



Effective Youth Mentoring: Best Practices

Johnny-Angel Butera
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Executive Summary

Mentoring is a broad and complex area of study and its practice has grown rapidly as a result of popular assumptions that mentoring is beneficial for youth. Meta-analyses have shown that mentoring has small, modest, positive effects on outcomes for youth, and it is unclear whether these benefits are sustainable at later points in youths' development. However, mentoring programs can be successful interventions that can improve academic, emotional, and social outcomes, and also decrease problem behaviours.

Youth mentoring can be thought of as a unique, personal relationship in which a caring individual provides consistent companionship, support, and guidance aimed at developing the competence and character of a child or adolescent. Mentoring relationships can be formal (IE. mentor and youth are matched by a third party) or informal (IE. mentor/youth relationship evolves on its own without outside intervention). They can take place within a range of contexts (IE. school, workplace, community setting, faith-based organizations, youth justice settings, virtual community), take many forms (IE. one-on-one, group, team, mixed, peer/cross-age mentoring), and target different groups of youth (IE. youth in foster care, academically at risk students, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth who have learning disabilities).

The most effective mentoring relationships are emotionally close relationships that take place over a long period of time, with consistent contact between mentor and mentee. Mentoring best practices will focus on ensuring these criteria are met. Best practices in youth mentoring should encompass:

- A document stating the goals of the program, the youth served by the program, and information on the program's structure and procedures.
- Clear recruitment strategies, thorough screening criteria and processes for mentors, and eligibility criteria for youth.
- Initial and ongoing training for both mentors and youth that sets realistic expectations of mentoring, enables mentors to understand the needs of the client group, familiarizes mentors with the programs goals and procedures, and allows practice and development of the skills of mentoring.
- A process for matching mentors and youth and provide them with opportunities to meet before a final match is made.
- A mentoring relationship commitment from both mentors and youth of at least one year, with regular contact between mentors and mentees.
- Ongoing support and supervision of mentoring relationships.
- The inclusion of parents/guardians in the mentoring process (IE. matching, monitoring).
- The encouragement of mentors to develop equality in the relationship through trust, mutual respect, encouragement and openness.

Introduction

Mentoring has become a popular social intervention for youth, yet the meaning of the term itself is unclear and its effects are not well understood (Herrera, Sipe, McClanahan, Arbretton & Pepper, 2000; Rhodes & DuBois, 2007; Duralak, 2011). In short, "mentoring is everywhere, everyone thinks they know what mentoring is, and there is an intuitive belief that mentoring works" (Eby, Rhodes & Allen, 2007: 7). Conclusions as to the efficacy of mentoring are inconsistent across studies, with most literature pointing to small, modest benefits and there is little knowledge of whether these benefits are sustainable at later points in youths' development (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002; Blinn-Pike, 2007; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011). However, meta-analyses and studies of mentoring programs primarily in the United States have shown that mentoring programs can be successful interventions that can improve academic, emotional and social outcomes in youth, and decrease problem behaviours (DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011). Others have shown that programs aimed at helping youth with education, social skills, and relationships were more often effective than those aimed at behaviour problems (IE. bullying, reducing teen pregnancy) (Lawner, Beltz & Moore, 2013).

It has been suggested that the key to effective mentoring is establishing and sustaining high-quality mentoring relationships. Research on mentoring points to the importance of several characteristics of mentoring relationships that are more likely to produce positive outcomes and avoid harm. These include the role of the mentor in the youth's life, the frequency and consistency of contact between mentor and youth, the duration of the relationship, and the emotional closeness of the relationship (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). So far, there has been limited success in establishing and sustaining long-term, close relationships associated with positive effects (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Research on mentoring shows that it is an effective approach to intervention for youth, but how to implement mentoring in an effective manner is not very clear (Rhodes et al., 2006; DuBois et al., 2011). Recent research seems to show that "youth mentoring is maturing into a more cohesive field, at least with respect to adherence to minimum guidelines for practice that may be important for avoiding some of the most noteworthy disparities in program effectiveness" (DuBois et al., 2011). In other words, the efficacy of mentoring, at least in formal programming, may depend on the characteristics of youth targeted for mentoring, mentor recruitment and selection, the criteria for matching youth with mentors, setting mentor-role expectations, training mentors, and providing support (DuBois et al., 2011). This report will examine these as potential keys to the effective training and support of mentors. First, however, this report will look at several main themes within the literature on youth mentoring. This includes a

