



GROUP MENTORING

PROGRAM DESIGN AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

SUPPLEMENT TO THE

***ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE
PRACTICE FOR MENTORING***

April 2020



MENTOR

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS WITHIN THE EEPM

The following pages detail the recommendations for group mentoring programs that emerged from the work of this project. Here we include two types of recommendations:

- **Program Design and Development**

Considerations – These represent major themes and considerations for program design and implementation. Programs will need to consider these factors in how they develop and structure services in order to increase their effectiveness and avoid common challenges expressed by experienced practitioners.

- **Recommendations for Practice** – These recommendations provide additional guidance and nuance to the standard *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*. These recommendations highlight ways in which group mentoring programs might refine or enhance their day-to-day practice to maximize program success.

As always, these recommendations should be viewed through the lens of the theory of change of the program — the activities, goals, and desired outcomes the program has for youth participants and the specific ways in which the actions of mentors and staff lead to those outcomes. Practitioners looking for one example of a group mentoring theory of change can find a sample version, along with a sample logic model, for a school-based group mentoring program on the National Mentoring Resource Center website at: <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/learning-opportunities/logic-models-and-theories-of-change.html>

It should be noted that we expect that all group mentoring programs, even those serving groups of youth with many challenges and needs, will be strengths-based in their focus and will generally adhere to the principles of positive youth development. But beyond those general principles, we expect that group mentoring programs will be very diverse in terms of their desired outcomes, contexts, and capacities. Thus, the recommendations below should be viewed and implemented through the lens of a program's specific local circumstances and objectives.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Newly planned group mentoring programs, or those looking to revamp existing services, may want to consider the program design elements noted here. All of these topics were noted research we reviewed and in the conversations with the Working Group about key program features and common challenges.

Determine the match structure that can best support youth participants.

Most common in group mentoring programs are structures where **one mentor** is matched with a small group (-3-6) of youth or a pair of co-mentors works with a slightly larger group (-8-12). The **co-mentoring** approach offers several advantages, including fewer cancelled meetings when a mentor is unavailable, improved ability to manage the groups, and empowering co-mentors to offer distinct forms of support, but also work together to mutually reinforce key messages or learnings for mentees. Both of these approaches offer a good depth of adult support to the group, but also empower the youth to get to know one another, take on ownership roles, and truly collaborate and bond with one another in the program's activities.

To see how one program promotes both co-mentorship and mentor-staff collaboration, see the profile of one of the Leadership Foundations' programs in the last section of this resource.

Less common are **hybrid group/one-to-one programs** — but this approach also has tremendous potential. These programs make one-to-one matches between mentors and youth, but those dyads participate almost exclusively in group activities. These programs are often called “family-style” programs as they often involve a communal meal or formal gathering.^{1,2} This approach can be helpful for youth who need the personal attention and connection of a one-to-one relationship, but who would also benefit from some robust peer interactions and collective experiences.

Team mentoring models are those in which groups of mentors are intentionally selected based on their specific skills, backgrounds, and other criteria. For example, a school-based mentoring program where the mentoring groups are led by a volunteer tutor, a classroom teacher, a counselor, and a youth development specialist working together to provide specific forms of support collaboratively. Other examples could include mentors, teachers, community members, and clinicians working together to offer a “web of support” to a youth recovering from trauma or a mental health crisis, or, to borrow an example from this project’s Working Group, the combination of a teacher, a college student, and a leader from the business community working together with groups of 10–12 middle schoolers in the LA Team Mentoring program (see [page XX](#) for more information on how this program intentionally builds its mentor and youth “teams”). These team programs can offer youth access to targeted forms of support and mentors with specific lived experiences³ and, when done well, combine mentor strengths into

a comprehensive support structure that can uniquely meet the needs of each youth in the group.

Practitioners will want to think carefully about which group structure is the best fit to meet the needs of their mentees. Youth who need a more personal touch and a simpler group experience may thrive in a small group with one mentor. Co-mentoring may be a safer structure in terms of meeting consistency and group management, but it also requires more recruitment and more support of mentors, who now must work collaboratively with another adult. Hybrid and team models offer really intensive support, but may not allow for the small group bonding and the rich peer-to-peer engagement of more traditional group structures. There is no right answer, but this decision influences everything the program does subsequently and should be carefully considered.

Set limits around group size and composition.

One of the most common questions practitioners ask about group mentoring is around the optimal mentor-youth ratio for the groups these programs make. Our literature search uncovered a wide variety of group sizes and configurations with the most common configurations being one mentor working with 4–10 youth or two mentors working with 8–12 youth. But there was considerable variety, including models where three mentors worked with 12 youth⁴, one mentor (in this case a teacher) working with a group of 15 students,⁵ four peer mentors serving a group of 10 youth in a group skills program,⁶ and even four mentors working with 50-plus youth in an after-school program⁷ that emphasized mentoring interactions. On average, the programs that reported a specific number of mentors and youth in their model averaged out to 6.4 youth per one mentor in the group and an average group size of 12 total youth.

