Youth Mentoring: A guide for mentors with practical application of communication principles to facilitate interpersonal relationships and youth development.

A Thesis Project

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Abstract

As individuals, we believe we have the unique ability to choose our paths and carve out our destiny in America. As we sculpt our path, through a variety of decisions, our relationships often serve as a governing force developing our person along our journey. Due to their influential nature, this project explores the power of mentor mentee relationships as it relates to youth development.

Grounded in the theory of transcendence, the social penetration theory and the uncertainty reduction theory, this project investigates youth mentoring and its positive influence on three basic parameters: social and emotional effect, cognitive effect, and identity development. Research suggests mentors often lack the confidence to effectively establish this relationship, especially if their mentee is considered “high-risk” or from a different cultural background. This project is a manual to guide the development of interpersonal communication, the vital component of intimate relationships. Should this manual be implemented in mentor training programs, mentors may be able to more quickly and effectively establish meaningful relationships that may ultimately lead to better, more sustained youth development.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Mentoring as a practice dates back to early reform initiatives attempting to capitalize on the proposed benefit of coupling an accomplished, reliable adult with a misguided and troubled teen. The United States began using mentoring approaches in conjunction with youth reform initiatives over a century ago (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008) in hopes of keeping youth on the right track and out of the system. This usage of adult guidance to steer children in the right direction and out of the court system gave inner-city and at-risk teens a new outlet for support. Mentoring programs quickly began to target children that were more likely, perhaps due to family circumstance or economic status, past record or negligent environment, to end up in the court systems or in jail (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarp, 2002). The goal was to keep kids in school and out of police custody.

When these youth/adult relationships began to achieve anecdotal success, the focus was no longer solely on at-risk juveniles but rather on a broader range of youth in underfunded or underprivileged areas, that could benefit from adult guidance (Jekielek et al., 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Grassroots organizations and socially conscious non-profits soon took up the baton and began developing programs targeting a wider variety of youth and focusing on community involvement rather than traditional “at-risk” children (DuBois, Doolittle, Yates, Silverthorn, & Tebes, 2006). This gave rise to such well-known organizations today like Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) whose mission became serving the needs of America’s youth.

Now more than three million youth nationwide participate in mentoring programs (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006). Federal funding for these programs has increased
dramatically from approximately 100 million dollars annually in congressional appropriations since 2004 alone (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Program involvement ranges from court ordered mentoring to local school volunteering. They vary from nationally affiliated organizations with public and private funding to community start-ups. What began as an attempt to jump start youth reform has become a national phenomenon.

Goal of Project

Clearly mentoring has evolved in a socially conscious environment that sees a place for youth development. This evolution continues through increased social mindfulness, media awareness, and scholarly investigation surrounding its contribution to youth development. Academia has contributed to our comprehension not only of how youth is developed through these relationships but also what these relationships mean, what type of communication aids in their formation, their success and their failure.

What we now know is this particular type of interaction hinges on the growth and success of interpersonal relationship development whose primary conduit is interpersonal communication (Barnard-Brak, et al., 2010). We also know that interpersonal communication is often hindered by the uncertainty surrounding the mentor/mentee relationship (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The goal of this project is to provide mentors a foundation to better understand the concepts of interpersonal communication, despite inevitable uncertainties, to guide more effective and appropriate relationship development. Through the creation of a manual, this project was ultimately designed to offer mentors a guide to establishing meaningful bonds with their mentees, especially when engaging in relationships with high-risk and culturally diverse youth.
Importance of Project and Statement of Problem

This support is necessary for two main reasons. First, the implications of mentoring and their effect on youth directly correlate to positive youth development. For some youth this development means a shot at college and a better life for themselves and their families. For others, this positive relationship may be the catalyst to prompt a child to avoid the life of addiction and choosing to live instead. Due to the significant influence of this relationship and its potential outcomes, mentors have an opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child. Their ability to make this difference is directly correlated to their level of intimacy within their mentor/mentee relationship. Not only do mentors fail to recognize the weight of their impact on their mentee they also lack the knowledge of how to effectively establish that bond on a significant level.

