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Education in a Changing World

What Is a Mentor?

Who was your mentor? Who could be trusted to answer the important questions you had? Who was there to give you advice? Who served as a role model at important points in your life?

Most successful people have had a mentor at some time in their life, whether in business, sports, the arts, the classroom, or university work.

FiVE Things You Should Know about Mentoring

1. What a Mentor Is and What a Mentor Is Not

A mentor is not:

- a parent
- a cool peer
- a babysitter
- a therapist
- a disciplinarian
- a parole officer
- a nag
- a savior
- an ATM

What a mentor is:

- a wise and trusted friend
- a link to another generation
- a confiant
- a tutor
- an advisor
- a visionary “seer” (been there, done that)
- a cheerleader
- a coach
- a listener
- an advocate
- a sounding board
- a guide
- a role model
- a partner
- a motivator

The following behavioral differences were found by Tierney and Grossman (1995) after a review of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program:

- 45% decrease in initiating drug use
- 27% decrease in initiating alcohol use
- 38% decrease in number of times hitting someone
- 37% decrease in skipping classes
- 37% decrease in lying to parents

The Commonwealth Fund's survey McLearn, Colasanto, and Schoen (1998) reported the following:

- 62% of students improved their self-esteem
- 52% of students skipped less school
- 48% of students improved their grades
- 49% of students got into less trouble in school
- 47% of students got into less trouble out of school
- 45% of students reduced their substance abuse
- 35% of students improved family relationships

2. Effects of Mentoring on Attitudes and Behavior

3. Some of the Benefits to the Mentee

The mentee

- gained a new friend
- gained an advocate
- increased self-respect
- improved attitudes toward school
- improved peer and parental relationships
- improved relationships with teachers and administrators
- improved academic achievement

- decreased discipline referrals
- learned new perspectives of life
- connected with another generation
- had fun!

“It can be easier than you think to make a difference in a young person’s life. Things that may seem straightforward to you and me are often mysterious to young people.”

national mentoring partnership, mentoring.org

4. Mentor Journal Benefits

We keep journals because it is so easy to forget. It is sometimes hard to recognize the progress that is taking place in a mentoring match when we are personally involved in it. Writing a journal entry each week helps a mentor perceive slight improvements or changes in the relationship that might otherwise be unnoticed or forgotten. Returning to past entries may help clarify what needs to be done next.

In the journal a mentor can record

- activities of the day and their value
- the attitude, mood, and reactions of the mentee
- goals that were set
- dreams of the mentee
- things the mentee is grateful for, has reason to be happy for
- fears and ideas of how to overcome problems
- information learned about the mentee or mentor
- general reflections of the day

“Mentoring is probably the most powerful developmental process people can experience.”

—david clutterbuck, the european mentoring centre

5. Different Ways to Implement School-Based Mentoring

A. Informal In-House Mentoring

A classroom teacher or staff member is assigned to make short, casual contacts with a particular child several times a week, providing additional positive adult contact.

B. Formal In-House

Mentoring by Faculty/Staff

A teacher or staff member mentors a student who is not a member of his or her class, meeting for a designated time period at least once a week.

C. Group or Team Mentoring

One adult mentors three or four students at a time.

D. Buddy System

Older students mentor younger students. They may read, study together, or visit.

E. Power Lunch or Lunch Buddy

A community volunteer meets with a student once a week for lunch. They may read or just visit.

F. One-on-One Mentoring

One volunteer mentors one student over the school year with the purpose of forming a relationship of trust (see Legacy Mentoring article in this issue).

G. Mentoring for Highly Gifted Students

An adult who has expertise in a specific academic area of interest to the mentee participates in one-on-one mentoring.

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