What remains elusive in terms of that practitioner question is whether there is an “ideal” ratio. While that ideal has not been clearly identified in the research, and likely depends heavily on the goals and activities of the program, there is an emerging sense among researchers and practitioners that somewhere around **four-to-five mentees for every adult mentor** in the group is a bit of a “sweet spot” in terms of a ratio. There are several reasons for this:

- It's easier for mentors to manage the groups in terms of behavior and keeping youth on task during activities
- It allows for more interpersonal interaction among the youth and makes it harder for some youth to “hide” in a larger group.
- It may be easier to build a sense of community and belonging with a smaller “unit.”
- A wide range of activities is likely more accessible as a smaller group that needs fewer resources, physical space, and coordination and logistical planning by adults
- Project-based work may be easier and more efficient with a smaller group

Of course, smaller group “units” have their challenges (e.g., if one member leaves prematurely, it is felt very keenly in a small group). But if the theory of change of the program is mainly driven by the youth participants interacting with one another, bonding with one another, and building a unique experience with the support of their mentor(s), then it logically follows that there is likely volume of support needed to keep the group focused, conflict-free, and empowered to work together. A mentor who has to contain and focus a larger number of youth may struggle with the practical realities of that group size.

This reality also suggests an upper limit on total group size regardless of the number of mentors in the mix — and that might actually be a larger concern here. Large groups, meaning groups of more than a dozen or so youth, can have participation challenges no matter how many adults are there to mentor or support the work. Larger groups allow some youth to check out, for cliques and subgroups to form, and for a variety of other issues to creep into the overall cohesion of the group.

However, there may be some circumstances where a larger group is perfect for the program — for example, a sports-based program where you need to field enough players to form teams and play a match and there is adequate physical space for the larger groups to do their work in. Once again, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to these issues. Programs should carefully consider both overall group size and the adult-youth ratio, as either of these can be misaligned with what the program wants to achieve or the realities of their meeting space.

While this question has not been tested explicitly in the research literature, it's worth noting that secondary analysis⁸ from one prominent study⁹ of a school-based group mentoring program found that group cohesion began to wane when the group size exceeded the one-to-four or five ratio suggested here. The experience level of mentors and the behavioral issues of the youth in the groups will be important factors to consider when ultimately determining appropriate group size. Clearly there is a range of ratios and configurations that can work in practice — but there is likely a “sweet spot” for the specific work a program wants their groups to do and for maximizing the pool of available mentors.

The importance of structured activities, with flexibility.

Group mentoring programs should be built around a robust **activity curriculum** that guides the content and structure of group interactions over the course of the program. In looking through the literature on group mentoring, we did not see any examples of programs where the meetings were completely freeform, although there were programs where groups could choose a la carte from a wide variety of activities at a school or program site. But for the most part, these programs are highly structured and often provide daily or weekly activity options and materials.

The types of activities offered by a program will vary depending on program goals and other factors, but in general, group activities should reflect these characteristics:

- **Emphasize active involvement and interaction for all group participants** – This ensures that each participant is getting the same experience and the same opportunities to learn, reflect, and grow.
- **Build on prior activities or further elaborate a theme related to program goals** – Many programs use a sequential curriculum that allows youth to use new skills or knowledge and move on to increasingly complex interactions and lessons.
- **Offer opportunities for honest reflection and open, safe sharing** – This is what puts the “mentoring” in group mentoring. This work is what allows youth to truly be in a relationship with one another and to open up and share their authentic selves.
- **Role plays or other scenario-based opportunities to practice new skills or behaviors** – A small, trusted group environment — with the support of adult mentors — offers an ideal space for youth to try out something new or practice a new way of acting or being. These activities, and the feedback of peers during them, can ground the lessons of the program in the day-to-day world of the mentees.
- **Facilitate knowledge-acquisition and skill-building** – In addition to mentor and peer support, group mentoring programs can also offer a chance to simply teach content or provide information to youth. We found examples of programs using groups to teach sexual health information, coping skills, and other relevant content to youth in these group mentoring settings, using the mentor to guide discussions, answer group questions, and help mentees clarify values or choose a path of action.
- **Allow youth to lead and take some ownership of the activities** – Activities should be as youth-led as possible so that they are empowered to collaborate with one another, stretch themselves in meaningful ways, and feel an organic sense of ownership and belonging to the group.
- **Promote group cohesion and the development of positive group culture** – This concept might very well be the crux of making group mentoring work. Is the group a true group? Have these youth bonded with one another and their mentors to make something more than the sum of their individual relationships? Is there a sense of community and togetherness? Of shared ownership? The activities a program offers should emphasize the ways in which the mentees build something new together in a collaborative, collective experience.



There is, however, another thread that runs through the literature on group mentoring: the importance of flexibility in how and when that curriculum is delivered. One of the original developers of the Project Arrive program that was part of this project's Working Group emphasized the concept of "curriculum with creativity" for their work.¹⁰ The idea is simple: mentors must be attuned to the needs and moods of their groups from meeting to meeting and realize that there are times when rigidly adhering to the weekly activity is not in the best interests of the group. This can include situations where the group is distracted with an issue at school or in the community, when too many group members are absent from a meeting, or when there is some other pressing concern that indicates that deviating from the curriculum might be the best thing for that particular day. This can also apply to instances where the group is stuck on an issue or problem, the curriculum feels redundant or prior work by the group, or there are events in the mentees' lives that require more immediate attention and support from mentors. This creative deviation from the set activities can also include modifying an activity, in terms of scope or how it's accomplished, in the name of making sure that mentees are able to have a positive engagement.