clarification of the term “mentoring”, a description of mentoring relationships, and finally a discussion of what makes a mentoring program effective.

Defining a Key Concept: Youth Mentoring

Youth mentoring consists of a range of relationships differentiated by context (IE. school, workplace, community setting, faith-based organizations, youth justice settings, virtual community), special population (IE. gifted, disabled, at risk youth), and developmental period (IE. children, adolescents). Mentoring can take on various roles (IE. tutor, coach, counselor), address aspects of child development and functioning (IE. academics, physical health, emotional wellbeing), and mentoring relationships can have varying levels of contact and duration of involvement (Keller, 2007: 7; Blaber & Glazebrook, 2007). As a result, “the application of mentoring to diverse settings and its broad scope of potential influence has created definitional and conceptual confusion about what is mentoring” (Keller, 2007: 7).

Despite this, we can look to several authors to clarify its meaning. For example, DuBois & Karcher (2005: 3) have identified three core elements of mentoring,

- The mentor is someone with greater experience or wisdom than the mentee.
- The mentor offers guidance or instruction that is intended to facilitate the growth and development of the mentee.
- There is an emotional bond between mentor and mentee characterized by a sense of trust.

Rhodes (2002: 3) describes mentoring as “a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé...in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé”. Furthermore, a mentor “is an adult who, along with parents, provides a young person with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and a constructive example” (MENTOR, 2009).

Finally, based on the works of other researchers in the field of mentoring, Eby, Rhodes & Allen (2007: 12) have come up with a framework to describe mentoring:

- Mentoring reflects a unique relationship between individuals.
- Mentoring is a learning partnership.

- Mentoring is a process defined by the types of support provided by the mentor to the mentee.
- A mentoring relationship is reciprocal, yet asymmetrical; a mentor may benefit from the relationship but the primary goal is mentee growth and development.
- Mentoring relationships are dynamic; they change over time and the impact increases over time.

Even though mentor/mentee, student/teacher, advisor/advisee, supervisor/subordinate, and coach/client relationships all involve interaction between relational partners, mentoring relationships “can exist in a wide range of contexts, have a broad scope of potential influence, display variability in mutuality and relational closeness, can be formal or informal, and can involve small to large power differences between individuals” (Eby et al., 2007: 12). This is what makes mentoring relationships truly unique.

Purpose of Youth Mentoring

From these definitions of mentoring, we can begin to see the rationale behind mentoring as a means to influence the lives of youth (Keller, 2007). Mentoring programs vary widely in their goals and philosophies: some will focus broadly on youth development, and others may focus specifically on reducing particular risky behaviours (IE. substance use, gang activity). Programs can also vary in the youth population targeted for intervention (IE. youth in foster care, academically at risk students, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth who have learning disabilities). It is this variability in goals, setting, and duration that makes it difficult to draw conclusions about outcomes across comparison studies of youth mentoring programs.

It is possible, however, to identify at least three objectives for natural (informal) or program (formal) mentoring (Keller, 2007: 27):

Prevention. Given that youth mentoring often targets youth who are considered at risk for poor health, academic, and other outcomes (DuBois & Karcher, 2005), one of the broad aims of mentoring has been prevention. These types of approaches are aimed at “preventing the emergence or continuation of psychosocial difficulties or problem behaviours” (Keller, 2007: 27).

