

Relationships in school-based mentoring programs

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Program:

Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Metropolitan Chicago

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Introduction and overview

- Background and significance
 - Conceptual framework
 - Review of literature
- Study of school-based relationships
 - Study description
 - Research methods
 - Findings
- Conclusions and implications
- Practice issues

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Background

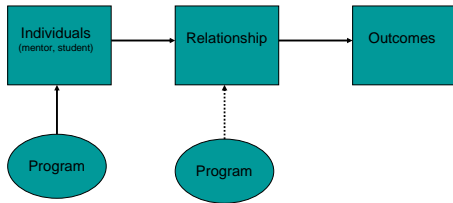
“Conceptual models proposing how individuals might benefit from mentoring necessarily begin with the assumption that some type of relationship exists between the youth and mentor.

Nevertheless, the development of the mentoring relationship itself rarely has been the object of study.

A better understanding of the processes involved in the formation, maintenance, and conclusion of mentoring relationships holds promise for more effective intervention.”

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Basic Model of Mentoring



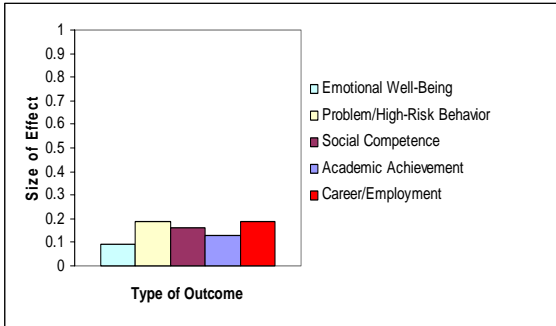
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Does mentoring achieve outcomes?

- Evidence suggesting benefits
 - Literature on resilience
 - Rigorous evaluations
 - PPV study of BBBS (Tierney, et al., 1995)
 - Across Ages (LoSciuto, et al., 1996)
 - PPV study of school-based programs (???)
 - Meta-analysis (DuBois, et al., 2002)
- Unequal effects
 - Not all programs effective
 - Works better in some individual cases than others

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Meta-analysis (DuBois et al., 2002)



Does relationship quality matter?

- Relationship duration
 - Matches over 12 months had greatest benefits
 - Matches that ended in less than 3 months had detrimental consequences (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002)
- Relationship contact
 - In evaluation studies, relationships with more consistent contact showed greater benefits (LoSciuto, et al., 1996; Slicker & Palmer, 1993)
- Program expectations for contact
 - Effective programs have guidelines (DuBois et al., 2002)

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Child characteristics and relationships

- Youth in higher risk situations
 - Programs based on risk status show greater results (DuBois et al., 2002)
 - Youth in foster have differential benefit (Rhodes et al., 1999)
- Youth with identified difficulties
 - Programs based on problem behavior show worse results (DuBois et al., 2002)
 - Youth with identified problems have shorter matches (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002)
- School-based
 - Typically based on teacher referrals for specified issues

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Thinking about relationships

- Temporal
 - *Social interaction over time*
- Interdependent
 - *Mutual influence*
- Meaning
 - *Mental representations*
- Continuity
 - *Past experiences influence subsequent interactions*
- Discontinuity
 - *Dynamic and multi-determined*
- Moments
 - *Fun, mundane, sad/ insightful, vulnerability, achievement*

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Multiple levels of interaction

(Van Lieshout, et al., 1999)

Domain	Person	Interaction	Support
Cognitive	Thinking	Communicating and interpreting	Advising
Emotional	Feeling	Expressing affect	Comforting
Behavioral	Acting	Regulating behavior	Monitoring
Intentional	Pursuing goals	Supporting or blocking	Advocating

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Multiple mentoring options

- Life domains
 - *Family, school, peers, hobbies, careers, etc.*
- Contact/commitment
 - *Frequency, hours, duration, etc.*
- Relationship types
 - *Friend, coach, advisor, advocate, teacher, etc.*
- Consequences
 - *Strength: Flexibility, individualized attention*
 - *Challenge: Confusion regarding mentor's role*

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Multiple relationship trajectories

- Each relationship has a life of its own
- Turning points, transitions, transformations
- Distinctive developmental pathways

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Relationship framework

- What distinguishes relationships?

