISBN: 978-1-57482-875-7)

This is an excellent tool for preparing both adult and peer mentors. It features ready-to-use handouts that explain a mentor's role, the meaning of developmental assets, and techniques for building a relationship and establishing trust. The content is written in easy-to-understand terms and is flexible enough to be useful to a wide spectrum of program types. This resource also offers several activities and tools mentors can use in their mentoring relationship.

Peer Helping Skills: Leader's Guide for Training Peer Helpers and Peer Tutors. For Middle & High School by John DeMarco, 1993. Published by Johnson Institute (ISBN: 978-1-56246-090-7)

This classic guidebook offers a number of training activities to prepare young people to work with other students. It is especially strong in teaching interpersonal skills that can come in handy when working with youth, such as listening skills, paraphrasing and restating, identifying roadblocks, and suggesting alternatives.

Student Leadership Training: A Workbook to Reinforce Effective Communication Skills by Diane Taub, 2002. Published by Scarecrow Press (ISBN: 978-0-81084-555-8)

This British resource provides dozens of ready-to-implement training activities on effective communication. Many of these activities expand on common communication skills topics in fun and creative ways. Specific chapters address communication roadblocks, providing feedback, talking about values, effective questioning, and more.

Teambuilding with Teens: Activities for Leadership, Decision Making, & Group Success by Mariam G. MacGregor, 2008. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-1-57542-265-7)

This is another guide centered on youth leadership that can easily be adapted for preparing peer mentors. There are activities, complete with reproducible handouts on topics such as the qualities of leadership, social issues, working with others, and creative problem solving.

See the handouts from the MRC Web Seminar, "Peer Mentoring: Recruiting, Training, and Ensuring Longevity," for tips for training peer mentors and recommendations of specific training activities at: <http://www.edmentoring.org/seminar7.html>.

4. Choosing Match Activities

Cross-age peer mentoring is distinguished from other peer programs by its primary emphasis on establishing a strong, positive relationship between mentor and mentee. Engaging in fun, pressure-free developmental activities is the key to forming such relationships, leading to improvements in mentees' self-image, connectedness to school and peers, and self-control. These improvements can, in turn, lead to improved academic outcomes and many other positive school and social impacts.

The activities you select for matches to do together should promote friendship and trust, build developmental skills, and help mentees develop stronger bonds within the school environment. Programs with specific academic goals may also ask peer mentors to engage in homework help, tutoring, and test preparation, but these activities should be introduced after the relationships have had some time to develop. Let mentees know they can turn to their mentors for academic assistance but try to avoid a prescriptive regimen of academic work at each meeting.

Peer mentors do need a certain level of structure to ensure they are engaging in positive and constructive activities with their mentees. Because peer mentors are themselves still developing maturity and interpersonal skills, they may lack the judgment to consistently be a positive role model and offer wise advice. They may also have difficulty, if left to their own devices, choosing appropriate activities and using their time with mentees wisely.

At the same time, both mentor and mentee will benefit from having choices and making their own decisions about what they do together, building confidence, and helping them practice decision-making and goal-setting skills. Program staff should supervise all match activities to observe how they are working in practice and to offer guidance as needed, without making matches feel like they are not trusted.

Here are some suggestions for how best to accomplish this rather tricky balancing act:

- Develop activities that support your overall program goals and achieve your stated outcomes without being overly prescriptive. For example, if you want to encourage improvements in team building or promote social skill development, include some regular group activities that have matches work together toward a common goal. If your outcomes include a reduction in aggressive behaviors among mentees, find activities that matches can do that develop problem-solving or anger management skills. Prepare mentors for these activities in advance through additional training sessions.



- Infuse academic skill building into developmental activities. Have mentors and mentees work on a journal or scrapbook together, write a story, or prepare drama skits, rather than simply providing them with workbooks or going over homework assignments.
- Offer a wide variety of activities that matches can choose from each time they meet, or start with a group project followed by time for matches to continue the activity on their own.
- Involve mentors and mentees in choosing topics for new program activities or suggesting how to carry out a specific activity. Mentors can also lead activities for the group with guidance from staff.
- Check in with mentors frequently to see if there are specific issues that are coming up, such as teasing or bullying, and find activities that can help matches work on these, either one on one or in a group. This will not only help improve the mentoring relationship but will also develop mentors' leadership and problem-solving skills.
- If you plan to use an ongoing curriculum or set of lesson plans to address specific issues or promote developmental changes, be sure to allow time for free interaction and opportunities to choose activities. If matches are only meeting to “get through” another prescribed activity the relationship has little opportunity to develop positively.