Positive youth development. Youth mentoring that follows a positive youth development framework views youth as “resources to be developed” and not as “problems to be managed” (DuBois & Karcher, 2012; Damon, 2004). In other words, from this perspective the focus of mentoring programs is not to “fix” youth, but to help them achieve their potential by “promoting personal competencies, enhancing psychological well-being, and preparing youth to be healthy and productive members of society” (Keller, 2007: 26; MENTOR, 2009).

This strength-based approach to mentoring emphasizes the identification, exploration, and use of strengths in youth to promote positive health outcomes at school, home, and in the community (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012).

Community integration. Youth mentoring can also be a strategy for developing active community partnerships and integrating youth with their community through opportunities for involvement (MENTOR, 2009; Keller, 2007). Getting youth out into the community can promote “a sense of caring, civic engagement, and intergenerational commitment within communities” (Keller, 2007: 26).

Specifically, mentoring is meant to provide youth with the resources and support they need to manage personal and social pressures; to promote skills development (IE. conflict resolution, communication, leadership); to develop positive attitudes, beliefs, and values; and to build self-esteem, confidence, and respect (youcan.ca website).

Mentoring Relationships

The definitions of mentoring provided in the previous section reflect the fact that most research on youth mentoring focuses on mentoring as a dyadic relationship (or a traditional relationship) between an adult and a youth. These mentoring relationships can be informal or formal.

Informal/Natural mentoring relationships. Relationships that develop naturally, spontaneously or incidentally without outside assistance are informal (or natural) mentoring relationships. These relationships develop from the types of roles adults have in the lives of youths, including family members (IE. grandmother/father, older sister/brother, aunt/uncle), members of a youth's informal social network (IE. coach, neighbour, friend's parent), or professionals (IE. teachers, counselors, religious leaders) (Spencer, 2007; Blinn-Pike, 2007; DuBois et al., 2005). Natural mentors are sometimes also referred to as Very Important non-Parental adults (VIPs) who provide comfort, guidance, and inspiration to youth (Spencer, 2007; Chen, 2003). Due to the proximity of these individuals to youth as they go about their lives, informal mentoring relationships likely occur more than formal mentoring but are less well documented. A natural mentoring relationship can be short or long, and focus on the specific achievement of goals or offer a general range of support and guidance as the youth grows and develops (Spencer, 2007). Based on a number of studies, DuBois et al., (2005) state that while there are benefits for youth reporting natural mentoring relationships, results have not been consistent across outcomes, and it is unclear whether informal mentoring can prevent serious behavioural

problems (IE. delinquency, mental health problems) (Blinn-Pike, 2007). However, Dubois et al., (2012: 528) believe the evidence “speaks positively to the potential for the mentoring that youth experience to be both of high quality and impactful”.

Formal mentoring relationships. Formal mentoring relationships (also known as program or planned mentoring) are those in which a mentor and a youth are matched together purposefully by a third party within a formal mentoring program (IE. Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys & Girl clubs, 4-H). Formal mentoring programs can be independent initiatives or can be used as a part of other programs. It has also been suggested that informal mentoring relationships be integrated with formal programs for a more effective form of support for youth (Blinn-Pike, 2007; Dubois et al., 2012). A comprehensive meta-analysis of formal mentoring programs supports the effectiveness of mentoring for improving outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional, and academic areas of youth development but the authors caution that there has been a lack of attention paid in evaluations to assessment of key policy interests (IE. educational attainment, juvenile offending, substance use, obesity prevention) and that it is unclear whether the benefits of mentoring will continue on into later points in youth development (Dubois et al., 2011).

