

Child and Youth Mentoring

New Models with New Opportunities

Research Context:

Mentoring is based on the idea that a created relationship between an older and a younger person will act to prevent future difficulties or be a support to a young person facing adversity in their life.

In practice, mentoring involves a mentor (adult) offering emotional, esteem advice and tangible support to a mentee (child) through friendship and regular shared leisure time. Overtly, it is about spending time together and having fun but at a deeper level, it is about offering a supportive relationship to a young person in need. There are at least three reasons for mentoring:

- Changes in family structure, increased co-habitation, more lone parent households, separation and divorce, all have reduced the opportunities for caring adults and young people to get to know one another and do things together. Mentoring is a way of creating these opportunities and of helping young people to overcome adversity as they grow.
- Support from adults and adult role models is a way for young people to 'steel' themselves for times of trouble and to build the 'assets' that help them to develop positively.
- Mentoring increasingly fits with international policy approaches that favour one-to-one work in tackling the needs of young people considered to be 'at risk'.

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Key Findings:

The authors propose three new types of opportunity for youth mentoring:

1. Using Family as Natural Sources and Mentors: Identifying, enlisting and training a willing aunt, uncle or cousin to provide powerful and lasting mentoring support to a young person.
2. Empathy Building in the Mentoring Relationship: Simply, in a low key and natural way, a mentor can support a young person to think strategically about issues affecting them, and develop an action plan where they work with others for empathic action and social justice.
3. Introduction of Purposeful Mentoring: Adding a new dimension to the fun and friendship of the mentoring programme e.g. safeguarding children through the mentor specifically checking (weekly) with the mentee about his or her personal safety from harm.

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