

overall pattern begins to emerge, it should be discussed with a clinical supervisor (if you have one) or your program coordinator.

### Screening Out Mentors<sup>10</sup>

Some people don't make good mentors. There are no hard-and-fast rules other than the obvious ones: criminal record, history of child abuse and so forth. However, you may want to also screen out those who exhibit the following characteristics:

1. Don't have enough time to commit to being consistent in their mentoring;
2. Seem to be volunteering for status or job promotion reasons;
3. Hold rigid opinions and don't seem open to new ideas;
4. Seem too concerned about what a mentee can do for them;
5. Want to be a mentor so they can work out problems from their own past; or
6. Do not have skills that match your program's needs.

### How to Say No

If a potential mentor exhibits any of these traits, it is best not to accept that applicant. Remember, there is no legal right for interested volunteers to serve as mentors. You may want to offer the volunteer a different opportunity, so it's a good idea to be prepared with a list of volunteer assignments other than mentoring: fundraising, office work, public relations and so on. When you must turn down an applicant, here are some things you might say:

1. "We have no mentees who would match well with you at this time."
2. "Your skills and interests don't fit our mentoring profile, but we'd like to have you involved with the program. Might I suggest some other important volunteer opportunities?"

### Interviewing Mentees

After youth are selected to participate or receive a referral from a parent or caregiver, the next step is to provide an orientation to the youth and parent/caregiver to determine if the program is appropriate to their needs. If the mission of your program meets their needs and expectations, you can then screen the youth through an intake interview.

Focus the interview on the youth's eligibility for participation. Use it to assess the youth's attitude and interest in the program and to help you make an appropriate match. You can also use the interview to gather personal information about the youth and outline the program expectations and policies to the parent/caregiver. If you determine that the youth could benefit from participation in the mentoring program, have the parent/caregiver complete and sign a consent form and arrange for the mentee to receive training.

### Hold Orientations

#### MENTORING TOOL

See orientation and training agendas and handouts in Section VI on the CD.

Conducting orientations as part of the screening process can also serve as a mechanism to weed out prospective participants who do not have the time or the motivation to participate in the program. Detailed information on mentor and mentee orientation sessions is included in the following section.

### ORIENT AND TRAIN MENTORS, MENTEES AND PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Establish a schedule that includes orientation and training for mentors and mentees. In this section, we will focus on key components for orienting, training and supporting mentors and mentees.

#### Mentor Orientation

By providing prospective mentors with a pre-match orientation, you allow them to make a more informed decision about whether to participate in your program. It also gives them the chance to meet other prospective

mentors and begin an informal support group. Make sure all your program staff members attend mentor orientations.

### **Provide an Overview of the Program, Clarify Roles, Responsibilities, Expectations and Discuss How to Handle a Variety of Situations**

In order to adhere to the *Elements of Effective Practice*, your agenda should include the following:

- An overview of the program, including mission and goals;
- The qualities of successful mentors, including a mentor job description that outlines program expectations and requirements;
- A description of eligibility, the screening process, suitability requirements and length of the screening and matching processes;
- The level of commitment expected (time, energy, flexibility, frequency);
- Benefits and rewards of participation;
- A summary of program policies, including those governing privacy, communications, liability and evaluation; and
- Safety and security, including use of the Internet.

You can use this opportunity to handle administrative matters, such as having prospective mentors fill out program forms, personal reference forms and release forms for criminal background checks. This is also a good time to distribute your schedule of mentor training sessions. Allow enough time for questions and answers at the end of the orientation. Your prospective mentors should clearly understand the goals of your mentoring program as well as a mentor's roles and responsibilities.

### **Mentor Training**

The investment you make in initial and ongoing training of mentors contributes to the success of your program in a number of ways. Your training should be geared to helping mentors achieve the following:

- Become more skilled at developing caring mentoring relationships;

#### **MENTORING TOOL**

See training handouts on building relationships in the appendix of Section VI.

- Learn about the challenges and barriers their mentees face and how to become more sensitive to those challenges and their effect on mentees; and

- Gain confidence in their ability to make a difference in the lives of their mentees, which will motivate and sustain their enthusiasm for the program.

Mentors are most successful when they receive thorough training *before* they are matched with young people and receive coaching and support *throughout* their involvement. Mentors can fill many roles; experience from established mentoring programs reveals four major tasks that mentors typically carry out. During initial trainings, make sure you cover the four major tasks<sup>11</sup> of mentoring:

#### **1. Establishing a positive personal relationship.**

The quality of each mentoring relationship depends on the extent to which the mentor and the mentee come to know, respect and trust each other. A relationship with a supportive person is the most important factor in a young person's personal growth. Youth participants often gain a sense of self-worth when they recognize that a caring adult other than their parent is willing to invest time and energy with them. To ensure that a positive personal relationship develops, your training should cover effective communication skills, the lifecycle of a mentoring relationship, mentor do's and don'ts, how to deal with emotional issues young people may have, how to work with mentees' families, how to handle difficult situations and how to say good-bye when a mentoring relationship ends. Role-playing is an effective method to help prospective mentors learn how to deal with these issues.