Activity Themes

The kinds of activities you select should reflect your program goals and the mentees you are serving. They will also depend on the resources—both at school and in the community—available to your program. School and community partners can be instrumental in helping you provide a wide variety of fun, developmental activities. Develop written agreements that define what kinds of assistance your partners can provide, along with policies and procedures that govern student participation in any off-site activities. For example, if matches need access to the school library on a regular basis, work out an agreement with the librarian about when and how this can occur. Plan ahead and create new activity options throughout the year that are responsive to match interests and needs.

The list of resources at the end of this section can help you find a variety of specific, ready-to-use activities, but there are several general activity areas that cross-age peer mentoring programs in schools tend to focus on:

Academic activities

- **Helping with homework**—Mentors are often called upon to help mentees finish writing assignments or solve a tricky math problem. This can build trust, as long as

mentors are not doing the work for the mentees or making mentees feel bad about their academic skills.

- **Studying for tests**—This occasional activity can promote academic achievement, especially if the mentee has made test improvement a personal goal. But remember that your program’s mission is developmental and not focused on improving standardized test scores. Mentors can also help mentees overcome anxieties about test-taking by offering practical tips and strategies from their own experience.
- **Learning how to conduct research**—Mentors can help mentees learn how to use the library or search the Internet for information that can help them with homework assignments and test preparation. This might be an area where mentors and mentees can develop skills together with the help of a librarian or media instructor.
- **Using computer labs**—All young people need to develop computer skills, and mentors may really enjoy the opportunity to help mentees find online information, build a Web page, edit and print photographs, or make music using the school’s computers. This time should be highly supervised, but it builds critical skills for the jobs of the future.

Personal growth activities

- **Goal setting**—Goal-setting activities are a great way to get the relationship off to a good start. Matches can set initial goals for the mentoring relationship, such as learning about each other’s cultural heritage or always being on time for meetings. Later, they can work together on personal long-term goals. Peer mentors can show mentees by example that it is possible to achieve goals and they can offer ongoing encouragement as mentees work on their own. There are many goal-setting tools and activities in the resources listed later in this section.
- **Bullying/aggression**—A variety of formal curricula are broadly available for teaching youth how to recognize, respond to, and prevent bullying behavior in and out of school. If bullying and aggression is a big issue for your school, ask your principal or district curriculum office to research these for you. Several of the resources listed below can help you prepare mentors to talk to mentees about this topic and learn to recognize warning signs of bullying.
- **Conflict resolution**—Mentors can role model effective problem-solving and conflict resolution skills for their mentees. Role play activities are especially useful in this area.
- **Diversity and respecting differences**—Many programs choose activities designed to change how mentors and mentees view others. This can help matches with the growth of their own relationship, as well as how they interact with their peers, school, and entire community.

- **Self-esteem**—Much of the growth in mentees' self-esteem will come from having a peer mentor who cares about them, but you can also find specific activities that mentors can use to help mentees reflect on their strengths and internalize their success in many different areas.
- **Parent and family issues**—Mentors and mentees may be more willing to discuss problems at home with each other than with a teacher or counselor. Mentoring can improve participant relationships with parents and siblings, and a focused activity in this area might further facilitate this outcome.
- **Anger management**—Peer mentors can be great role models for teaching mentees how to handle frustrations in a more mature way. Role plays are particularly good for transferring and practicing these skills.
- **Peer pressure**—This is a topic where the peer mentors' own life experiences can provide great advice to mentees. All of your mentors will have experience dealing with peer pressure in various situations, and a focused activity allows them to share their experience and discuss strategies for making good decisions.
- **Health issues**—Potential topics in this area include tobacco, drugs and alcohol, healthy eating habits, personal hygiene, sexuality, and physical fitness. If you do activities that address these topics, make sure that your mentors are not providing any poor advice or negative role modeling.