Obviously, deviating from a set curriculum can sound less than optimal to practitioners, and it's always possible to give groups so much freedom of choice that they fail to complete the full program or avoid more challenging activities that might offer the most potential for growth. But both practitioner wisdom and common sense dictates that there should be some malleability to the programming, which is why group programs are encouraged to build scheduling flexibility and some open time into the flow of their program. This may allow for some "wiggle room" to get activities completed and give

Strategies for Adding Flexibility to Structured Group Mentoring Programs

- Intentionally schedule group meetings to include both a curricular activity and time for informal interaction.
- Have curricular themes for each session but allow for a menu of activities that mentors/mentees can choose from.
- Plan the program over time so that structured activities/curriculum early in the year give way to greater youth control/decision-making over time. One example could be to choose activities that correspond with Tuckman's stages of group development (e.g., develop listening skills and conflict-resolution skills when a group is in the "storming stage" and goal-setting and team-work skills when in "norming stage," etc.).
- Schedule curriculum-focused days interspersed through the program.
- Set parameters around flexibility/ability to deviate from curriculum — e.g., specify the essential versus optional/adaptable components of a curriculum in order to maintain fidelity to key elements.

the groups some much needed time to innovate, take breaks, or shift focus as needed. Sometimes, deviating just a bit from the rigid structure of a program leads to gains and growth in group cohesion and other areas that make the trade-off worth it. See the sidebar for some of the creative ways we noticed programs trying to offer both



structured interactions and this needed flexibility. You can also see an example of how the Clubhouse Network’s programs try to find balance between structured time and flexible meetings in the last section of this resource.

Plan for access to resources, physical space, and supplies.

Because group mentoring programs are so activity-driven — and also tend to be housed at a site like a school, nonprofit center, or other institution — they must emphasize the logistical planning around use of physical space and resources. Among the common challenges noted in both the research and by our Working Group members were the challenges of ensuring a proper physical space, and adequate privacy, for groups to meet and in acquiring access to the equipment and materials needed to do group activities. If the program is housed in a “host” site like a school, a Memorandum of Understanding or other binding document can help clarify agreements around access to space and resources. The bottom line is that mentors and their groups need access to facilities, tools, materials, equipment, and other infrastructure that is needed for conducting program activities.

Empowering groups to develop their own norms, rituals, and customs.

Given that creating a sense of group ownership and community is one of the main goals of group mentoring programs, practitioners are encouraged to think about how they can encourage groups to develop their own customs, rituals, and group rules. This can include everything from a common greeting or opening icebreaker to their meetings, a set of rules around confidentiality and handling conflict, or even rituals on how they celebrate accomplishments by group members.

Of particular importance are the rules around how the group will make decisions (e.g., unanimous agreement versus taking turns choosing versus majority vote, etc.) and how the group will deal with violations of its agreed-upon rules. Both of these elements will help establish a sense of group identity and will facilitate mentee trust-building with their mentors and their fellow peers. The more these types of elements can be collectively created and agreed on with maximum buy-in, the better.

These types of meeting structures and rituals allow groups to create a positive culture and to work out conflicts productively. Groups are encouraged to work together early in the program cycle to establish these idiosyncratic norms and rituals. These will bring consistency and stronger rapport to the group over time if they are agreed on and adhered to. They can also provide some of the fun and silly moments that make being part of a group so enjoyable.

You can learn more about how the members of our Working Group encourage their mentoring groups to set norms, rituals, and rules in the final section of this resource.

Anticipate some common group mentoring challenges.

Program developers should give thought to how they will mitigate **common challenges** for group mentoring models, such as:

- **Ensuring that each group has a relatively similar experience** even though each group is somewhat unique and will evolve at their own pace and in idiosyncratic ways. If your groups are having wildly different experiences, it may be challenging to achieve the program’s goals with consistency.

- **Ensuring that all youth get a relatively similar level of engagement, interaction, and participation.** Shy youth or youth who are less comfortable in groups can easily be pushed to the side by more boisterous, confident, or naturally social mentees, and their mentors will need to pay close attention to who is not participating fully and who is dominating the spotlight. Ideally, each member of the group will get the same level of adult and peer support, but this can only really happen if the mentors and staff are encouraging full participation and making sure to check in with every child about their experience in the group. This does not mean that all youth have to participate in every single activity equally — in fact it can be really harmful to shy youth or youth who have experienced trauma if they are forced to share in group conversations if they are not ready. In these situations, mentors should find other ways for youth to be engaged and be part of the group even if they aren't comfortable speaking up in a particular moment. But the main idea here is that the program will struggle to give each youth the mentoring experience they deserve if participation varies considerably and nonparticipation in activities is the norm.

- **Determining how to meet youth's individual needs** while participating in a group experience. Some youth may benefit more from a closer one-to-one mentoring relationship as it can be hard for all youth to get their specific needs addressed in a group format. Think carefully about which youth can get their individual needs met through a group approach. Some youth might be better off being referred to a one-to-one model or other service (see Recommendation 19 below). But in most programs, mentors can provide extra support to youth in their group by offering one-on-one time to talk before or after the group sessions or

at some other time that allows for extra support beyond the group. Some programs also promote good staff-mentor communication in order to determine which youth might need more supports than the mentoring program alone can provide. See the great example of how Project Arrive handles this by using social workers as program coordinators in the last section of this resource.

- **Managing group dynamics.** Mentors will need considerable skills and support to keep groups on task, relatively free of conflict, and functioning well through all of the stages of group development. In fact, Tuckman's stages of group development¹¹ (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning) may offer a useful framework for thinking about the group over the program cycle. But mentors will always need to be keeping an eye on the interplay between mentees and ensuring strong group cohesion.



Emphasize belonging and safety for mentees.