Not only do mentors lack the understanding of their potential to impact a youth or to effectually form a meaningful bond, mentors also lack the confidence or support to venture outside of their comfort zone and mentor youth from a different status or cultural background. While all youth benefit from a mentor the vast are “at-risk” and the vast majority of mentors are-middle class, Caucasian/Euro-American. This can lead to increased relational uncertainty largely due to cultural dissonance and thus an inability for mentors to form a relationship with their mentee. Depending on the mentors own background or life experience, some mentors shy away from mentoring due to this uncertainty. If mentors had a resource to guide their communication and the development of their relationships with their mentees, despite their status or ethnicity, would more mentors volunteer their time? The hope of this project is to demystify youth
of different status or cultural background and encourage more adults to engage and become involved in the life of a child.

Definitions of Terms Used

At-risk/high-risk youth: a youth exhibiting negative behaviors including but not limited to negative parental structure, deteriorating parental structure, violence, substance abuse, gang activity, sexually promiscuity, or disruptive behavior in school is often categorized as at-risk or high-risk. If the youth comes from a low socioeconomic background, they may also be considered at-risk.

Case study: Case studies are a common tool utilized to retrospectively analyze or explain a situation. In this case they are a descriptive account used to explore an underlying principle.

Interpersonal communication: This type of communication directly impacts the development of interpersonal relationships. It helps us understand human behavior and offer rationale for why and how people communicate, behave, and also construct their realities. Often considered its own area of study, interpersonal communication is best described as a process used to convey our thoughts, feelings, ideas, and beliefs to another person. Interpersonal communication is accomplished through the sharing of messages, the uncovering and imparting of knowledge, feedback and reflection. Scholars Caputo, Hazel, and McMahon (1994) posit interpersonal communication is “an ever-changing transactional sharing that develops between people who are finding meaning with each other and come to know one another better as their relationship tends to move from impersonal to personal” (p. 8).

Mentee: An apprentice or protégée, a person receiving mentoring.
Mentor: Someone to trust as a friend or counselor who is wiser and more experienced in life than their mentee.

Mentoring: Mentoring is a process of relationship development, through communication, with the goal of impacting a mentee. “Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)” (Retrieved November, 19, 2011).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This thesis project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the mentoring and the need for better support for mentors. Chapter Two organized the available literature on youth development and mentoring. Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor’s (1973) social penetration theory was explored since interpersonal communication requires the development of intimacy through a gradual process of self-disclosure, voluntary sharing, and other forms of vulnerability (Altman & Taylor). (Griffin, 2009, p. 113). Charles Berger’s (1975) uncertainty reduction theory was also used to evaluate the challenges of developing interpersonal communication and then to outline the specific ways in which interpersonal communication can be enhanced in this dynamic. The literature review proceeds to explore the connection between mentor and mentee, mentoring’s perceived benefits and its specific role in youth development. This
role is examined in the context of the youth’s potential status as “at-risk,” as well as their cultural orientation.

Chapter Three outlines the scope and methodology of the project while Chapter Four outlines the creation of the manual. The manual explains basic communication principles and describes how uncertainty can hinder relationship development and stresses the importance of mentoring and its ability to create positive change in a child’s life. The manual also includes a compilation of case studies gathered from mentors across the country. These situational experiences and their outcomes serve as case studies to support and further inform and guide mentors through the experience of others. Chapter Five concludes this thesis project and discusses the results.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Relationships are often accused of being the sole purpose for human existence. A relationship with God or with some inherently good universal being, finding a partner in life, a lover, a best friend, many would argue these relationships are the reason people exist. We breathe each day to laugh, to love, and to share this world with others. This sharing creates a life where our relationships shape and guide the development of our person. As we share ourselves we uncover just as much about ourselves as we uncover in another. We each take these pieces of self-discovery and knowledge with us into every new relationship and experience (Shepherd, John & Striphas, 2006).

This project will examine the intricate nature of relationships and the influence they exhibit on personal development. Specifically, this project will investigate the necessary components of relationship development between a youth and an adult mentor. The literature will seek to understand what type of bond is necessary to establish a relationship between a mentor and mentee and what potential factors may inhibit its development. The literature will also seek to uncover available resources for mentors and potential gaps in support provided during their tenure as a mentor.