Purely fun activities

Don't forget to provide matches with the opportunity to just have fun and blow off some steam. Often, the most intense bonding between mentor and mentee comes when they are just having carefree fun together rather than focusing on a structured activity. Build in fun activities such as:

- Field trips (be sure you get parent permission)
- Picnics (these can build in a family component, too)
- Sports and recreational games
- Contests (especially ones where the mentor and mentee create something together)
- Arts and crafts

Print Resources for Group and Individual Mentoring Activities

The resources listed here can help your program identify fun and meaningful activities for your peer mentoring matches to engage in over the course of the year. These activities can be a great way to bring structure and purposefulness to mentoring relationships, while also allowing for personal connection and cooperation between mentors and mentees.

Many of these resources offer both group and individualized activities, and most are structured as curriculum with facilitator notes, handouts, and lists of supplies provided.

These titles are available from their respective publishers, although many are also available to U.S. Department of Education grantees on loan from the Mentoring Resource Center Lending Library, or through the National Mentoring Center's interlibrary loan program.

Please remember to respect any copyright restrictions when adapting content from these or any other activity guides for use in your own program.

104 Activities that Build: Self-Esteem, Teamwork, Communication, Anger Management, Self-Discovery, and Coping Skills by Alanna Jones, 1998. Published by Red Room Publishing (ISBN: 978-0-9662341-3-8)

This resource is something of a brain-dump of activities and games for kids, and might be a useful resource to have around when you run out of ideas for things to do. Most of the activities are perfectly suitable to be led by kids, require minimal materials, and can be used by small groups or in one-on-one sessions.

BAM! Boys Advocacy and Mentoring: A Leader's Guide to Facilitating Strengths-based Groups for Boys, Helping Boys Make Better Contact by Making Better Contact With Them by Peter Mortola, Howard Hiton and Stephen Grant, 2008. Published by Routledge (ISBN: 978-0-41596-318-3)

This in-depth resource provides a complete guidebook for implementing a program aimed at working with at-risk groups of adolescent males. Many of the activities involve strategic storytelling and other communication styles likely to be effective with boys, and most of the facilitated activities can be useful outside the highly structured BAM! framework.

The Best of Building Assets Together: Favorite Group Activities That Help Youth Succeed by Jolene L. Roehlkepartain, 2008. Published by Search Institute (ISBN: 978-1-57482-159-8)

This comprehensive activity guide offers 166 activities that can get groups of youth, including mentor-mentee pairs, sharing, thinking, collaborating, and reflecting together. Built around the 40 Developmental Assets framework, the activities cover topics such as raising self-awareness, strengthening relationships, developing character, and setting goals. Included is a CD-ROM with reproducible handouts and other materials.

Beyond Bars... A Curriculum for Life: Building Resilience Through Life Skills Development by Trina Brooks and Virtual Research Group, 2006. Published by Girl Scouts of the United States of America (ISBN: 0-88441-699-2)

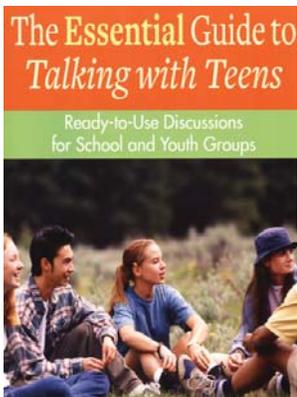
Originally designed for working with girls who have a parent in the correctional system, this curriculum provides over a dozen activities that address many issues common to all youth, such as managing friendships, making healthy choices, identifying personal values, and setting goals. The materials are designed for working specifically with girls, but could be adapted for use with boys as well.

Brave New Girls: Creative Ideas To Help Girls Be Confident, Healthy, and Happy (Revised & Updated Edition) by Jeanette Gadeberg, 2008. Published by Fairview Press (ISBN: 978-1-57749-179-8)

This resource is designed mostly as a workbook for individual teen girls, but many of the worksheets and activities can easily be adapted for use by mentees or even mentor-mentee pairs. It covers a wealth of topics that are relevant to teen girls, such as managing friendships, setting goals, improving self-esteem, and understanding and reflecting on messages about young women in popular culture.

Dare to Be King: What if the Prince Lives? A Survival Workbook for African American Males by David C. Miller, 2003. Published by Hotep Press/Urban Leadership Institute (ISBN: 0-9659028-2-X)

This resource focuses on many lessons and reflection activities for African American boys and other adolescent males living in harsh urban environments. The often blunt subject matter of the lessons, which address topics such as violence in society, peer pressure, gang activity, interactions with law enforcement, and hip hop culture, may be too graphic for many elementary age students. But it is a culturally relevant tool for working with middle and high-school youth who are living in tough urban neighborhoods.