#### **2. Helping young people develop life skills.**

Mentors can help mentees develop life-management skills, such as decision making, values clarification and long-range planning. Through these skills, the young person can gain economic independence and personal empowerment. To facilitate the development

of these skills, your training should teach mentors how to help young people build their communication skills, manage time and set goals.

3. **Assisting in case management.** Through training, mentors can become knowledgeable about the social services available in their mentees' communities and, in collaboration with program staff, help their mentees access these services. Training should also help mentors understand what they are required to report to the mentoring program coordinator should their mentee share anything that could affect the mentee's safety. In addition, training should help prospective mentors know what documentation they must regularly provide to the program coordinator to facilitate effective monitoring of the match. Such documentation should include monthly activity reports.

4. **Increasing awareness of and ability to interact with other social and cultural groups.** Training should help mentors better understand multicultural issues, as well as issues currently affecting youth. Characteristics of youth and strategies on how to work with different age groups are included in the appendix of this section and in the adolescent development section of the *Community Mentoring for Adolescent Development* manual, which can be downloaded at [www.mentoring.org/training\\_manual](http://www.mentoring.org/training_manual).

While you should cover all of these tasks thoroughly, you'll want to prioritize them according to your program's goals and the training needs of your mentors.

Every quarter, provide your mentors with ongoing training and support. Bring them together to ask questions, exchange ideas and share experiences. Also, consider inviting guest speakers, such as former mentors and mentees, to share their experiences. Such give-and-take helps create a mentor network and support group. In addition, ensure that your mentors understand that they can turn to your program coordinator for guidance and help whenever difficulties arise in their mentoring relationships.

Additional topics for ongoing mentor training include the following:

- Clarifying values;
- Solving problems;
- Learning counseling skills;
- Understanding youth;
- Dealing with substance abuse;
- Learning leadership skills; and
- Understanding emotional problems.

### **Mentee Orientation and Training**

At the mentee orientation, outline your expectations for the youth who are participating in your mentoring program. Make roles and responsibilities clear to minimize the potential for misunderstandings.

In addition, youth participants need the opportunity to address their concerns about mentoring. In developing your curriculum, put yourself in the young person's shoes. Make sure the orientation answers questions such as these:

- Who is this person I'll be spending time with?
- What can mentoring do for me?
- How much time will mentoring take?
- Are all this time and effort worth it?

Give young people the opportunity to talk about what they want to get out of the mentoring program. Also, schedule time for them to get to know one another and begin developing a sense of community with other participants.

Consider including these additional topics in the orientation or training:

- What to expect—and what not to expect—from mentors;
- Basic communication skills (nondefensive statements, assertiveness, listening skills);
- Ways to interact with mentors (activities, problems mentors can help with); and

- What to do when things aren't working out with a mentor (basic problem-solving and conflict resolution skills).

Invite parents/caregivers to the orientation and hold a question-and-answer session afterward to allay any fears and address additional concerns. Parental participation and consent are crucial to creating the atmosphere for a successful mentoring relationship. Assure the parent/caregiver that the mentor's primary role is to provide guidance and friendship to the child, not to become a substitute parent. Involve parents/caregivers by asking them to do the following:

- Notify their child's mentor or the program coordinator when their child can't make it to a scheduled meeting;
- Attend and help with group meetings or end-of-year celebrations; and
- Meet with the program coordinator to share concerns and assess progress.

### MATCH MENTORS AND MENTEES

A review of "What Makes a Successful Mentoring Relationship?" in Section III will be helpful as you embark on matching young people with the most appropriate mentors. When you are considering potential matches, ensure that the prospective mentor and mentee:

- Meet your program's eligibility criteria;
- Share some or all of the following traits: gender, age, language requirements, availability, needs, interests, geography, life experience and temperament; and
- Are committed to the conditions of the match and the mentoring relationship.

#### MENTORING TOOL

See matching criteria, in Section VI on the CD.

Successfully matching mentors with youth takes preparation. Give mentors and mentees an opportunity to do the following:

- State their needs and personal preferences with regard to the match;
- Know how matching decisions are made; and
- Request a different match if, after a reasonable effort, the original match is not satisfactory.

### Use Established Criteria

In matching mentors with young people, you'll need to use preestablished criteria, which may include these points of compatibility:

- **Personal preferences.** Mentors and youth may request someone of the same gender, a certain age range or another characteristic. You should honor such requests whenever possible.
- **Temperament.** Try to ensure that personality and behavior styles mesh. Does the mentor have a nurturing, familial approach or a more formal approach? Match the mentor with a young person who responds best to that mentor's particular style.
- **Life experiences and interests.** All else being equal, matches made on the basis of similarities (e.g., hobbies, lifestyle and family makeup) usually lead to strong relationships. (See Dr. Jean Rhodes' article "What Makes Mentoring Work," which can be found in the Research Corner at Mentoring.org.)
- **Race.** Depending on your program's goals, race may be an important factor in the matching process. Pairing mentors with young people of the same race can encourage greater candor and frankness. That kind of strong rapport between mentors and young people is essential in forging a trusting, long-term relationship.

Some programs allow young people to choose their own mentors. Self-selection can help relationships form more naturally, on the basis of mutual interest. On the downside, this may mean a mentor's preference can't be honored. Mentors or youth who do not get their first choice may be disappointed.