*Philosophical Assumptions*

By their very nature relationships have the ability to serve as a conduit for both positive and negative expressions and experiences (Griffin, 2009). To comprehend relationships we must realize they are more than a convenient establishment of shared indulgence or commonalities (Berger, 1977). Relationships are the people and the involvements that shape our lives and serve as the measuring stick of our experiences with which we assess future individuals and circumstances (Griffin, 2009). Gregory
Shepherd (2006) explained the significance of the bonds relationships create through transcendence. He further explains relationships, and the communication that takes place within them, as a pathway to shaping ourselves through those interactions (Shepherd, John & Striphas, 2006). Shepherd (2006) believes that as we communicate we share ourselves, our person and “the significance of the experience of one another that we share—each of us becoming more, not by our actions alone, but because of our interaction” (p. 25), affects us both individually and collectively. As we indulge in the knowledge of each other we also heighten our awareness of ourselves and simultaneously redefine our perspectives, our views, and our very nature (Griffin, 2009; Shepherd, John & Striphas, 2006).

Without intention our relationships shape us, they have power. They have the ability to determine or play a role in the determination of what and who we are as individuals. Given their influential nature, and status as a driving force of development, relationships are where this project will focus.

*Theoretical Basis*

Academia has contributed to our comprehension not only of how youth is developed through mentor/mentee relationship but also what these relationships mean, what type of communication aids in their formation, their success and their failure. What we now know is this particular type of interaction hinges on the growth and success of interpersonal relationship development whose primary conduit is interpersonal communication (Barnard-Brak, et al., 2010).

This significant experience of establishing a common bond while simultaneously becoming more self-aware and autonomous is perhaps the reason the relationship matters
so much in mentoring. Shepherd (2006) posits, [a relationship’s] highest purpose is affecting us and potentially guiding the formation of our character. This potential to mold and affect is why scholars identify relationships as the key to effective mentoring and effective interpersonal communication, the sharing of self, their conduit (Griffin, 2009).

Social Penetration Theory

According to Capella (1987) “[i]nterpersonal communication affects interpersonal relationships, and relationship states influence the communicative activity of those involved in them” (Salwen & Stacks, p. 279). Relationships, with any multitude of characterizations, rely on communication to both sustain and grow the partnership. Specifically, they rely on interpersonal communication to determine their depth and breadth and nurture their evolution (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The aforementioned benefits of mentoring require the mentor and mentee develop a close and meaningful bond both established through their verbal and nonverbal communication (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Jekielek et al., 2006; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Pedersen, 2009; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

While establishing this bond through interpersonal communication is necessary, many mentors function in a mentor/mentee relationship without the proper knowledge of how to establish this type of communication and thus this type of relationship (Rhodes, 2005; Rhodes et al., 2006; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). This, leads to a deficit in the ability of a mentor to appropriately nurture a relationship with a youth, develop and promote positive influence (Rhodes, 2005; Rhodes & Chan, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).
The social penetration theory essentially explains how communication perpetuates either the growth or the decline of interpersonal relationships through a series of vulnerabilities either enhancing or negating interpersonal intimacy. Altman and Taylor (1973) quantified these behaviors in an “interpersonal economy in which was all ‘take stock’ of the relational value of others we meet” (Griffin, 2009, p. 91). They likened individuals to having an onion-like personality, scaffolding with multiple layers of feelings and beliefs about the world and also themselves (Griffin, 2009). They believed as people “take stock” of their relationships they progress through the depth of penetration or degree of intimacy then established. This intimacy is perpetuated as individuals self-disclose, the very nature of which prompts others to reciprocate the exchange (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). This communication guides the interaction beyond superficial niceties to intimate layers of knowledge and sharing (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This gradual, layered process continues as long as each person remains open with in their communication and perceives a reward beyond the cost of disclosing personal, often private information to one another (Griffin, 2009).

While this perceived reward/cost analysis, per each individual interaction, is described by Altman (1973) as a smooth process with an inevitable track Knapp (1972) proposed instead that relationships are less about establishing intimacy through self-disclosure and more about opposing dialectical forces. In his view, this smooth trajectory toward intimacy and the development of relationships was hindered by individual desires that were conflicting, thwarting self disclosure and discouraging vulnerability necessary to continually peel back the layers of knowledge of another (Knapp, 1972). For example, an individual may desire freedom while also wanting to connect with another (Salwen &
Stacks, 1996). This creates tension in the relationship equating to increased variability and relationship deterioration rather than continuity (Knapp, 1972).