(Laursen & Bukowski, 1997)

- Permanence
 - *Voluntary, kinship, committed*
- Social power
 - *Resources, experience/knowledge, rank*
- Gender
 - *Male-male, female-female, cross-gender*

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Mentoring is a hybrid (Keller, 2005)

	Permanent (obligation)	Voluntary (mutual)
Unequal social power (vertical)	Parent	Mentor
Equal social power (horizontal)		Friend

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Review of Literature

- Mentoring style (Morrow & Styles, 1995)
 - Prescriptive mentoring A
 - Transformation goals early, often, consistently
 - Authority and control of decision making
 - Rigid and frustrated
 - Prescriptive Mentoring B
 - Wanted reciprocal partnership
 - Unrealistic expectations for youth to initiate activities
 - Wounded and discouraged
 - Developmental mentoring
 - Relationship-building goals (throughout) and transformation goals (emerging later)
 - Youth-centered, reading youth's cues
 - Flexible, adaptable and persistent

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Review of literature

- Aims of mentors
(Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992)
 - Level-1: developing a relationship
 - Level-2: introducing opportunities
 - Level-3: developing character
 - Level-4: developing competence
- Hierarchical—Higher level mentors incorporated lower level aims
- Results: Levels 3 & 4 had longer and more successful relationships

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Looking and Listening: An Intensive Study of School-based Mentoring Relationships

Identifying relationship patterns

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BBBS school-based program

- One-to-one relationship in group setting
- Students referred by teachers
- Teams of mentors from businesses, organizations
- Regular after-school meetings (1 hr/week)
- School-year commitment
- Activities within schools (e.g. library, cafeteria)

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Study overview

- Intensive study
 - Multiple perspectives, informants
 - Multiple sources, types of data
 - Multiple timepoints, observations
- Exploratory, inductive approach
 - Nature of interpersonal interactions
 - Nature of activities
 - Relationship development
 - Contextual influences

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Study aims

- Reflect complex, multi-dimensional nature of relationships
- Focus on relationship itself rather than predictors or outcomes
- Objectives
 - **Description:** Explore diversity in nature and developmental course of mentor-student relationships
 - **Distinction:** Examine systematic variation along dimensions such as communication, emotional closeness, and level of support
 - **Combination:** Characterize overall patterns of interaction in mentoring relationships

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Three schools

- School A
 - Volunteers: young high-tech professionals
 - Administration: uninvolved
 - Coordinator: hands off
- School B
 - Volunteers: employees of building supply company
 - Administration: principal emphasized test scores
 - Coordinator: hands off
- School C
 - Volunteers: seniors from AARP
 - Administration: very welcoming, supportive (cookies)
 - Coordinator: scheduled group activities/projects every session

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Sample

- Three elementary schools in low-income urban areas
- All program participants asked to be in study
- Enrollment rates: Mentors=95%, Students=85%

	Mentors (n=37)	Youth (n=33)
Age range	25-81	9-13
Gender (m/f)	38% / 62%	45% / 55%
Race		
African American	53%	78%
Caucasian	39%	0%
Latino	5%	12.5%
Other	3%	9.5%

Number of complete matches analyzed: 27

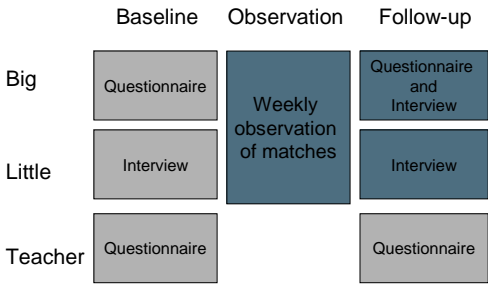
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Perceived needs of students

Category	Characteristics Identified by Teachers	Sample
Disruptive	Short attention span, impulsive, difficulty managing anger, frequent conflict with peers, related academic difficulties	N = 11
Withdrawn	Shyness, social isolation, low self-esteem, failure to engage with peers or academic work	N = 7
High-Potential	High potential for leadership and achievement paired with lack of environmental or familial supports	N = 8

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Research design: 3 school sites



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Relationship dimensions

- Developed three analytic dimensions:
 - Interpersonal tone (affect)
 - Activity orientation (content)
 - Developmental trend (trajectory)
- Developed and verified coding scheme based on dimensions

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Dimension 1: Interpersonal tone

Category & Sample	Characteristics
Engaged (n = 11)	Mutual enjoyment, high level of eye contact, speech, laughter and shared affect.
Tentative (n=7)	Affection and warmth coupled with periodic interpersonal challenges and dissonance, often resulting in uncertainty.
Task-Focused (n = 4)	Activity-based interaction patterns that involved minimal emotional sharing.
Disengaged (n=5)	Disconnection as evidenced by dissonant affect, sporadic eye contact, and halted speech.

