

CHAPTER 1



An Overview of Career-Focused Mentoring Programs

PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is twofold:

1. To summarize lessons learned from research about the benefits of mentoring;
2. To provide a career preparation framework for use in mentoring programs.

THE VALUE OF QUALITY MENTORING PROGRAMS

Well-structured mentoring relationships can be instrumental in assisting youth who are moving from one stage of personal development to another. For generations, family and neighborhood networks served as the primary source of mentors for young people. Today, these networks have expanded to include caring adults and other youth who volunteer in schools, community-based organizations, and businesses. Well-structured mentoring relationships help vulnerable youth in two principal ways:

- Assists them in navigating the complexities of adolescence and young adulthood; and
- Engages youth and connects them to productive academic, community, and social life choices.

The establishment of a supportive adult or peer relationship through mentoring is critical to the ability of youth to link to the world of work or to education and training, and to engage in other productive activities that help them grow. Research shows that mentoring can increase an individual's chance of having a productive and satisfying life. The ability of youth to have these positive experiences, however, depends a great deal on having access to caring adults that are ready, willing, and able to be involved. Unfortunately, while vulnerable youth, older adolescents, and young adults are in the greatest need of caring adults, they are the least likely to have access to them.

Mentoring a youth is not terribly difficult. By and large, youth appreciate mentors who are supportive, caring, and willing to assist them with activities that support academic, career, social, or personal goals. Trust is crucial to all mentoring relationships. Youth in mentoring relationships are not as likely to connect with or trust someone who seeks to cure or solve perceived problems, who assumes a parental role, or who is judgmental or overly critical.

While mentoring takes many forms, there are four common characteristics around which mentoring programs should be organized:

- Mentors and mentees should make a long-term commitment (generally, at least a year);
- Mentors should focus on building trust and respect with their mentees;
- Mentees and mentors should set high, clear, and fair expectations for themselves and their mentoring partner; and
- Mentors and mentees should meet or communicate with enough regularity to develop a strong relationship.
 - At a minimum, mentors and mentees should meet at regular intervals for at least four hours per month for at least a year (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2004).
 - For e-mentoring, 30 to 45 minutes of online time each week for at least one school year is recommended (Institute on Community Integration, 2003, pg. 57).

The research identifying these indicators of quality mentoring programs is based upon a range of programs, most of which serve a spectrum of vulnerable youth. Research also shows that less successful mentors adopt an authoritative role and emphasize behavior change more than developing mutual trust and respect.

Youth with disabilities are represented (and in some cases are prevalent) in all of the vulnerable youth subgroups (such as those with low income, those in foster care, and those attached to the juvenile justice system). These youth often have additional indicators of distress as well as special support requirements that warrant attention. The recruitment, screening, and training of volunteer mentors should be done carefully to support the specific needs of each individual youth.

A STUBBORN DILEMMA

In order for youth with disabilities to be self-sufficient and healthy, to have good family and social relationships, and to contribute to their community and society generally, they may need family, educational, social, and economic supports. Without adequate supports, youth in transition who have

disabilities are more likely than their peers without disabilities to experience the following:

- live in poverty and be dependent on public assistance.
- have chronic health problems, and lack comprehensive health insurance.
- be unemployed or underemployed.
- be dependent on family members for housing and finances.

Compared to other youth, youth with disabilities face significant challenges. They are:

- twice as likely to drop out of high school and half as likely to attend or finish college. Those who do finish high school are more likely to have taken a less rigorous course load than their non-disabled peers.
- more likely to develop mental health impairments.
- more likely to have unintended pregnancies.
- four times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2005)

Many youth with disabilities have not had the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to be exposed to necessary career preparation options. In the past, the career planning process for youth with disabilities often did not reflect the values of personal choice and self-determination. Rather, many youth with disabilities were relegated to passive roles in their own career-planning process. This often resulted in very few options being recommended or offered; options that reflected the low expectations of advisors; options that featured perceived needs for protection and support; and options driven primarily by community availability rather than by self-determination. As a result, many youth have not had the opportunity to pursue career options that they found motivating and satisfying.

These stubborn realities are largely reversible if this group of vulnerable youth is provided access to the same career-preparation and work-based learning opportunities as their peers without disabilities. Mentoring can play a key role in helping youth with disabilities achieve success and break this longstanding pattern.

A CAREER PREPARATION FRAMEWORK

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) conducted an extensive literature review of research, demonstration projects, and effective practices covering a wide range of programs and services. This study included lessons from youth development, quality education, and workforce development programs. Core commonalities were identified across these three disciplines, programs, and institutional settings. The review also revealed the fact that no single institution or organization could provide the full range of services needed for successful transition; rather, it highlighted agency interdependence and the need for communities, states, the federal government, and multiple organizations at all levels to collaborate with one another in order to facilitate quality transitions for all youth.

The applicable literature suggests that all youth need the following:

- Access to high quality standards-based education regardless of the setting;
- Information about career options and exposure to the world of work, including structured internships;
- Opportunities to develop social, civic, and leadership skills;
- Strong connections to caring adults;
- Access to safe places to interact with their peers; and
- Support services and specific accommodations to allow them to become independent adults.