If there were two themes that echoed across the literature on group mentoring, that most spoke to the power of these programs to intervene in the lives of youth and build something positive, it is the twin goals of **belonging** and **safety** above all else. These two characteristics of effective groups — mentees feeling a sense of belonging combined with a sense that this is a safe place for them — are at the heart of almost every example of effective group mentoring programs we examined. These two principles are cited extensively in the research, both as outcomes in their own right and as precursors to other, more distal outcomes (e.g., improved behavior or peer relationships). Other common group traits found in the (mostly qualitative) research on group mentoring include:

- The group as a place that offers *unconditional support* to members
- The group allowing participants to *normalize their experiences* by comparing and contrasting with those of their peers
- The group as a place to *build identity and autonomy*, while also building mutuality and acceptance with others
- The group as a *place to learn*
- The group as *feeling like a family*

There is no cookie-cutter model to building an effective group mentoring program, but programs that attended to the concepts of belonging and participant safety, and the other factors mentioned here, seemed most successful in creating an environment in which the bigger goals of the program could be met. Practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders are encouraged to think through these types of design considerations and then test to see if these types of design features are impactful as part of regular program evaluation.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Note: The structure presented below uses the original language from the Elements of Effective Practice (4th Edition) as the framework for making additional group mentoring recommendations. Readers should be aware that some of that language may need to be modified to reference a group model rather than the implied one-to-one model. Group mentoring programs can find their specific recommendations in the colored, numbered Recommendations throughout the FRAMEWORK BELOW.

STANDARD 1 – RECRUITMENT

BENCHMARKS:

Mentor Recruitment

B.1.1 Program engages in recruitment strategies that realistically portray the benefits (to society, the company, and to mentees), practices, supports, and challenges of mentoring in the program.

1. Group Recommendation: Program recruits mentors who express an interest in developing a supportive, caring relationship and friendship with more than one mentee, as well as the potential for co-mentoring with other adults in programs using that configuration.

2. Group Recommendation: Program communicates to prospective mentors that in addition to mentoring one or more youth, they may also be facilitating activities with their mentee(s).

3. Group Recommendation: Program describes the extent to which mentors can expect support from their fellow mentors in the program and the extent to which mentors are expected to provide support to one another.

4. Group Recommendation: Program communicates to prospective mentors that they will likely have a diverse group of mentees and that establishing a close, supportive relationship may be easier to do with some youth than others.

B.1.2 Program utilizes recruitment strategies that build positive attitudes and emotions about mentoring.

5. Group Recommendation: Program uses recruitment messages that communicate to mentors that they have the opportunity to positively impact more lives through being a group mentor than an individual mentor.

B.1.3 Program recruits mentors whose skills, motivations, and backgrounds best match the goals and structure of the program.

6. Group Recommendation: Program prioritizes the recruitment of individuals who have education, employment, or training in:

- group facilitation skills with youth
- empathic listening
- strong social skills
- implementing a curriculum with fidelity, when relevant

7. Group Recommendation: Program prioritizes recruiting members of nontraditional, underrepresented, and minority groups to match the diversity of youth served and to support program goals around diversity, inclusion, belonging, and safety, as relevant.

8. Group Recommendation: If relevant to youth needs and program goals, program may consider using a “team” mentoring model, in which it recruits mentors with specific professional expertise and relevant skill sets and backgrounds who are then grouped with other mentors to serve together as a team working with a mentee or group of mentees.

B.1.4 Program encourages mentors to assist with recruitment efforts by providing them with resources to ask individuals they know, who meet the eligibility criteria of the program, to be a mentor.

B.1.5 Program trains and encourages mentees to identify and recruit appropriate mentors for themselves, when relevant.



Mentee and Parent or Guardian Recruitment

B.1.6 Program engages in recruitment strategies that realistically portray the benefits, practices, supports, and challenges of being mentored in the program.

9. Group Recommendation: Program conveys benefits of the group experience when recruiting mentees.

10. Group Recommendation: Program communicates to parents or caregivers that their child will participate in a group mentoring relationship with one or more mentors as well as one or more peers.

11. Group Recommendation: Program communicates to parents or caregivers how mentors and youth group members in the program are screened, matched, and monitored.

12. Group Recommendation: Program describes how mentees are expected to participate fully in the program and in their group's relationships, conversations, and activities, so that youth and families can set realistic expectations and assess their fit with the program.

B.1.7 Program recruits mentees whose needs best match the services offered by the program.

13. Group Recommendation: Program recruits mentees who express interest in developing a close, supportive relationship with a mentor (or mentors, depending on the program structure) as well as with one or more peers.

14. Group Recommendation: Program provides information to referring agencies/institutions so that they are aware of what type of young people will be best served by the program and how they will benefit from the group model.

ENHANCEMENTS Mentor Recruitment

E.1.1 Program communicates to mentors about how mentoring and volunteering can benefit them.

E.1.2 Program has a publicly available written statement outlining eligibility requirements for mentors in its program.

E.1.3 Program uses multiple strategies to recruit mentors (e.g., direct ask, social media, traditional methods of mass communication, presentations, referrals) on an ongoing basis.

Mentee and Parent or Guardian Recruitment

E.1.4 Program has a publicly available written statement outlining eligibility requirements for mentees in its program.

E.1.5 Program encourages mentees to recruit other peers to be mentees whose needs match the services offered by the program, when relevant.

STANDARD 2 – SCREENING

BENCHMARKS: Mentor Screening

B.2.1 Program has established criteria for accepting mentors into the program as well as criteria for disqualifying mentor applicants.

15. Group Recommendation: Program should consider screening prospective mentors for education or training in:

- group facilitation skills with youth
- empathic listening
- strong social skills
- implementing a curriculum with fidelity, when relevant



16. Group Recommendation: Program should consider screening prospective mentors for having positive relationships with diverse colleagues in the workplace, friends, or family members.