Tensions and variability are unavoidable and while they may lead to a stilted or less smooth trajectory for relationship development they are also factored into Altman and Taylor’s (1973) theory highlighting the need for constant interpersonal communication. This open, purposeful communication promotes the progression of first the “superficial to intimate levels of exchange as a function of both immediate and forecast outcomes” (Griffin, p. 114). As the depth and breadth of the relationship is established, so is the interpersonal connection, which grows with each person.

The theoretical model Altman and Taylor (1973) established weighs an individual’s ability to communicate and disclose information with the expectation of reciprocity, as the mitigating factor in establishing an interpersonal relationship. This theory explains the emphasis on interpersonal communication to establish a relationship with a child as a requirement to positively effect youth development. Each person, mentor or youth, has layers of themselves they are willing to disclose to a stranger (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). This expectation of establishing a relationship cannot be separated however from the awkwardness or uncertainty of initial interactions with strangers and the difficulty of navigating the unknown to achieve this intimacy (Rhodes et al., 2006; Rhodes and DuBois, 2008). The uncertainty surrounding relationships and its reduction is a core mechanism in the development of interpersonal communication, intimacy, and relationships (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Theiss & Solomon, 2008).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory
Empirical evidence suggests high levels of uncertainty “limit the knowledge necessary to establish intimacy” (Theiss & Solomon, 2008, p. 627) and corresponds to a diminished liking. Knobloch and Solomon (2005) also discovered that uncertainty thwarts an individual’s ability to make assumptions or derive inferences through relational cues about their relationships. Individuals may have uncertainty not only about the person they are engaged in a relationship with but also the state of their relationship (Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). This uncertainty is often the reason relationships fail (Clatterbuck, 1979). There is a fundamental lack of understanding and knowledge about the other person and their perception due to uncertainty.

In response to the discovery of uncertainty and its role as an inhibiting factor to the establishment of interpersonal relationships, Charles Berger (1975) developed the uncertainty reduction theory to explain and negate its negative effects. This theory investigates the methods and motivations of communication in interpersonal relationships explaining that “uncertainty is a negative state that people are motivated to resolve or eliminate, especially if they anticipate future interaction with the person and if a relationship with that person is perceived as highly rewarding” (Theiss & Solomon, 2008, p. 697). Berger and Calabrese (1975) posit that as relationships evolve, both communicators, the mentor and mentee, must have a need and the means to comprehend themselves and the situation.

*What is Mentoring?*

The word mentor originates between 1740-50 anno domini and comes from the Greek word Méntōr, meaning a wise counselor or trusted teacher (Retrieved September 2, 2011). Outside of mythology the first modern recorded usage of the word came from a
French author by the name of François Fénelon. He wrote and published a novel in the eighteenth century about a lead character that was “Mentor” (Retrieved September 5, 2011).

From trusted friend to wise counselor, in our society today the word mentor is also synonymous with teacher and advocate. It has morphed into a general definition of an adult who takes time to develop a relationship with a youth in hopes to provide a positive example and meaningful influence (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). This word has transformed into a movement in America known as mentoring.

**Mentoring’s Affect on Youth Development**

Mentoring has evolved in a socially conscious environment that sees a place for youth development. This recognition has led to the academic pursuit of understanding mentoring and its effects on youth. While much of the early data gathered on youth mentoring is derived from subjective, anecdotal sources (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarp, 2002), more quantitative studies are emerging. These less subjective means of investigation correspond with previous anecdotal results, to assess the benefits of youth mentoring, on a comprehensive scale (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

For example, the literature illustrates that the effect or influence of a mentor relationship is revealed in such areas of the youth’s life as substance abuse and teen pregnancy (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010). The literature also shows the involvement of a mentor has been indicated to decrease first time adolescent drug use by almost half (Quinn, 1999). In a nationally represented, retrospective, longitudinal examination of young adults, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) discovered that individuals
involved in a mentor/mentee relationship during their adolescence reported “significantly better outcomes within the domains of education and work (high-school completion, college attendance, employment), mental health (self-esteem, life satisfaction), problem behavior (gang membership, fighting, risk taking), and health (exercise, birth control use)” (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008, p. 254)

Complementing this data, a meta-analysis of 55 mentoring program evaluations (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), both quantitatively and anecdotally, supports claims that the mentor/mentee relationship positively relates to youth development. Specifically this analysis, along with several other empirical bodies, discovered overall mentoring has a positive effect on three basic parameters of youth development: (1) social and emotional development (2) cognitive development (3) identity development (Barnard-Bark et al., 2010; DuBois et al., 2002; Jekielek et al., 2002; Rhodes & Chan, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008; Quinn, 1999).