There are five categories, referred to as *Guideposts for Success* (Table I), which can help steer families, service providers, educators, government programs, mentoring organizations, and youth themselves through the transition processes. These *Guideposts*, which serve as the basis for this Guide, are built on the following basic values:

- 1) Highest expectations for all youth, including youth with disabilities;
- 2) Equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, and inclusion and integration;

- 3) Full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation in decision-making;
- 4) Independent living, including skill development and, where necessary, long-term supports and services;
- 5) Competitive employment and economic self-sufficiency, with or without supports; and
- 6) Individualized transition-planning that is person-driven and culturally and linguistically appropriate.

MENTORING IN SUPPORT OF THE GUIDEPOSTS

Remember that the *Guideposts* are built upon the recognition that families, community institutions, and government agencies must all be involved in helping youth transition into the adult world. Mentors can play important roles in helping youth make their way through this process. Details regarding what mentors can do to assist youth in a range of career awareness and preparation activities will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

Mentoring can help youth gain the experiences needed to make quality transitions, consistent with the *Guideposts*, from childhood into adulthood. A variety of mentoring strategies should be considered based upon age and stage appropriateness and, for youth with disabilities, the type and severity of disability.

Although hybrids of mentoring models exist, the following four basic types of mentoring models will be covered in this Guide:

- **Traditional One-to-One** — A model of mentoring in which one adult is paired with one young person. Typically, there will be an extensive matching process to ensure a strong relationship, and it is expected that the commitment will be for one year or longer.
- **Peer** — A mentoring model in which peers from a shared or similar developmental stage provide support and advice to mentees. Peers can be close in age or farther apart, depending on the circumstances.

- **Group** – This form of mentoring matches one or more adults with a group of youth in a structured setting. This could include an individual or group of adult volunteers working with several youth in a school or a faith-based program, or a group of employees from one company working with students from a local school in a work-based mentoring program.
- **E-mentoring** – A contemporary model commonly used in schools in which one (or more) youth is matched with a mentor. The youth and mentor regularly exchange e-mail messages for a designated prolonged period of time. In ideal circumstances, e-mentoring includes occasional face-to-face meet-

ings to provide a more personal connection. In many instances, a program coordinator (often a teacher) will monitor all correspondence and meetings.

Each type of mentoring, and its concomitant strengths and limitations, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. It should be noted that a scarcity of evidence-based research exists relating to age and to mentoring youth with disabilities. The authors of this Guide have extrapolated from non-mentoring research and also consulted with mentoring, workforce development, and youth development experts in order to provide practice-based strategies to augment the sparse nationally recognized research.

TABLE I: GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p>School-Based Preparatory Experiences</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">1</p>	<p>In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations, and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. The following are necessary components of all educational programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic programs that are based on clear state standards; • Career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards; • Curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work, and community-based learning experiences; • Learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary; • Supports from and by highly qualified staff; • Access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures; and • Graduation standards that include options. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and use strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling; • Have access to specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school; • Develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and • Be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff.

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<p>Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">2</p>	<p>Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order for youth to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day or through after-school programs, and will require collaborations with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career assessments to help identify students’ school and post-school preferences and interests; • Structured exposure to postsecondary education and other life-long learning opportunities; • Exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and • Training designed to improve job-seeking skills and workplace basic skills (sometimes called “soft skills”). <p>In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing; • Multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that are specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit; • Opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (so-called “soft skills”); and • Opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices; • Learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs; • Learn to find, request formally, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training, and employment settings.
<p>Youth Development and Leadership</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">3</p>	<p>Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings; • Peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities; • Exposure to role models in a variety of contexts; • Training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution; • Exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and • Opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem. <p>Youth with disabilities also need the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors and role models, including persons with and without disabilities; and • An understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues, as well as their rights and responsibilities.

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<p>Connecting Activities</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may also need one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental and physical health services; • Transportation; • Tutoring; • Financial planning and management; • Post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and • Connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation). <p>Youth with disabilities may need one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies; • Community orientation and mobility training (e.g., accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, and health clinics); • Exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies; • Personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and • Benefits-planning counseling, including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that youth may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.
<p>Family Involvement and Supports</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have high expectations that build upon the young person’s strengths, interests, and needs and that foster each youth’s ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency; • Remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood; • Have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources; • Take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and • Have access to medical, professional and peer support networks. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of the youth’s disability and how it affects his or her education, employment, and daily living options; • Knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation; • Knowledge of access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and • An understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.

EXHIBIT 1.1: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

There is a growing body of solid research regarding the value of mentoring programs. Sipe (1996), in her study of mentoring research conducted by Public/Private Ventures (PPV), found that mentoring has the following advantages:

- Mentoring approaches show promise in the prevention of substance abuse;
- Mentoring relationships appear to reduce *some* negative youth behaviors; and
- Participating in mentoring promotes positive social attitudes and relationships.