Mentoring relationships often develop from two perspectives: **relational** and **instrumental**. A **relational** perspective focuses on relationship building where the goal of the mentor is to create a trusting, emotionally close connection with a youth. Two styles of mentoring relationships can be identified within this perspective: *developmental* (youth-driven; based on cues from the youth, the mentor’s role is to meet the needs and interests of the youth, and to be flexible and supportive) and *prescriptive* (mentor-driven; mentor defines goals and sets expectations for the relationship) (Keller, 2007; Morrow & Styles, 1995). An **instrumental** perspective emphasizes the engagement of youth in challenging and rewarding goal-directed activities that build their competence (IE. preparing for employment opportunities, improving academic performance) (Keller, 2007; Darling, Hamilton & Niego, 1994). Mentors should develop relationships based on both perspectives in order to build a trusting relationship with the youth and promote youth development through activities that take into account the youth’s interests and are both mutually challenging and enjoyable (Keller, 2007).

There is growing interest in other forms of mentoring relationships beyond traditional, one-on-one, youth—adult mentoring relationships. These other forms include group mentoring (ratio: one adult to a small number of youth), team mentoring (ratio: several adults to a small number of youth), peer or cross-age mentoring (youth of a similar age mentoring other youth), e-mentoring (mentoring over the internet via e-mail and online messaging), site-based

mentoring (youth and mentor interactions are limited to a particular setting), and mixed mentoring (mentoring that transitions from a group to one-to-one mentoring) (Blaber & Glazebrook, 2007; MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership chart; DuBois & Rhodes, 2006; Vandenberghe, 2013). Peer or cross-age mentoring tends to work best when the mentor and youth are at least two years apart in age and attend separate schools (Vandenberghe, 2013). E-mentoring is particularly useful in rural or remote settings where transportation between mentors and youth is difficult (Vandenberghe, 2013). Little is known about the effectiveness of these alternative forms of mentoring but research is evolving in this area (Blinn-Pike, 2007; DuBois & Rhodes, 2006).

Both traditional and other forms of mentoring relationships (with the exception of e-mentoring, which takes place online) can be:

- **Agency-based** – mentoring takes place at a community agency.
- **Community-based** – mentoring takes place within the community (IE. at a museum or event).
- **Faith-based** – mentoring takes place at a house of worship or an adjoining building.
- **School-based** – mentoring takes place at the youth's school, at a designated meeting place (IE. the library).
- **Work-based** – mentoring takes place at the mentor's workplace (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership chart).

In their meta-analysis, DuBois et al. (2002) found no differences in mentoring outcomes based on the setting of the program (among community, school, and workplace mentoring). However, Lawner et al., (2013) found that community-based mentoring seem to have positive impacts more consistently than school-based programs.

Effective Mentoring Best Practices: What Works?

In order to establish effective mentoring programs that foster high-quality mentoring relationships and positive outcomes in youth, mentoring relationships should to be close, consistent, and enduring:

- **Close relationships** – The mentor and youth must feel connected and share a sense of mutual trust, understanding, fondness, and respect (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). However, it is possible that closeness can be the by-product of an effective mentoring relationship (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2010).
- **Consistent relationships** – The regularity or frequency with which mentors and youth spend time together has been linked to positive youth

outcomes because it provides more opportunities to develop a close relationship through engagement in beneficial, shared activities, the provision of emotional and social support, and the integration of the adult into the youth's social network (Rhodes et al., 2006).

- Enduring relationships – Research indicates that the benefits of mentoring increase over time. Mentoring relationships lasting one or more years showed improvement in academic, psychological, social, and behavioural characteristics. Those that lasted six to twelve months showed fewer positive outcomes. Relationships shorter than three months have been shown to be detrimental to youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes & Roffman, 2003; Lawner et al., 2013).

Characteristics of mentors also seem to be important in facilitating close, effective mentoring relationships. These characteristics include mentors that have had prior experience in informal or formal helping roles or occupations, are sensitive to the socioeconomic and cultural influences in youths' lives, have a sense of efficacy for being able to mentor youth, can model and encourage skills and positive behaviours, while discouraging negative behaviours (Rhodes et al., 2006). It has also been suggested that mentors should possess qualities such as approachability, enthusiasm, commitment, trustworthiness, maturity, communication skills, respect, availability, and financial security (Satchwell, 2006 in Vandenberghe, 2013).