There are multiple bodies of scholarship assessing the quality of mentoring and positively linking its effect to youth development (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010; Pedersen et al., 2009). The evidence confirms these results undeniably link positive youth development through mentor/mentee relationships (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarp, 2002).

**Social and Emotional Effects**

When we look specifically at the first parameter positively linked to mentor relationship, we find benefit in the realm of the youth’s overall confidence and self esteem (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Larson, 2006). Social and emotional youth development is an outcome that pertains to the youth’s perceptions of self-worth, their
attitudes and their individual perceptions (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010). Mentors who utilize their time with a youth as an opportunity to emotionally coach the child find will the youth will subsequently expand their network of social interaction, competence, and forge bonds with others more adequately (Rhodes et al., 2006). This parameter creates social and emotional maturity on the part of the youth that translates into their increased ability to cope, handle, process, and positively manage both social and emotional situations (Jekielek et al., 2002; Rhodes & Chan, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008; Thomson & Zand, 2010; Quinn, 1999).

**Cognitive Effects**

The second parameter of positive youth development, cognitive benefit, is most adequately described as the youth’s “exposure to new opportunities for learning, provision of intellectual challenge and guidance” (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006, p. 694). For instance, a vast majority of mentor programs are designed within the school system and a result of the relationships’ influence translates into the improvement of grades and academic performance (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Jekielek et al., 2002). Because these programs utilize the educational system to support a mentor relationship, it is reasonable to expect that this measurement of success would also coincide with the overall benefit of cognitive development. Rhodes (2008) also found that this exposure to an abnormal circumstance with consequential cognitive development makes youth more receptive to adult wisdom, their values and even their opinions (Rhodes et al., 2006).

The literature proves this arena of development is the most quantifiable of all three, offering more deliverable, tangible outcomes with which to measure the success of the
mentor/mentee relationship (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Jekielek et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2006). This measurable benefit of quantifying academic performance, comparing high school graduation rates and the enrollment of these youth in a higher education establishment may explain the rationale for a majority of programs working in collaboration with educational entities (Dubois et al., 2006).

Identity

Identity development is the last, most subjective but perhaps most significant, variable mentors have the ability to affect through their relationships. Communication research credits the language of interpersonal interactions to actively affecting relationships and influencing roles (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002). “Through learning interpersonal functions of language, people both adopt a role or set of roles, while accepting (or rejecting) those that are assigned them; they express their own judgments, own attitudes, own personalities, and in so doing, exert certain effects on the receivers” (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002, p. 141).

Mentors, in effect, serve as an example of the youths’ “possible selves” (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008, p. 256). As youth enter an awkward age of adolescents they naturally tend to mask their preferences or emotions about topics that may not be considered “cool” by friends or peers. A mentor relationship often serves to unmask a child’s sensitive issues and true emotions about their life, themselves, their dreams, without the fear of rejection (Darling et al., 2002). This may prompt a child to illicit the adult’s perspective and advice, which in turn provides confidence (Downs, 2003). This is the same confidence needed to pursue new experiences, free of embarrassment, perhaps leading to the further development of the youth’s person (Rhodes et al., 2006).
Subjective processes, coupled with physiological assessments, anecdotal successes, and applicable behavioral models establish that mentors open the door to possibility for youth (Pedersen, Woolum, Gagne, & Coleman, 2009), broadening their horizons and helping them shed the fear of their limited perceptions (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Larson, 2006; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). This parameter is the most delicate parameter, totally reliant on the relationship and the mentor and mentee connection, to demonstrate effect.

Why Quality and Time Matter

Based on the literature the mentor/mentee relationship has the ability to not only positively affect youth development but to produce resounding implications in the life of a child. This research, and the overall benefits that result through this particular relationship, hinge on the development of an intimate, close rapport between both the mentor and mentee (Rhodes et al., 2006; Theiss & Solomon, 2008). The success and failure of the mentor/mentee relationship and thus its developmental outcomes are directly related to the establishment of intimacy within the relationship, sustained over time (Jekielek et al., 2006; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Pedersen, 2009).