Overall, PPV found that youth participating in mentoring relationships experience positive academic returns. Youth participating in mentoring programs *experienced fewer unexcused absences from school, demonstrated more positive attitudes toward school, and were more likely to pursue higher education* than their peers who did not have mentors. Research findings, nearly all positive, concerning the impact and efficacy of mentoring approaches indicate that young people who perceive high-quality relationships with their mentors experience the best results.

Jekielek, Moore, and Hair (2002) found through a synthesis of research that youth who participate in programs that include stand-alone mentoring or mentoring as one component of a comprehensive intervention have the following positive outcomes, compared with similar youth:

- Significant reductions in school absence;
- Higher college participation;
- Better school attitudes and behavior;
- Less drug and alcohol use;
- Lower likelihood of aggressive behaviors;
- Lower likelihood of committing misdemeanors or felonies and major offenses;
- More positive attitudes toward their elders and toward helping; and
- Improved parental relationships and support from peers.

Mentoring's Benefits to Others

In-school mentoring programs have been shown to improve the performance of students, support teachers in the classroom, improve staff morale, make connections to the community at large and to the business community, increase volunteer involvement in other areas, and serve as a selling point to parents who have a choice in schools. In community or faith-based organizations, mentoring programs have improved the connections youth have to the organization; increased organization membership, community involvement, and civic engagement and interest; made connections to the business community; and made organizations more visible and vibrant.

Other evaluation studies have returned similar findings.

Overall, success in individual mentoring relationships depends on many factors, including compatibility, availability, and willingness on the mentor's and the mentee's parts to enter into a give-and-take relationship. The amount and quality of support and assistance from mentoring program staff also contribute to the likelihood of success.

Mentors and employers also benefit from participating in mentoring. Pardini (n.d.) found that mentoring has the following positive effects:

- Mentors gain personal and professional satisfaction from helping a student;
- Mentors gain recognition from their peers;
- Mentors gain improved interpersonal skills;
- Mentoring focuses the mentor outside of himself or herself; and
- Mentoring promotes deeper understanding of teen and societal problems.

And when mentors are recruited from local companies, those companies enjoy the following benefits:

- Mentoring builds employee morale, thereby improving company morale;
- Mentoring develops the same skills needed for successful and effective company managers;
- Mentoring enhances the image of the company;
- Mentoring allows for participation by the company in the total educational process;
- Mentoring recognizes the competence of employees;
- Mentoring prepares employees to take on greater responsibilities in the corporation;
- Mentoring helps the company revitalize the community; and
- Mentoring assists in the development of a competent future workforce.

Disability-Related Research

Research findings on students with disabilities who drop out of school suggest that these students leave school after a prolonged period of disengagement and alienation. A 2002 study identified four broad intervention components as common critical elements that promote student success and

enhanc[e] student motivation to stay in school and work hard: (a) opportunities for success in schoolwork, (b) a caring and supportive environment, (c) clear communication of the relevance of education to future endeavors, and (d) addressing students' personal problems. (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002)

EXHIBIT 1.1: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

While work experiences are beneficial to all youth, they are particularly valuable for youth with disabilities. One of the most important findings from the research shows that work experiences (either paid or unpaid) for youth with disabilities during high school help them acquire jobs at higher wages after they graduate. Also, students who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings are more likely to be competitively employed than students who do not participate in such activities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Rogan, 1997).

Unfortunately, many young people with disabilities do not have the opportunity to participate in structured high-quality programs designed to help them make informed choices about what careers they may want to pursue (Luecking & Fabian, 2000).

More Research Needed

Although research has demonstrated that mentoring can have a dramatic effect on a young person's life, there is little data that provides specific information regarding the value of mentoring for youth with disabilities. A review of 15 years of research on various types of mentoring identified a broad array of demographic and risk factors for youth in mentoring programs, but disability status was not one of those factors (Sipe, 1999). Another national survey identified several characteris-

tics important to mentoring relationships, such as academic performance, duration and quality of interaction, race, and socioeconomic factors, but these studies did not address the disability status of mentors or mentees (McLearn, Colasanto, Schoen, & Shapiro, 1999). As a result of this gap in mentoring research there is a critical need for the following:

- Information regarding the impact of mentoring on the lives of youth with disabilities;
- Research-based evidence of effective mentoring practices in meeting the needs of youth and mentors with disabilities; and
- Data that will help policy makers to identify the resources and practices needed to improve mentoring outcomes for all youth, including youth with disabilities.

Jekielek, Moore, and Hair (2002) also called for more research in order to refine the knowledge base. They note the following needs:

- To examine the nature of the relationship between mentoring and increased academic achievement;
- To determine the impact, if any, of mentoring on specific social and behavioral problems related to delinquency;
- To determine whether mentoring has a positive impact on self-esteem; and
- To examine the impact, if any, of mentoring on youth employment and postsecondary education.