

Questions about Youth Mentoring

1. What is a mentor's main purpose?

To develop a personal relationship with a young person by being a wise and trusted friend; a caring individual offering positive consistent reinforcement and support towards a young person's well being.

2. What are the benefits for the child? Education? Life skills? Workplace?

Mentoring programs can vary in terms of their focus. Some focus on educational improvement/dropout prevention, others on career options, and others on leadership skills, etc. However, in addition to program specific goals, young people who are mentored receive:

- a. support in the development of life management skills (decision making, goal setting, time management, coping skills, etc.)
- b. assistance in broadening their exposure to life experiences, opening doors otherwise not accessible, and developing their networking systems
- c. increased opportunities to interact with people from various socio-economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds.

3. Who does mentoring benefit the most? Is there a type of teen or child that would benefit more than others?

Mentoring can benefit anyone. However, research has shown that young people who have an array of high risk factors will not demonstrate the effects of mentoring as quickly as other youth who do not possess these multiple high risk factors. Mentoring by itself cannot counteract the impact of extensive negative behaviors; but used within a comprehensive support system can work towards the positive development of any one.

4. Are there statistics that prove that children who are mentored perform better than their peers at school?

A Public Private Ventures study of Big Brothers Big Sisters found that youth who participate in regular one-one mentoring relationships were:

- a. 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs;
- b. 27% less likely to start drinking;
- c. 52% less likely than their peers skip a day of school;
- d. and 37% less likely to skip class.

5. How long does it normally take for children to bond or develop a relationship with their mentors?

It often depends on the background and personality of the youth and the background and personality of the mentor, as well as how regularly the child and mentor have contact with each other. Generally speaking, if the matches have weekly contact with at least two face-to-face contacts per month, then within 60-90 days, a strong relationship usually develops. However, it usually takes a year on this schedule before long lasting impact occurs.

6. What are some common activities that mentors and their match do together?

This varies as much as each one of our personalities. As mentioned, there are many different mentoring programs in terms of area of focus and the age of the young people they serve. Therefore activities can vary from academic tutoring, career and college prep activities, technology related activities, recreational activities, arts and cultural events, volunteerism and community service projects, arts and crafts and other hobbies, sporting events, or just companionship. Often it is based on the interests of the youth with input from the mentor.

7. Do mentors need to be trained? If so, can you explain a little about the training classes? How can United Way help me become a mentor?

Yes. Mentors need training and organized support from the program where they participate. Mentors need a period of orientation to learn program expectations and requirements. In addition, basic mentor training is necessary to further explain the roles and tasks of a mentor including how to build a good relationship with a young person utilizing positive youth development principles, and the stages of adolescent development. After the basic mentor training, ongoing supportive training sessions should be given to mentors throughout the relationship to cover topics such as communication, problem solving, self-esteem building, accessing community services, etc. United Way is a great resource for mentor training. Through our Community Impact Institute we offer a basic mentor training session every month for any volunteer interested in mentoring. Call our Campaign for Mentors at 1-866-MENTOR-3 or look for additional information at www.uwsepa.org/training.

8. What are some of the popular mentoring programs in the Philadelphia area? How do they differ?

The Philadelphia region has a strong network of mentor providers to which the United Way lends support. United Way works with about 85 programs such as the traditional Big Brothers Big Sisters organization which specializes in one-to-one mentoring, Philadelphia Futures, a college prep mentoring program, DHS Achieving Independence Center, a mentoring program working with youth aging out of foster care, The Center Foundation Youth Support Network located in Media, working with teen parents, RSVP of Montgomery County that pairs older adults with youth, Chester County's Communities that Care mentoring program working with immigrant children, and United Way works with a network of faith institutions providing "one-to-one" and "group" mentoring opportunities for their communities. All of the providers in United Way network are trained on best practices in quality mentoring. United Way offers monthly program development workshops through our Community Impact Training Institute. Call 1-866-MENTOR-3 or visit www.uwsepa.org/training.

9. January is National Mentoring Month, can you tell us when this started and what special events/activities are taking place to celebrate this?

The Harvard Mentoring Project of the Harvard School of Public Health and MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership started national Mentoring Month in January of 2002. The Goals of National Mentoring Month are:

- a. To raise awareness of mentoring in its various forms
- b. To recruit individuals to mentor, especially in programs that have waiting lists of young people
- c. To promote the rapid growth of mentoring by recruiting organizations to engage their constituents in mentoring

The NMM Directors at Harvard produce public service announcements and obtain celebrity endorsements for mentoring and combine this with a national TV, radio and print media campaign promoting volunteer mentoring. The United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania celebrates NMM with a Celebration of Mentors each year in January at a Sixers game at the Wachovia Center in Philadelphia. In addition, we hold various recruitment events throughout the tri-county region.

10. I heard there is a new program called e-mentoring. Can you explain a little bit about this new phenomenon?

E-Mentoring is a mentoring relationship conducted via the Internet. The use of technology is what sets e-mentoring apart from traditional mentoring; mentors and matches “talk” primarily through the vehicle of email. Organizations that are developing mentoring programs are working to insure a safe and private environment for all participants.

11. How can the corporate community get involved with mentoring? Corporate participation in mentoring is beneficial to both the young people and the business community. Corporate programs have helped increase teamwork and productivity while improving employee retention, community relations and the company’s public image. The business community can get involved through a range of activities:

- a. Start a company mentoring program with a school or youth group.
- b. Participate in an existing citywide workplace mentoring program such as Business Mentoring Youth.
- c. Provide release time or flex time for employees participating in mentoring programs.
- d. Promote mentoring internally and externally and encourage employees to become mentors.

United Way’s Campaign for Mentors can help and can even come onsite to recruit and educate people about the many different mentor options. For more information, Call 1-866-MENTOR-3 or e-mail B.A.Mentor@uwsepa.org.

12. Are foster children paired with mentors?

Yes. However, there are not enough mentors available for the large number of foster care children. As compared with other children, youth in foster care experience a range of mental health problems, including depression, aggression and withdrawal. They often suffer grief due to the separation from or loss of relationships with their natural parents, they may have difficulty adjusting to new and often changeable school and home environments, and are also at heightened risk for educational and behavioral difficulties. Further, as they "age out" of the foster care system they face a number of other risks, including unemployment, substance abuse, pregnancy and involvement with the criminal justice system. Far

too many youth in foster care lack the adult support that is so necessary to help them through this difficult transition.

As alluded to previously, mentoring programs cannot entirely redress the needs and circumstances of youth in the foster care system. But, such programs are part of a more comprehensive approach within a well-coordinated system of care. Along with mentoring programs, churches, schools, businesses, recreation departments and other service providers all have a role to play in fostering better outcomes for this vulnerable population of youth.

13. How can a parent or guardian find a mentor for their child? Unfortunately, there are not enough mentors for the number of children in need. This question has proved to be problematic in the past, as UWSEPA is not equipped to serve as a referral services for parents and youth requesting mentors. Reaching out to established organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters or searching on-line for local mentoring organizations is a good first step toward obtaining a mentor.

15. How about a positive mentoring success story? David and Stanton. Stanton has a devoted mother who does all she can for him, but he grew up without his father. During high school, Stanton started associating with students that were taking his attention off his studies. David came into Stanton's life and became his mentor. With the help of David's guidance and friendship, Stanton graduated high school and is now in his third year of college. David and Stanton have established a relationship beyond the initial program and now they are mentoring a student together.