B.2.2 Prospective mentors complete a written application that includes questions designed to help assess their safety and suitability for mentoring a youth.

B.2.3 Program conducts at least one face-to-face interview with each prospective mentor that includes questions designed to help the program assess his or her suitability for mentoring a youth.

B.2.4 Program conducts a comprehensive criminal background check on prospective adult mentors, including searching a national criminal records database, along with sex offender and child abuse registries and, when relevant, driving records.

B.2.5 Program conducts reference check interviews with multiple adults who know an applicant (ideally, both personal and professional references) that include questions to help assess his or her suitability for mentoring a youth.

B.2.6 Prospective mentors agree in writing to a one-year (calendar or school) minimum commitment for the mentoring relationship, or a minimum time commitment that is required by the mentoring program.

17. Group Recommendation: Prospective mentors agree to mentoring more than one mentee.

18. Group Recommendation: Program should assess during the screening process whether prospective mentors may have scheduling challenges or conflicts that would hinder their full attendance at group meetings, and screen out those who may be unable to consistently meet with their group of mentees.

B.2.7 Prospective mentors agree in writing to participate in face-to-face meetings with their mentees that average a minimum of once a week and a total of four or more hours per month over the course of the relationship, or at a minimum frequency and amount of hours that are required by their mentoring program.

Mentee Screening

B.2.8 Program has established criteria for accepting youth into the program as well as criteria that would disqualify a potential youth participant.

19. Group Recommendation: Program should assess if prospective mentees would benefit specifically from being in a group program with peers or if an exclusively adult mentoring relationship or some other intervention might be a better fit.

20. Group Recommendation: Program should specify the criteria for determining that youth have the ability to fully and positively participate in the program's group relationships, activities, and discussions (e.g., behavioral expectations, requisite skills, or circumstances, etc.).



B.2.9 Parent(s)/guardian(s) complete an application or referral form.

B.2.10 Parent(s)/guardian(s) provide informed permission for their child to participate.

B.2.11 Parent(s)/guardian(s) and mentees agree in writing to a one-year (calendar or school) minimum commitment for the mentoring relationship, or the minimum time commitment that is required by the mentoring program.

B.2.12 Parents(s)/guardian(s) and mentees agree in writing that mentees participate in face-to-face meetings with their mentors that average a minimum of once a week and a total of four or more hours per month over the course of the relationship, or at a minimum frequency and amount of hours that are required by the mentoring program.

ENHANCEMENTS

Mentor Screening

E.2.1 Program utilizes national, fingerprint-based FBI criminal background checks.

E.2.2 Program conducts at least one home visit of each prospective mentor, especially when the match may be meeting in the mentor's home.

E.2.3 Program conducts comprehensive criminal background checks on all adults living in the home of prospective mentors, including searches of a national criminal records database along with sex offender and child abuse registries, when the match may meet in mentors' homes.

E.2.4 School-based programs assess mentors' interest in maintaining contact with their mentees during the summer months (following the close of the academic school year) and offer assistance to matches in maintaining contact.

E.2.5 Programs that utilize adult mentors prioritize accepting mentor applicants who are older than college-age.

E.2.6 Program uses evidence-based screening tools and practices to identify individuals who have attitudes and beliefs that support safe and effective mentoring relationships.

Mentee Screening

E.2.7 Mentees complete an application (either written or verbally).

E.2.8 Mentees provide written assent agreeing to participate in their mentoring program.

STANDARD 3 – TRAINING

BENCHMARKS

Mentor Training

B.3.1 Program provides a minimum of two hours of pre-match, in-person, mentor training.

21. Group Recommendation: Because of the increased training demands on group mentors to learn about group facilitation skills, as well as potentially about how to facilitate activities using a curriculum, pre-match mentor training should extend beyond the minimum of two hours generally recommended. While the exact length of training will vary from program to program, group programs heavy on complex activities and skill-building work may offer upward of four hours of pre-match training to mentors, as an example.

B.3.2 Program provides pre-match training for mentors on the following topics:

a. Program requirements (e.g., match length, match frequency, duration of visits, protocols for missing, being late to meetings, and match termination).

22. Strategies for beginning and ending each group meeting.

b. Mentors' goals and expectations for the mentee, parent or guardian, and the mentoring relationship.

c. Mentors' obligations and appropriate roles.

23. If there is more than one mentor in a group, training on group co-facilitation skills, including how the mentors' partnership will work, planning and leading activities together, building relationships individually and together, conflict resolution, sending consistent messages, and developing shared goals and methods.

24. Strategies for sharing power with group members so that the groups are youth-led as much as possible.

25. Rapport and team-building activities and rituals to use at every group meeting to build group cohesiveness.

26. Delivering session content/activities with fidelity and at a high quality, especially in programs that are building specific youth skills or focused on sequential activities.

27. Working with program staff to refer youth to additional programs, services, and supports to address needs beyond what the mentoring program can provide.

28. Clarifying roles and responsibilities of program staff, including which circumstances and situations should be handled by program staff or liaisons and when mentors are empowered to address situations on their own.

d. Relationship development and maintenance.

29. Strategies for treating all mentees equitably and developing close, effective relationships with all group members.

30. Strategies for encouraging all group members to participate in discussions and activities, and feel that they all belong in the group.