In order to achieve successful relationships within formal youth mentoring programs, research suggests that attention needs to be paid to the selection of youth and mentors, training of mentors, matching of youth and mentors, and ongoing supervision and support. As a matter of rule, effective mentoring programs should first demonstrate a need for the program, target specific issues, and have a program manual that includes key policies and procedures (Miller, 2007).

Selection of Youth and Mentors: Recruitment and Screening

In order to promote satisfying mentoring relationships, long-term matches, and avoid early match closures (or an early end to the mentoring relationship), it is essential that recruitment strategies realistically represent the benefits, practices, and challenges of mentoring to prospective mentors. Equally as important is recruiting youth to be mentored whose needs best match the services being offered by the program and helping them and their families understand what mentoring is and what they might expect to gain from the relationship (MENTOR, 2009).

It may also be necessary to collaborate with professionals to screen and identify youth with mental health or emotional disorders, specific learning disabilities,

attention deficit hyperactivity and attention deficit disorders, acquired and traumatic brain injuries, and other chronic health conditions that are not apparent. It is possible that these conditions may not have been diagnosed or acknowledged by the youth or the youth's family. Identifying these can impact the mentoring process, require accommodations, and lead to referrals for other services as well (Timmons, Mack, Sims, Hare & Wills, 2006)

Mentors, youth, and families of youth must be willing to commit to at least one year to the mentoring process, and to frequent (IE. one hour per week) face-to-face meetings (or combine with other forms of mentoring such as e-mentoring where appropriate). Potential mentors should fill out an application, attend a face-to-face interview with program staff, and submit to a reference check and a criminal background check. Potential mentees should receive parental/guardian consent to take part in the mentoring program (MENTOR, 2009).

Training of Mentors

Research suggests that mentors should receive initial training, as well as ongoing training for the duration of the mentoring relationship. These training sessions will provide mentors with the time to practice and develop the skills of mentoring through various learning activities (IE. role playing) (Miller, 2007; MENTOR, 2009).

Initial training. It has been found that initial pre-match, in-person training of mentors should be at least two hours in length; any less and mentors' reported feelings of closeness decreases, less time is spent with their youth, and the relationship is less likely to continue into a second year (Herrera et al., 2000). The initial training session should affirm the commitment of the mentor to the program, familiarize the mentor with the program's goals, procedures, and rules, help the mentor establish their own realistic goals and expectations for the relationship, address relationship development and maintenance as well as ethical issues that may arise related to the relationship, and discuss effective closure of the relationship (MENTOR, 2009; 9). Mentors should also be shown where and how to access sources of assistance and support (MENTOR, 2009).

Ongoing training. Post-match training permits program staff to continue screening mentors for suitability, identify goals, modify unrealistic expectations, and enables mentors to get more out of their mentoring relationships. Ensuring realistic mentor expectations and goals for the mentoring relationship that are also in line with those of the youth are particularly important for relationship retention (Madia & Lutz, 2004; Spencer, 2006; MENTOR, 2009). Ongoing training should include developmental topics such as the youth development process, cultural awareness, gender, identity, economic issues, and diversity issues and disability issues (IE. disability etiquette, disclosure of disabilities, and abuse), as

well as the opportunities and challenges associated with mentoring specific populations of youth (IE. children of prisoners, youth involved in the justice system, youth in foster care) (MENTOR, 2009: 10; Axelrod, Campbell & Holt, 2005). It should emphasize building trust and focus on developing relationship enhancing behaviours (IE. authenticity, empathy, collaboration and companionship) through activities about active listening and rapport-building, since relationships characterized by mutuality, trust and empathy have been found to be most effective (Rhodes, 2005; Rhodes et al., 2006). Youth (and parents or guardians) should also receive training to discuss program guidelines, the obligations and appropriate roles of mentor/mentee, and parent/guardian involvement guidelines (MENTOR, 2009).