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Engaged

- "Like we would give each other a hard time but we knew it was . . . we kind of talked a little bit of trash to each other. He started it but I'm all for it. You know, it was just kind of great, it would be like the first move of a game, he'd be like, "Now who's winning?" I'm like, "I haven't even gone yet! What do you mean, who's winning? Of course you're winning, you were the first one to move!" He's like, "I just want you to remember that!" You know (laughing), so it was good to see him like, know that he felt comfortable enough, to give me a hard time." (Mentor Interview: Tyrone & Andrew)

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Tentative

- "When [I] first met her, she was very happy to be with me, all around, can't wait to see me and then something changed. I believe it was like after the first two times, it became . . . she was always running off and sneaking away. I don't know if it was her form of being funny but it took me some time to get to understand it but I think it was that she needed more social interaction, not just to be with us.
- . . . she had some issues with her background and we talked just on a surface level and I didn't know how deep we were allowed to get since I don't see her that often. I didn't have a basis so it's hard to dive into something like that and be a real benefit to her." (Mentor interview: Susan & Charlene)

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Task-focused

Big Sister offers specific praise and encouragement as they begin task. Both working well together and very task-oriented, have high standards, are competitive and goal-oriented (Big rewrites completed story in order to get it just right, later stating, "we have the best story!").

Once they are finished with this part of the exercise, they both sit back in their seats simultaneously, satisfied with their accomplishment. In a minute, Little Brother leans forward [toward his Big Sister] and says, "OK, next project!" (Observation: Jacob & Clara)

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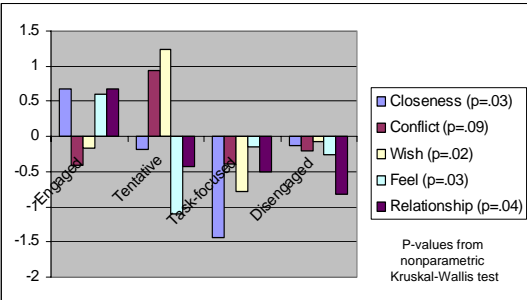
Disengaged

The two have multiple barriers between them, including objects (purse, heavy coat zipped up to nose). . .there were a few times when the Little expressed energy or enthusiasm but the Big seemed to almost stifle this excitement. Neither one really seemed to enjoy the time together. (Observation: LaShonda & Eleanor)

Little walks in, hooded, withdrawn, little eye contact, at 8:15 [15 minutes late]. Big is playing cards with other Bigs, and looks around at Little but does not say anything. . . (Observation: Darian & Morris)

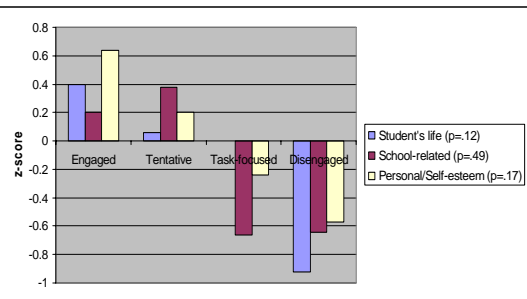
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Mentor reported relationship variables



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Mentor reported discussion topics



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Dimension 2: Activity orientation

Category & Sample	Characteristics
Friend (n = 11)	Focus alternated between formal learning exercises, games, and some interpersonal sharing.
Counselor (n = 6)	Included relatively high level of verbal sharing; level of other activities varied. Mentor demonstrated sense of protectiveness and offered advice.
Teaching Assistant (n = 6)	Focus primarily on academics and instruction.
Acquaintance (n = 4)	Limited level of activity due to awkwardness and uncertainty.

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Friend

I: Imagine this summer somebody asks, one of your friends asks you what it was like to be in the Big Sister program...