The Essential Guide to Talking with Teens: Ready-To-Use Discussions for School and Youth Groups by Jean Sunde Peterson, 2007. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-1-57542-218-3)

The discussion activities in this book can easily be adapted to working with mentor-mentee pairs in a group setting, and some may even be useful as one-on-one activities for peer mentors and mentees. The activities are designed to produce thoughtful reflection and conversation in focus areas such as handling stress, forming identity, processing feelings, and creating a positive vision of the future. Reproducible handouts are provided.

Girls Inc. Presents: You're Amazing! A No-Pressure Guide to Being Your Best Self by Claire Mysko, 2008. Published by Girls Incorporated (ISBN: 978-1-59869-713-1)

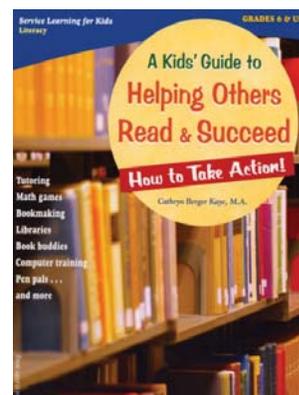
This resource is designed primarily as a workbook for individual teen girls, but some sections could be adapted for use by mentor-mentee pairs or groups of girls. The topics covered are based on the issues and concerns of girls as identified in Girls, Inc.'s 2006 survey of third through 12th-graders, many of whose comments and stories are included in the book. Topics include dealing with stereotypes, looks, friends, academics, dating, relationships, family, stress, talents, setting priorities, and tough breaks. There is a good resource list of Web sites and national organizations at the back of the book.

Helping Teens Handle Tough Experiences: Strategies to Foster Resilience by Jill Nelson and Sarah Kjos, 2008. Published by Search Institute Press (ISBN: 978-1574822489)

This book gives an overview of many difficult issues facing teens, provides tips for working with teens on the topic, includes a list of online and print resources, and provides a summary handout that is included in a CD accompanying the book. Programs may find it useful in training to help mentors deal with tough issues that may come up in mentoring relationships. Topics covered include anxiety, bullying and relational aggression, depression, eating disorders, foster care, gangs, physical abuse, and many more. Some handouts are provided for teens to coach them on how to help themselves and each other.

A Kids' Guide to Helping Others Read & Succeed: How to Take Action! by Cathryn Berger Kaye, 2007. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-1-57542-241-1)

This resource is intended as a self-directed guidebook for youth, grades 6 and up, who would like to set up a peer-tutoring program as a service project. The first section has general background on literacy, tutoring, and working with younger children. The second section helps youth get started, and includes a template for a service learning proposal.



The Kid's Guide to Service Projects! by Barbara A. Lewis, 1995. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-0-915793-82-2)

This resource may be helpful for peer programs as a brainstorming tool of different ideas and activities for service projects. It is designed as a self-guided book for kids, with over 500 different ideas, running the gamut from environmental projects to working with senior citizens in their communities.

Letter 2 a Teen: Becoming the Best I Can Be by Robin Cox, 2008. Published by Essential Resources (ISBN: 978-1-877440-57-1)

This resource from New Zealand offers a number of ready-to-use activities for teens on setting goals, building friendships, communication, managing time, handling stress, writing résumés, and becoming positive role models. Although designed for individual teens, many of the worksheets could be adapted for peer mentoring matches.

Make a World of Difference: 50 Asset-Building Activities to Help Teens Explore Diversity by Dawn C. Oparah, 2006. Published by Search Institute (ISBN: 978-1-57482-868-9)

The topic of cultural and ethnic diversity is one that all mentoring programs, and mentoring relationships, must address to be effective for all participants. This activity book offers 50 ready-to-use sessions that can be used to either train peer mentors or give mentors and mentees unique and fun ways to think and talk about diversity. Specific topics include boundaries, sexism, disability awareness, classism, gender roles, and body image. This is a great resource for teaching young people to value and respect others.

Making Choices: Life Skills for Adolescents by Mary Halter and Barbara Fierro Lang, 1994. Published by Advocacy Press (ISBN: 978-0-91165-549-0)

This full curriculum provides multiple lessons in each of a dozen topic areas, such as cultural diversity, self-esteem, personal integrity, family relations, personal health, and career exploration. Many of the lessons could be conducted as a mentor-mentee joint activity, although some of the content would probably be too advanced for elementary age mentees. This resource could also be valuable in mentor training and skill development, providing older youth with the tools and values to assist younger students.