31. Strategies for handling negative group dynamics (e.g., cliques, conflicts, scapegoating, nonparticipation, etc.).

32. Strategies for group decision-making, handling disagreements, and handling disruptions to group activities or conversations.

e. Ethical and safety issues that may arise related to the mentoring relationship (see also B.3.3).

f. Effective closure of the mentoring relationship.

33. How to communicate with the group if one mentee leaves the group prematurely.

34. How to communicate about and plan for the ending of the full group.

35. Understanding the potential negative impact of mentors quitting groups prematurely.



g. Sources of assistance available to support mentors.

h. Opportunities and challenges associated with mentoring specific populations of youth (e.g., children with an incarcerated parent, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth in foster care, high school dropouts), if relevant.

36. The importance of taking a strengths-based approach that emphasizes how the positive peer culture of a group can be used to meet the specific needs and goals of the population served.

37. Group facilitation and management skills, particularly recognizing the potential negative impact of “deviant peer training” and other antisocial behaviors on group members, and strategies for keeping those behaviors in check.

i. Initiating the mentoring relationship.

38. Strategies for initiating the group involving Stages of group process and implications of these group stages for developing close, supportive mentoring relationships.

j. Developing an effective, positive relationship with mentee’s family, if relevant.

B.3.3 Program provides pre-match training for the mentor on the following risk management policies that are matched to the program model, setting, and population served.

- a. Appropriate physical contact
- b. Contact with mentoring program (e.g., who to contact, when to contact)
- c. Relationship monitoring requirements (e.g., response time, frequency, schedule)
- d. Approved activities

e. Mandatory reporting requirements associated with suspected child abuse or neglect, and suicidality and homicidality

f. Confidentiality and anonymity

40. Group Recommendation: Program emphasizes the increased complexity of confidentiality in group settings, especially in mentee training, and encourages groups to address confidentiality in their ground rules.

- g. Digital and social media use
- h. Overnight visits and out of town travel
- i. Money spent on mentee and mentoring activities
- j. Transportation
- k. Emergency and crisis situation procedures
- l. Health and medical care
- m. Discipline
- n. Substance use
- o. Firearms and weapons
- p. Inclusion of others in match meetings (e.g., siblings, mentee’s friends)
- q. Photo and image use
- r. Evaluation and use of data
- s. Grievance procedures
- t. Other program relevant topics

B.3.4 Program uses training practices and materials that are informed by empirical research or are themselves empirically evaluated.



ENHANCEMENTS

Mentor Training

E.3.1 Program provides additional pre-match training opportunities beyond the two-hour, in-person minimum for a total of six hours or more.

- 41. Group Recommendation: Program may have new mentors shadow seasoned mentor(s) or meet previous mentors and be able to ask them questions.

E.3.2 Program addresses the following post-match training topics:

- a. How developmental functioning may affect the mentoring relationship
- b. How culture, gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and other demographic characteristics of the mentor and mentee may affect the mentoring relationship

- 42. Cultural factors and how culture might influence the functioning of the group.

- c. Topics tailored to the needs and characteristics of the mentee
- d. Closure procedures

- 43. Group Recommendation: Because mentors will be closing relationships with more than one mentee, additional closure skills training is needed on topics such as how to handle the early departure of individual mentors and mentees, as well as communicating and reinforcing rules around mentor-mentee and mentee-mentee contact outside the program after closure.

- 44. Group Recommendation: During times of transition or closure, the program provides mentees with an opportunity to reflect on and share feelings about their relationships with the other youth in the group and with their mentors.

E.3.3 Program uses training to continue to screen mentors for suitability to be a mentor and develops techniques for early trouble-shooting should problems be identified.

Mentee Training

E.3.4 Program provides training for the mentee on the following topics:

- a. Purpose of mentoring
- b. Program requirements (e.g., match length, match frequency, duration of visits, protocols for missing or being late to meetings, match termination)
- c. Mentees' goals for mentoring
- d. Mentors' obligations and appropriate roles
- e. Mentees' obligations and appropriate roles

- 45. Group Recommendation: Mentee training should also include their role in helping to establish and maintain group rules, helping to create a group culture, and how to get the most out of a group mentoring experience.

- f. Ethics and safety in mentoring relationships
- g. Initiating the mentoring relationship

- 46. Group Recommendation: Training for mentees should include information that describes the experience of participating in the group, the stages of group development, and the group's rules, goals, and rituals.

- h. Effective closure of the mentoring relationship

E.3.5 Program provides training for the mentee on the following risk management policies that are matched to the program model, setting, and population served.

See B.3.3 for the list of policies to address during training.

Parent or Guardian Training

E.3.6 Program provides training for the parent(s) or guardian(s) (when appropriate) on the following topics:

- a. Purpose of mentoring
- b. Program requirements (e.g., match length, match frequency, duration of visits, and protocols for missing or being late to meetings, match termination)
 47. **Group Recommendation:** Program also clarifies policies and procedures for handling conflicts between mentees and other disciplinary issues, including who, when, and how to contact staff members.
- c. Parents' and mentees' goals for mentoring
- d. Mentors' obligations and appropriate roles
- e. Mentees' obligations and appropriate roles
- f. Ethics and safety in mentoring relationships
- g. Initiating the mentoring relationship
- h. Developing an effective, working relationship with your child's mentor
- i. Effective closure of the mentoring relationship

E.3.7 Program provides training for the parent(s) or guardian(s) on the following risk management policies that are matched to the program model, setting, and population served.

See B.3.3 for the list of policies to address during training.