L: I say it was real, real, real nice.

I: What do you remember most about it?

L: I took a picture with her and I had so much fun with her.

I: So, that's what you remember the most, you took a picture with her?

L: And, I miss her. And I wished we still had Big Brothers and Sisters after school.

I: Why do you think Betty wanted to be your Big Sister?

L: Because she loves me and she likes to be my friend. 'Cause I love...I come in there feeling good and stuff, have on my little clothes and stuff, I know she like me'. (Child interview: Chrissy & Betty)

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Friend

"I just tried to make as much conversation as I could and try to show him that I was interested in him and show him that he could trust me and I kind of related to some of the things that he was interested in. You know, I'm not too far off from where he is. I remember the time when I was his age. And it's not like I'm 50 years old and 'oh yea, I remember way back when...' I remember when I was that old and just tried to relay that to him, not by telling that to him, but by showing him in some different ways and just talking." (Mentor interview: Brad & Derrick)

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Counselor

"Probably a couple things, one being obviously fairly comfortable with other people and the ability to establish rapport with a child which isn't super easy. But also a willingness and ability to be an adult. Really act the adult role, boundaries, be willing to discipline appropriately. In the most limited sense, adjust right and wrong and appropriate behavior. Nothing beyond the scope of the setting you are in. And honestly, for the kids it's great to have someone that is fun and relaxed. Has an idea of what it is like to be a child in their living. . . . know something about their life. I think that's probably it. Flexibility I think is very important."
(Mentor interview: Sherry & Jane)

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Teaching assistant

I: How does she [your big sister] help you?
L: She helps me with my homework.
I: With your homework, uh huh. Anything else that she helps you with?
L: [Silence—shaking head 'no']
I: Nope, just your homework, OK. Um, why do you think that she wants to be your big sister?
L: To help me read.
I: Do you think more kids, like in your school or in different schools should have big brothers or big sisters?
L: Yes.
I: Why?
L: Because they can learn how to read.
(Child interview: Tricia & Anna)

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Teaching assistant

The Big then encouraged the Little to start on her homework. "Let's do this now (pointing to the homework) and then we'll maybe play a game." The Big gave the Little a lot of positive encouragement while she worked, such as pats on the back and clapping a few times when she finished a task, and making statements, such as "You write very neatly," and "You are a very neat colorer." The Big watched her attentively and gave her prompts and guidance when she got stuck on a question.
The Big asked questions about the Little's life between homework tasks, such as, "What are you going to do this weekend?" and "Is there someone at home to help you with your homework?"
(Observation: Tricia & Anna)

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Acquaintance

M: Maybe the third or fourth week, he would come in and, we went to the gym, and he was just running around, the same thing like when he would sit by himself, playing by himself and I would be like, "Why don't you shoot over here?" And he would just be running back and forth, playing by himself kind of thing. So I didn't really feel like I bonded with him.

I: So you were trying to engage him in a game and he was doing his own thing?

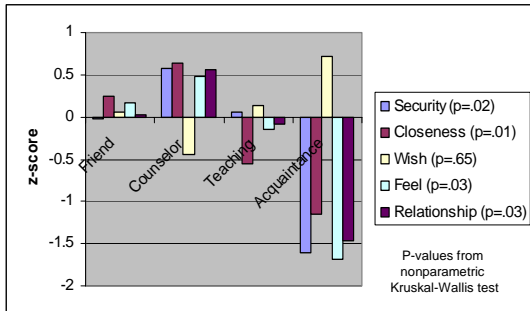
M: Right.

I: And how did you feel during that experience?

M: How I felt? Not empty, but wow, what am I going to do here? I'm sitting here and I see everyone else playing with their Littles and I feel like, do something, I don't want to say helpless, but I felt like I didn't know what to do. (Mentor interview: Darian & Morris)

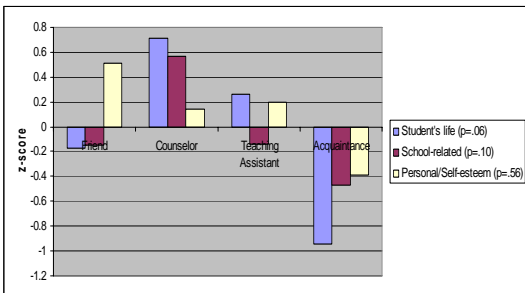
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Student reported relationship variables