Matching Youth and Mentors

Creating effective matches between youth and mentors is key to establishing relationships that will be satisfactory and sustained over a long period of time. Effective matches can be achieved by taking into account the aims of the program as well as mentor and youth characteristics. Characteristics such as interests, language, personality, proximity, availability, age, gender, race, ethnicity, and culture are some of the criteria that can be used to match mentors and youth.

Race, ethnicity, culture. While race has been shown not to be as important as other qualities such as common interests (DuBois et al., 2011) in the matching process, others suggest that matching by race or ethnicity (with consideration of the preferences of mentors, youth, and parents) may be beneficial for youth who do not have many positive, same-race or ethnicity role models or for youth who have internalized racism (Sánchez, Colón-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield & Berardi, 2012). It has also been suggested that matching based on common experiences such as being a refugee or a new immigrant can be beneficial in promoting trust and connectedness (Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman & Lee, 2002).

Gender. In terms of matching based on gender, the literature is “inconclusive on the relative advantages of same- versus cross-sex matching of mentors and mentees” (Liang, Bogat & Duffy, 2012: 168). It has been suggested that some youth may benefit from same-sex matching but research in this area is limited and variable (Liang et al., 2012).

DuBois et al., (2011: 78) believe that matching youth and mentors should “go beyond demographic characteristics to encompass deeper and more nuanced considerations of compatibility”. Ultimately, the matching process should take into account the preferences of the mentor, the youth, and the youth's family. For example, a pre-match survey assessing preferences based on a variety of identity characteristics, including gender, race, ethnicity, and

socioeconomic status may be useful when matching mentors and mentees. Opportunities to meet before the final match is made to talk about common interests and assess compatibility is also important to the matching process (Miller, 2007; Liang et al., 2012).

Ongoing Supervision and Support

Ongoing supervision and support of mentors in their mentoring relationships goes hand-in-hand with ongoing training. It allows program staff to monitor relationship milestones and support mentors with ongoing advice, problem-solving support and training opportunities (MENTOR, 2009). Monitoring mentoring relationships should include contact with the mentor (IE. twice during the first month and monthly thereafter) with documented information on each mentor/mentee contact, resources for the mentor to help negotiate challenges (IE. expert advice from staff or other professionals, access to publications, referrals to other programs and services, other mentors), contact with an important person in the youth's life quarterly for the duration of the relationship, and group activities or support activities for the mentor and youth should be arranged to facilitate mentor-youth relationship development (MENTOR, 2009: 14).

Ongoing support for mentors helps to strengthen relationships and minimize early match closures. Mentoring programs that have these practices are more likely to have positive outcomes (Cavell, DuBois, Karcher, Keller & Rhodes, 2009; Vandenberghe, 2013).

Match Closure

As a final measure, mentoring programs should have clear procedures in place to manage anticipated match closures (IE. a celebration of the relationship) and unanticipated match closures (IE. a process for re-matching a mentor or youth). In fact, it has been suggested that mentors and youth be informed of their options for ending their mentoring relationships from the beginning (Vandenberghe, 2013). Exit interviews conducted with both parties permits reflection of positive experiences during the relationship, an opportunity to see if additional resources or supports could be provided to allow the match to continue, and a chance for the mentoring program to assess itself (MENTOR, 2009).