STANDARD 4 – MATCHING

BENCHMARKS

B.4.1 Program considers the characteristics of the mentor and mentee (e.g., interests; proximity; availability; age; gender; race; ethnicity; personality; expressed preferences of mentor, mentee, and parent or guardian; goals; strengths; previous experiences) when making matches.

48. **Group Recommendation:** If the mentees know each other prior to joining the program, staff should consider the youths' prior history together when assigning them to mentoring groups (e.g., check to see if any participants are bullies or victims of bullying, if youth have "enemies" in the group, or if youth are close friends, and avoid placing these pairs together in the same group).
49. **Group Recommendation:** Program should strive for a good blend of youth backgrounds, experiences, and leadership levels in each group and avoid placing too many youth who exhibit aggressive or other negative behaviors, or who are prone to dysregulation due to trauma exposure, into the same group.
50. **Group Recommendation:** If program assigns more than one mentor to a group, program should consider matching mentors who are diverse with respect to characteristics such as age, race, gender, interpersonal skills, and professional background.
51. **Group Recommendation:** Match mentors who have more experience in a helping profession or managing groups containing one or more youth with behavior problems.



B.4.2 Program arranges and documents an initial meeting between the mentor and mentee as well as, when relevant, with the parent or guardian.

B.4.3 Program staff member should be on site and/or present during the initial match meeting of the mentor and mentee, and, when relevant, parent or guardian.

B.4.4 Mentor, mentee, a program staff member, and, when relevant, the mentee's parent or guardian, meet in person to sign a commitment agreement consenting to the program's rules and requirements (e.g., frequency, intensity and duration of match meetings; roles of each person involved in the mentoring relationship; frequency of contact with program), and risk management policies.

52. Group Recommendation: Program should also include an icebreaker activity so that group members can introduce themselves to one another, discuss the topics that were covered in training, explain mentee's roles in the group context, set ground rules, and discuss goals for the group.

B.4.5 GROUP Co-mentors should be offered an opportunity to get to know each other and discuss their perspectives and skill sets prior to the initial match meeting with their mentees.

ENHANCEMENTS

E.4.1 Programs match mentee with a mentor who is at least three years older than the mentee.

E.4.2 Program sponsors a group matching event where prospective mentors and mentees can meet and interact with one another, and provide the program with feedback on match preferences.

E.4.3 Program provides an opportunity for the parent(s) or guardian(s) to provide feedback about the mentor selected by the program, prior to the initiation meeting.

E.4.4 Initial match meeting occurs at the home of the mentee with the program staff member present, if the mentor will be picking up the mentee at the mentee's home for match meetings.

E.4.5 Program staff member prepares mentor for the initial meeting after the match determination has been made (e.g., provide mentor with background information about prospective mentee; remind mentor of confidentiality; discuss potential opportunities and challenges associated with mentoring proposed mentee).

E.4.6 Program staff member prepares mentee and his or her parents or guardians for the initial meeting after the match determination has been made (e.g., provide mentee and parent(s) with background information about selected mentor; discuss any family rules that should be shared with the mentor; discuss what information family members would like to share with the mentor and when).

E.4.7 GROUP Program may consider having a brief, announced trial period at the beginning of the program during which mentoring program leaders can observe the groups, obtain feedback from group members, and make adjustments in order to create the optimal group composition of both youth and mentors (while avoiding stigmatizing participants or generating negative feelings).



STANDARD 5 – MONITORING AND SUPPORT

BENCHMARKS

B.5.1 Program contacts mentors and mentees at a minimum frequency of twice per month for the first month of the match and once a month thereafter.

53. Group Recommendation: Program staff members should observe each mentor-mentee group periodically, as needed, throughout the program cycle and be prepared to offer substantial support to groups that are struggling with culture or behavioral challenges.

B.5.2 At each mentor monitoring contact, program staff should ask mentors about mentoring activities, mentee outcomes, child safety issues, the quality of the mentoring relationship, and the impact of mentoring on the mentor and mentee using a standardized procedure.

54. Group Recommendation: Program staff members should also ask mentors about the stage the group is in, the relationships between mentors who are co-leading a group, and the relationships between mentees in the group.

B.5.3 At each mentee monitoring contact, program should ask mentees about mentoring activities, mentee outcomes, child safety issues, the quality of the mentoring relationship, and the impact of mentoring on the mentee using a standardized procedure.

55. Group Recommendation: Program staff members should also ask mentees about their relationships with their mentors and other members of the group.

B.5.4 Program follows evidence-based protocol to elicit more in-depth assessment from mentors and mentees about the quality of their mentoring relationships, and uses scientifically tested relationship assessment tools.

56. Group Recommendation: Program periodically assesses group dynamics, co-mentor relationships, mentor-mentee relationships, and mentee-mentee relationships.

B.5.5 Program contacts a responsible adult in each mentee's life (e.g., parent, guardian, or teacher) at a minimum frequency of twice per month for the first month of the match and once a month thereafter.

B.5.6 At each monitoring contact with a responsible adult in the mentee's life, program asks about mentoring activities, mentee outcomes, child safety issues, the quality of the mentoring relationship, and the impact of mentoring on the mentee using a standardized procedure.

B.5.7 Program regularly assesses all matches to determine if they should be closed or encouraged to continue.

B.5.8 Program documents information about each mentor-mentee meeting including, at a minimum, the date, length, and description of activity completed.

57. Group Recommendation: Mentors should record the activities that their group completed, especially if the activities differ from a preset curriculum, as well as significant conversations among group members, impressions of group dynamics, and information about group relationships.