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Mentor reported discussion topics



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Dimension 3: Developmental trend

Category & Sample	Characteristics
Progressive (n = 13)	Smooth start, gradual development that steadily deepened over time, variable conflict
Stagnant (n = 8)	Halting start, limited or no development over time, minimal conflict
Plateaued (n = 4)	Smooth start, gradual development that either leveled off or deteriorated over time, variable conflict
Breakthrough (n = 2)	Halting start, uneven development over time, significant conflict served as turning point to enhance quality as relationship progressed

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Stagnant

THREE OCCASIONS THROUGHOUT MATCH

"...but after a few minutes they had to put it away because it was time to go. While the Little put the game away, the Big filled out his mentoring form for the Big Brother/ Big Sisters program about what they did that day. The Little came back to get his coat and then left without saying goodbye."

"At the end of the hour, the Little seemed to linger, waiting for an interaction from his Big. He seemed to make a choice at some point to leave without that but walked by his Big on his way out of the room."

"The Big and Little came back to the cafeteria when the bell rang. The Big followed the Little into the room. The Little put on his coat and walked out of the room. The Big didn't see him leave and searched the room for him. He looked around the room, and under the tables, saying, "I lost him again!" After he looked everywhere in the room, he gave up and put on his coat." (Observation: Jason & Joe)

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Breakthrough

"At first I thought I had a young man who had...I will not be able to get through to him because he's uh...maybe he's just not going to be receptive. But I think I put a dent in it, in [Carlos's] life. When the last day came he never wanted to leave, he never wanted to go home."

"[Carlos] wanted me to feel like he didn't care, he didn't like me, and uh, you're not here for my good, and I'm going to do anything I want to do. He was that type, but I saw past that looking for attention. He didn't want to talk about anything other than girls and gangs. But that's not what he wanted to do, that's what he's exposed to. And it was toward the end that I found out [Carlos] was probably the biggest helper you could have. Just ask him to do something and he would break his neck...he wanted to be appreciated. He wants you to see, "Hey I'm somebody, I can do that!" It was the last two weeks of the program we realized he wanted to help everybody because he know everything, been everywhere, and he's done everything. You know, he's "God Jr.!" (laughing) (Carlos & Valerie)

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Breakthrough

"He came and calmed down and I said, 'I want your work to be better than anybody's work in this room today. And the only way you can do it is sit down, be quiet and do it.' I said, 'When [program facilitator] asks questions, I want your hand to go up. I want you to answer it, use some common sense. Don't just say something stupid to make people laugh, because that's not intelligence.' And, he started raising his hand and he started doing things, you know, making things. He made something and I said 'Who in the world are you going to give that to?' And he said, 'Not you!' I said, 'Well that's fine because I'm not going to give mine to you either.' You know, when he finished all of that, he told me, 'This is for you.' It really was touching. And I told him, I said, 'Guess what? This one is for you!' (laughing) He started blushing. I was really touched." (Mentor interview: Carlos and Valerie)

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Composite groups

Match Label	# of Matches	Composite of Primary Relationship Dimensions
Connected	13	Engaged Tone, Friend or Counselor Role, Progressive Trend
Disconnected	5	Disengaged Tone, Acquaintance or Teaching Assistant Role, Stagnant Trend
Intermittently Connected	5	Tentative Tone, Friend or Counselor Role, Plateau Trend
Resilient	2	Tentative Tone, Friend or Counselor Role, Breakthrough Trend
Task-Oriented	2	Task-Focused Tone, Teaching Assistant Role, Stagnant Trend

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Attunement

Category & Sample	Characteristics
Highly Attuned (n = 11)	Consistently seeks to attend flexibly and creatively to verbal or nonverbal signs from youth as to preferences, concerns, and feelings
Moderately Attuned (n = 13)	Inconsistent response to student needs. Although generally attuned, mentor's attention and flexibility varies due to challenges connecting with youth, involvement with other group members, or lack of program support.
Minimally Attuned (n = 3)	Consistently limited in response to youth. Slow or unable to adjust approach based on youth's verbal or nonverbal signs as to preferences, concerns, or feelings.