Mentoring for Meaningful Results: Asset-Building Tips, Tools, and Activities for Youth and Adults by Kristie Probst, 2006. Published by Search Institute (ISBN: 978-1-57482-875-7)

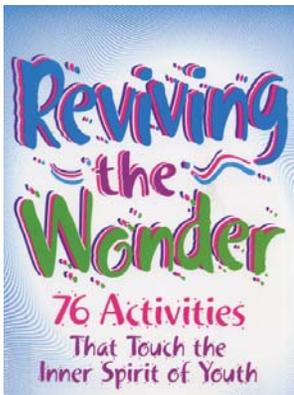
This resource provides mentors and mentees with a dozen worksheets, handouts, and accompanying activities that can help them establish a close trusting relationship and get them talking about important issues. It also provides worksheets and activities for use with the mentee's family. All materials are ready-to-use and come with full instructions.

Meaningful Mentoring: A Handbook of Effective Strategies, Projects and Activities. Helping You Become a Co-Pilot in a Child's Life (Grades K–5) by Robert P. Bowman and Susan C. Bowman, 1997. Published by YouthLight Inc. (ISBN: 978-1-88963-604-7)

This revised version of the classic "Becoming a Co-Pilot" series provides many "lessons" that mentors can do with their mentee on topics such as self-esteem, character, and confidence in school. For programs serving older mentees, there is another version of this handbook with activities for serving youth in grades 6–12.

More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth by Liana Lowenstein, 2002. Published by Champion Press (ISBN: 978-0-96851-991-2)

This collection features over 30 activities that can be done by individuals, groups, and even whole families. The topics fall into five main categories: engagement, feelings, anger management, social skills, and self-esteem. Most would be useful for mentor-mentee pairs to do together or separately, followed by discussion time. Full facilitator notes, handouts, and lists of supplies are provided.



Reviving the Wonder: 76 Activities That Touch the Inner Spirit of Youth by Ric Stuecker with Suze Rutherford, 2001. Published by Research Press (ISBN: 978-0-87822-474-6)

This resource strives to provide young people with values, understanding, and skills that can help them take care of themselves and the communities around them. The activities are a mix of hands-on arts and crafts projects, worksheets, and other creative and fun reflection exercises. Each comes with detailed facilitator instructions and discussion points. These activities could be used in groups or done by individual mentor-mentee pairs with some supervision and coaching.

The Teen Guide to Global Action by Barbara A. Lewis, 2008. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-1-57542-266-4)

Designed as a workbook for individual youth, some of the material from this resource would be easily adapted to a peer mentoring programs seeking to design service projects. There is an initial section with useful checklists on identifying a cause, researching it, and planning for action. The areas of action covered are human rights, hunger and homelessness, and peace and friendship.

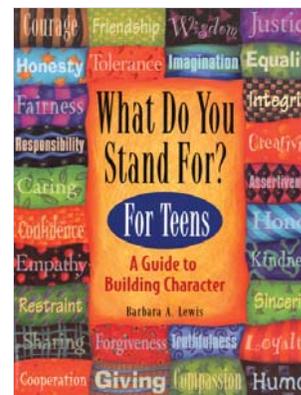
Tools for Teaching Social Skills in School: Lesson Plans, Activities, and Blended Teaching Techniques to Help Your Students Succeed by Michele Hensley, Jo C. Dillon, Denise Pratt, Jacqueline Ford, and Ray Burke, 2005. Published by Boys Town Press (ISBN: 978-1-88932-264-3)

Originally designed to assist teachers in creating more orderly and productive classrooms, this activity guide has many tips and lessons that can be adapted for use in peer mentoring

programs. Topics include handling conflict appropriately, proper ways of getting attention, staying on task, sharing with others, and many others that would be useful for peer mentors and mentees alike.

What Do You Stand For? A Kids' Guide To Building Character by Barbara A. Lewis, 2005. Published by Free Spirit Publishing (ISBN: 978-1575421742)

This book provides activities to help youth build character. Each chapter starts with a description of a character trait (from a long list including integrity, tolerance, loyalty, citizenship, empathy, etc.) and presents several “dilemmas” to use for journaling, writing essays, and discussion. There are “check it out” sections with suggestions for Web sites, books, and movies. Each chapter ends with an inspirational true story of a young person who exemplifies that trait.