According to Rhodes and DuBois (2008) one of the major limitations in quantitatively measuring the effects of mentoring is the duration of time the mentoring relationship exists. In fact research shows that for relationships lasting less than twelve months regression in these three parameters (social and emotional development, cognitive development, identity development) outweighed their sustained improvement (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Some researchers found less than a ten percent benefit, even when a year had lapsed, in youth development as it relates to social and emotional,
cognitive, and identity development (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). These findings have been used by national organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) to establish guidelines for the length of time of their programs. National organizations now encourage mentorship to only be pursued if mentors can commit to a minimum of a year, working with a youth (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006).

*Relationships as a Primary Factor*

This time constraint has proved to be an important factor in the efficacy of mentoring largely because scholars have discovered that the development of a relationship through a superficial stage to a meaningful connection takes time (Jekielek et al., 2002). Time and the quality of the relationship work in synergy to produce a bond that is sustainable to illicit the vulnerability necessary to impact a youth (Barnard-Brak, Burley & Crooks, 2010).

Some scholars question time as an accurate variable determining the benefits of youth mentoring, stressing the relationship itself as the primary factor producing positive youth development (Jekielek et al., 2006; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Pedersen, 2009). Still others find the two go hand in hand (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). The natural assumption is the reason that the duration of a mentor/mentee relationship is so important is because the lack of intimacy established during the relationship. Should intimacy be established earlier, and a stronger bond created more effectively, time would prove a less meaningful measurement (Rhodes et al., 2006; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

Scholars debate time as a primary variable required to develop youth through the effects of the relationship (Jekielek et al., 2006; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Pedersen, 2009). While this debate continues the quality of the relationship between the mentor
and mentee is widely acknowledged as the pivotal element in establishing positive influence and thus youth development (Jekielek et al., 2006; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Larson, 2006; Pedersen, 2009).

**Mentoring and Cultural Obstacles**

Functioning in a relationship without comprehension of how to establishing interpersonal communication to ultimately achieve positive youth development, is difficult enough within like cultures. When establishing this relationship cross culturally, this deficiency in mentor/mentee relationships often serves as the explanation for why mentors do not offer their time or experience to mentees (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

Mentors are often unsure of how to communicate with a child. When that child is from a different background the comfort of familiarity is absent and creates intimidation of the unknown on the part of both the mentor and mentee (Hogg, 2009; Sanders & Wiseman, 1993). When mentors engage with a youth from a different cultural background, interpersonal communication becomes more of an obstacle and relationships are rarely established beyond a superficial nature (Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985; Sanders & Wiseman, 1993). This fundamental lack of knowledge affects the “how” and the approach mentors take to establish these relationships. Without an understanding of how to approach a relationship with a child that is different from the mentor, insecurity and lack of confidence take the place of an intimate connection (Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985; Sanders & Wiseman, 1993). Research proposes this difficulty mentors face, when attempting to establish interpersonal communication cross culturally, is dependent on the lack of knowledge about the differences in how those cultures communicate (Hogg, 2009). Research also suggests they manner in which cultures
communicate is largely based on their associations to either an individualistic or collective culture (Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985).

Knowing that individualistic cultures, like the American culture, the individual is the focus and their goals and needs trump the overall good of the collective, gives a mentor the necessary perspective to direct their lines of inquiry or information seeking and begin to establish common ground (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993). In this type of interaction, a person from an individualistic culture communicates in a more direct fashion and establishes bonds based on the investigation and sharing of them as individuals (Cushman, Branislav & Kovačić). Establishing a relationship is person-based.

In collective cultures the emphasis on communication and relationship building is placed on group as a whole. In collectivist cultures the group goals “take precedence over individual goals, and individuals get to know others initially by understanding their group memberships” (Cushman, Branislav & Kovačić, p. 69). Status and group affiliation are far more important than individual goals. Again the importance of having this knowledge lies in the mentor’s ability to apply it and alter approach to establishing interpersonal communication and thus, promote the foundation of a relationship (Hogg, 2009; Sanders, 1993; Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985).

The difference in how collective and individualistic cultures communicate is perhaps best illustrated by through the results of an analysis of over a thousand college students from three different western universities (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993). These students volunteered to take part in a series of questionnaires that investigated significant
predictors in creating relationships that included, nonverbal immediacy, interrogation, other’s disclosure and self-disclosure (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993).