B.5.9 Program provides mentors with access to relevant resources (e.g., expert advice from program staff or others, publications, Web-based resources, experienced mentors) to help mentors address challenges in their mentoring relationships as they arise.

58. Group Recommendation: Program staff should also provide mentors with meaningful feedback about group outcomes, group development stages, how peer relationships may be affecting youth outcomes, whether the group is stalled at a stage, and strategies for helping the group advance to a new stage.

59. Group Recommendation: Program should have procedures and provide mentors with strategies for integrating new group members after the group has been initiated.

B.5.10 Program provides mentees and parents or guardians with access or referrals to relevant resources (e.g., expert advice from program staff or others, publications, Web-based resources, available social service referrals) to help families address needs and challenges as they arise.

B.5.11 Program provides one or more opportunities per year for post-match mentor training.

B.5.12 Program provides mentors with feedback on a regular basis regarding their mentees' outcomes and the impact of mentoring on their mentees to continuously improve mentee outcomes and encourage mentor retention.

ENHANCEMENTS

E.5.1 Program conducts a minimum of one in-person monitoring and support meeting per year with mentor, mentee, and when relevant, parent or guardian.

E.5.2 Program hosts one or more group activities for matches and/or offers information about activities that matches might wish to participate in together.

60. Group Recommendation: Given the complexity of managing a group in addition to establishing mentoring relationships, programs should provide opportunities for all mentors to meet and talk with each other to provide each other with peer support.

E.5.3 Program hosts one or more group activities for matches and mentees' families.

E.5.4 Program thanks mentors and recognizes their contributions at some point during each year of the mentoring relationship, prior to match closure.

E.5.5 At least once each school or calendar year of the mentoring relationship, program thanks the family or a responsible adult in each mentee's life (e.g., guardian or teacher) and recognizes their contributions in supporting the mentee's engagement in mentoring.

STANDARD 6 - CLOSURE

BENCHMARKS

B.6.1 Program has a procedure to manage anticipated closures, when members of the match are willing and able to engage in the closure process.

61. Group Recommendation: Program should provide mentors with strategies for closing each meeting with rituals that encourage reflection on the group members' relationships and personal growth and allow each member to say goodbye in ways that mirror the ultimate closure of the group.



62. Group Recommendation: Program should have procedures for managing, and provide mentors with strategies for continuing the group when a mentee or mentor leaves the group prematurely.

63. Group Recommendation: Program should build group closure activities into the curriculum or the last several meetings of the group so that closure can be adequately addressed and youth and mentors have time to reflect and process the group's dissolution.

B.6.2 Program has a procedure to manage unanticipated closures, when members of the match are willing and able to engage in the closure process.

64. Group Recommendation: Program should provide mentors with strategies and guidelines for discussing any mentee who left the group unexpectedly, with an emphasis on confidentiality and group concerns.

65. Group Recommendation: Program should establish policies and procedures for when premature departures of mentors or youth from one or more groups may necessitate the merging or dissolution of groups or other reconfigurations in the middle of the program cycle.

B.6.3 Program has a procedure to manage closure when one member of the match is unable or unwilling to engage in the closure process.

B.6.4 Program conducts exit interview with mentors and mentees, and when relevant, with parents or guardians.

B.6.5 Program has a written policy and procedure, when relevant, for managing rematching.

B.6.6 Program documents that closure procedures were followed.

B.6.7 Regardless of the reason for closure, the mentoring program should have a discussion with mentors that includes the following topics of conversation:

- a. Discussion of mentors' feelings about closure
- b. Discussion of reasons for closure, if relevant
- c. Discussion of positive experiences in the mentoring relationship
- d. Procedure for mentor notifying the mentee and his or her parents, if relevant, far enough in advance of the anticipated closure meeting to provide sufficient time to adequately prepare the mentee for closure
- e. Review of program rules for post-closure contact
- f. Creation of a plan for post-closure contact, if relevant
- g. Creation of a plan for the last match meeting, if possible
- h. Discussion of possible rematching, if relevant

B.6.8 Regardless of the reason for closure, the mentoring program should have a discussion with mentees, and when relevant, with parents or guardians that includes the following topics of conversation:

- a. Discussion of mentees' feelings about closure
- b. Discussion of reasons for closure, if relevant
- c. Discussion of positive experiences in the mentoring relationship
- d. Procedure for notification of mentor, if relevant, about the timing of closure
- e. Review of program rules for post-closure contact
- f. Creation of a plan for post-closure contact, if relevant
- g. Creation of a plan for the last match meeting, if possible
- h. Discussion of possible rematching, if relevant



66. Group Recommendation: Program should offer each group an opportunity to acknowledge the personal growth of each mentee, as well as to reflect on the journey of their entire group and celebrate the experience they created together.

B.6.9 Program has a written public statement to parents or guardians, if relevant, as well as to mentors and mentees that outline the terms of match closure and the policies for mentor/mentee contact after a match ends (e.g., including contacts using digital or social media).

ENHANCEMENTS

E.6.1 At the conclusion of the agreed upon time period of the mentoring relationship, program explores the opportunity with mentors, mentees, and (when relevant) parents or guardians to continue the match for an additional period of time.

E.6.2 Program hosts a final celebration meeting or event for mentors and mentees, when relevant, to mark progress and transition or acknowledge change in the mentoring relationship.

67. Group Recommendation: Program invites parents, guardians, or others who are important in the life of the mentees to celebration events.

E.6.3 Program staff provide training and support to mentees and mentors, as well as, when relevant, to parents or guardians, about how mentees can identify and connect with natural mentors in their lives.



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