Creating Culturally Competent Mentoring Programs

In addition to the above sections, there are a number of actions that can be taken to make mentoring programs more culturally competent. This means having program staff and mentors that have compatible attitudes, knowledge, and skills that enable them to interact with youth of diverse cultural values, beliefs, customs, and practices with respect, appreciation, and effectiveness. It

also means that the mentoring program itself works effectively with culturally diverse populations by integrating cultural diversity into all aspects of its organizational values, structures, policies, and practices (Ngo, 2008). Best practices to achieve cultural competency include:

- Examining the cultural competence of the program (its policies and the staff), mentors, and the network that supports it and plan to address areas of concern (Sánchez et al., 2012).
- Engaging refugee and immigrant youth, family, and community leaders in designing, running, and guiding programs (Schineller & Rummell, 2009).
- Integrating opportunities for youth to explore their racial or ethnic heritage with the support of mentors and staff into programs (Sánchez et al., 2012)
- Recruiting multilingual and multicultural program staff, or staff that share the same culture as the youth being served by the program and ensuring that mentors recruited for the program include those whose cultural backgrounds are similar to the youth being served by the program (Schineller et al., 2009; Sánchez et al., 2012).
- Training programs for mentors and staff. Sánchez et al. (2012) suggest using Sue's (2006) cultural competence framework (cultural awareness and beliefs, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills) and including a discussion of the social construction of race.
- Assessing youth perceptions of their mentor's cultural sensitivity and using this information to guide supervision and training of mentors and to inform program evaluation. Sánchez et al. (2012) suggest using the Cultural Sensitivity Scale – Mentee Report (Sánchez & DuBois, 2006).
- Assessing mentor's cultural competence and using this information to inform the training of mentors and matching with youth. Sánchez et al. (2012) suggest using the Ethnocultural Empathy Scale (Wang, Davidson, Yakushko, Savoy, Tan & Bleier, 2003).

Conclusion

Research indicates that mentoring can be a successful intervention that leads to improved outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional and academic domains of youth development. However, meta-analyses have shown that these outcomes are small and modest. In general, the large amount of variation among programs regarding their goals, setting, and duration makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the specific outcomes of mentoring.

Mentoring is a broad, complex area of study and as a result, there is conceptual confusion about what is mentoring. Essentially, youth mentoring is a unique, personal relationship in which a caring individual provides consistent companionship, support, and guidance aimed at developing the competence,

and character of a child or adolescent. Mentoring relationships can be formal (IE. mentor and youth are matched by a third party) or informal (IE. mentor/youth relationship evolves spontaneously or incidentally without outside intervention). They can take place within a range of contexts (IE. school, workplace, community setting, faith-based organizations, youth justice settings, virtual community), take many forms (IE. one-on-one, group, team, mixed, peer or cross-age mentoring), and target different groups of youth (IE. youth in foster care, academically at risk students, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth who have disabilities).

Effective youth mentoring programs will foster mentoring relationships that are close, consistent, and enduring. Research indicates programs should adhere to minimum guidelines to establish effective programs, including:

- Writing a manual with program goals and procedures.
- Creating clear recruitment strategies and screening procedures for prospective mentors and youth.
- Effectively matching mentor and youth based on shared criteria and personal preferences.
- Creating initial and ongoing training for both mentors and youth that sets realistic expectations and goals for the mentoring relationship,
- Providing ongoing support and supervision.
- Encouraging a relationship commitment of one year with frequent contact for the duration of the relationship.

Researchers and practitioners in the field of youth mentoring may be interested in joining the YouthMentoring Listserv, run by Dr. David DuBois, a top international researcher on mentoring from the University of Illinois at Chicago. It is an interactive forum for researchers and practitioners to communicate and discuss youth mentoring topics. The listserv is free to join; simply send your e-mail address and name to youthmentoring@listserv.uic.edu to be added to the list of recipients and to receive frequent posts on mentoring.

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Crime Prevention Ottawa

Partners for a safer community

110 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

Tel: **613 580 2424**, ext. **22454**

Fax: **613 580 2593**

Email: **cpo@ottawa.ca**

crimepreventionottawa.ca

Prévention du Crime Ottawa

Ensemble vers une communauté plus sécuritaire

110, av. Laurier Ouest, Ottawa (Ontario) K1P 1J1

Tél. : **613 580 2424**, poste **22454**

Téloc. : **613 580 2593**

Courriel : **pco@ottawa.ca**

preventionducrimeottawa.ca