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Attunement

"I know when she's reading out loud, I notice that she gets, loses interest even though I know she's a very avid reader. And I actually attribute it to the fact that, I don't really like reading out loud, I'm a fast reader and I get bored by the slow pace. So I made a decision, at a certain point I was trying to press us along, read more pages. And I actually sort of realized, I said to her, 'actually maybe it's just that reading out loud can be kind of annoying?' So I made a decision not to push her then because why spoil something she loves?" (Mentor interview: Sherry and Jane)

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Attunement

- Insightfulness, inter-subjectivity, adaptability
 - Identifies issue (*child loses interest*)
 - Notices incongruence (*child avid reader*)
 - Looks to own experience for insight (*I don't like to read out loud*)
 - Considers own role in interactions (*I was trying to press along*)
 - Weighs trade-offs (*important to make progress but not spoil love of reading*)
 - Considers child's perspective and makes adjustment

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Matches, needs, attunement

Match Category	# of Matches	Youth Needs	Attunement
Connected	13	High potential (6) Disruptive (3) Withdrawn (4)	High (8) Moderate (5)
Disconnected	5	High potential (2) Disruptive (1) Withdrawn (2)	Moderate (5) Minimal (3)
Intermittently Connected	5	Disruptive (4) Withdrawn (1)	High (2) Moderate (3)
Resilient	2	Disruptive (2)	High (1) Moderate (1)
Task-Oriented	2	High potential (1) Disruptive (1)	Moderate (2)

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Other observations

- Discrepancies between Bigs and Littles in description of experience
- Lack of themes linking activities over time
- Lack of communication about the relationship itself
- Lack of attention to closure (and future)

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Summarizing

- Mentors influential in relationship development
- Hybrid model
 - Have sense of adult purpose
 - Keep youth voluntarily engaged
- Youth-focused
 - Seek youth input, interests
 - Willing to take different routes to achieve aims
 - Experiment and adjust
- Interpersonal skills
 - Sensitive, attuned
 - Flexible, persistent

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Program and Practice issues

Creating and supporting relationships

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Systemic model of mentoring

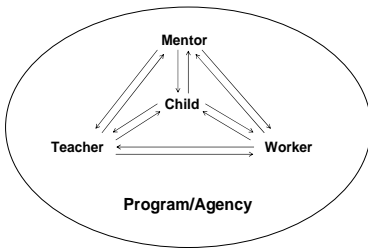
(Keller, 2005b)

- Intervention goes beyond mentor-child relationship
- Caseworker, teachers, parents contribute to success or failure of relationship
- Mentoring effects can be indirect, through multiple pathways of influence
- Importance of social context

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Systemic model

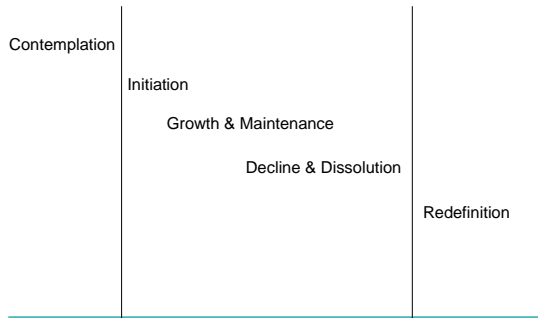
(Keller, 2005b)



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Developmental stages

(Keller, 2005a)



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Stage model

(Keller, 2005a)

Stage	Conceptual features	Research findings	Program practices
Contemplation	Anticipating and preparing for relationship	Mentor motivations, expectations, and goals	Recruiting, screening, training
Initiation	Beginning relationship and becoming acquainted	Mentor patience, similarity of mentor and youth interests	Matching, making introductions
Growth and maintenance	Meeting regularly and establishing patterns of interaction	Frequency and nature of activities, mentor style	Supervising and supporting, ongoing training
Decline and dissolution	Addressing challenges to relationship or ending relationship	Mentor and youth characteristics, mentor style	Supervising and supporting, facilitating closure
Redefinition	Negotiating terms of future contact or rejuvenating relationship	Not available	Facilitating closure, rematching

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Final thoughts

- Human beings of all ages are happiest and able to deploy their talents to best advantage when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise.

□ John Bowlby

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Reported study

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