Conclusion

Cross-age peer mentoring programs have tremendous potential to facilitate the personal, social, and academic growth of both mentors and mentees. The advice and other resources referenced in this guidebook offer a starting point for developing and implementing your program. Much more additional content on recruiting and training peer mentors can be found in the accompanying Web Seminar on peer mentoring best practices found here: <http://www.edmentoring.org/seminar7.html>.

Readers should note that programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service currently have access to dedicated training and technical assistance that can help them further refine and structure their specific program model.

All cross-age peer mentoring programs will ultimately find success if they remember the key considerations of:

- A program model grounded in a youth development framework
- Intensive training of mentors supplemented with ongoing skill development and match support
- A variety of engaging and developmental activities for matches to choose from;
- Diligent monitoring of match activities and mentor behavior
- Clear roles and responsibilities for program and school staff
- Strong philosophical support from the school administration
- An evaluation component that captures program success and provides information that can improve the program over time

Always remember that your cross-age peer mentoring program is ultimately about helping youth reach their own potential and achieve their personal goals. If you give them opportunities to do just that, you are certain to reach your overall program goals as well.

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Additional Reading and Resources

Print:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. (1998). *Developing a high school BIGS program: A practical guide for Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies*. Philadelphia, PA: Author.

Herrera, C., Kauh, T. J., Cooney, S. M., Grossman, J. B., & McMaken, J. (2008). *High school students as mentors: Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

Hughes, C., & Carter, E.W. (2008). *Peer buddy programs for successful secondary school inclusion*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

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Online:

National Association of Peer Programs – <http://www.peerprograms.org>

Peer Resources – <http://www.peer.ca/helping.html>

Other MRC Publications That Can Assist Peer Mentoring Programs:

Going the Distance: A Guide to Building Lasting Relationships in Mentoring Programs
http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/going_the_distance.pdf

Ongoing Training for Mentors: 12 Interactive Sessions for U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Programs
http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/ongoing_training.pdf

Preparing Participants for Mentoring: The US Department of Education Mentoring Program's Guide to Initial Training of Volunteers, Youth, and Parents
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/training.pdf>

Peer Mentoring and Academic Success (Fact Sheet #7)
<http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet7.pdf>

Worksheet: Partnership Goals, Roles, and Responsibilities

1. What are the goals of the school-based mentoring program?
2. What will be the initial size of the program?
3. Who are the key staff members responsible for the mentoring program?
4. What is the role of teachers?
5. What is the role of the principal?
6. What legal and liability issues do you need to explore?
7. What financial agreements need to be made between your organization and the school?
8. What procedures will be used to inform parents about the program?
9. How will you evaluate the program?
10. Have your organization and the school developed and signed a memorandum of agreement?

Worksheet: Program Responsibilities

Who has day-to-day responsibility for the peer mentoring program? (That person might be called a program administrator, coordinator, or liaison.) Who is responsible for what tasks? Which responsibilities will be shared? This worksheet can help your program assign responsibilities for managing the program; add extra responsibilities as needed.

Responsibility	Site Coordinator	Other Staff
Informs school staff about mentoring program and referral process		
Provides referral forms to school staff		
Arranges for space in school where mentor and student meet		
Works with teacher to identify best times for student to meet with mentor during the school day		
Accepts written referral of students from teachers		
Decides on the mentor-student match		
Sends parental permission form; handles any problems with its return		
Arranges first meeting between mentor and student		
Is present at first mentor-student meeting		
Has ongoing contact with mentor, student, teacher, and perhaps parent		
Recruits potential mentors		
Screens potential mentors		
Provides orientation to mentors		
Provides orientation to mentees		
Trains mentors		
Keeps track of mentor hours and performs other ongoing data collection		
Handles year-end data collection		
Responsible for mentor recognition		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

Worksheet adapted from Jucovy & Garringer (2008).

Peer Mentor Training Session Plan

Lesson Title: Welcome to the (Name of Your) Program!

Date: _____

Presenter(s):

Training Objectives:

By the end of this session the mentors will:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Session Logistics:

Timeframe	
Participants	
Location	
Room Set-Up/ Equipment	
Materials	

Planning tool adapted, with permission, from Taylor, 2003.

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E-mail: edmentoring@emt.org

Web: <http://www.edmentoring.org>



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