This multivariate analysis (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993) discovered the only variable that had a pan cultural effect was others’ disclosure. The only significant difference found between the cultures was their level of other and self-disclosure (Sanders, 1993). For example, African-Americans place emphasis on establishing a relationship not on “how I act but how you act” (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993, p. 10). Only others’ disclosure had an effect on interpersonal communication (Sanders & Wiseman, 1993). In the analysis of Euro-Americans the opposite is true. All four variables had significant value in establishing the relationship (Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985; Sanders, 1993). True to the individualistic nature of American culture, the direct means of information gathering established through other and self-disclosure, nonverbal immediacy as well as interrogation led to confident formation of relationships (Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985; Sanders, 1993). When establishing a relationship with collective cultures like Hispanic Americans and Asian-Americans, Sanders and Wiseman (1993) found “Hispanic-Americans apparently do not perceive interrogation as critical…and for [Asian-Americans] only other's disclosure and nonverbal immediacy significantly contributed in attaining attributional confidence” (pp. 9-10) affecting the establishment of interpersonal communication and thus the relationship.

*Mentoring and High Risk Children*

Uncertainty, surrounding the establishment of interpersonal communication and its role as a deterring factor in establishing intimate relationships, is not limited to cultural differences. Research suggests, aside from a mentor and mentee having different
cultural backgrounds, the mentee’s status as high risk can also lead to uncertainty surrounding how to establish a productive relationship (Berger; 1988; Feldstein & Witryol, 1971; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

A child can be considered “high-risk” based on their actions that tend toward deviant, dangerous or unproductive behavior (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Often this status is assigned by external factors in the child’s life that are believed to contribute to misconduct (Rhodes, 2002). If a youth comes from a low socioeconomic class, if they have been taken from their homes or have lost parents they may be deemed high risk (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). If a youth has experienced inconsistent or unavailable parenting this status may also be assigned (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Youth in this situation tend toward anger, uncertainty, and mistrust of adults because of their experience with this parental model (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006).

When a child is considered high risk a natural reaction is to stereotype in an effort to understand and then relate to the child (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). While relating is important, at-risk children have been shown to establish close relationships primarily through the resolution of conflict, either internal or external (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Conflict “is an inevitable feature of relationships, especially close ones” (Salwen & Stacks, p. 282), and can be diffused through finding “common ground—similarities in values, experiences, objectives, and so forth that can become the basis for mutually acceptable solutions” (Burgoon, Berger & Waldron, 2000, p. 119). If mentors approach a high risk child with the intention of finding common ground and reducing conflict through a sensitive and consistent approach, youth may in turn view the
mentor as a dependable, supportive outlet and allow them to provide emotional support in their negative environment (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). In this context mentors can act as an alternative or secondary attachment figure, alleviating some of the tensions and conflicts throughout the youth’s existing relationships (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Scholars found when mentors serve as a sounding board they provide youth an example of how to communicate and how to regulate their positive and negative emotions, leading to less conflict (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). This conflict resolution in turn allows interpersonal communication to take place and provide a foundation for a relationship that has the potential to positively affect the child (Burgoon, Berger & Waldron, 2000; Rhodes et al., 2006).

Mentoring and Expectations

Dissimilar culture and high-risk status are challenges when attempting to establish the necessary interpersonal communication to facilitate a relationship between a mentor and mentee (Hogg, 2009). These obstacles do not create an easy pathway to effective mentoring. Adding to these challenges is the lack of knowledge regarding overall expectations for a mentor and their conduct within a mentor/mentee relationship.

Mentors are often placed in partnerships with youth without instruction on how to communicate with them, how to communicate should they be from a different culture or if they are considered high risk (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Dubois et al., 2006). Few mentors are placed in circumstances with guidelines and protocols while most are thrown into situations without support or description as to how to establish the communication vital to form relationships (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006).
Some mentors also lack guidance and coaching as to what is appropriate and expected of the mentor/mentee relationship (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010). This creates confusion surrounding expectations for communication, both verbal and nonverbal, (Jekielek et al., 2006). This also generates confusion on how to maintain strict boundaries while attempting to connect to a child (Feldstein & Witryol, 1971). Maintaining boundaries should be a priority for any adult placed in an intimate situation with a youth.

Understanding proper conduct and maintaining physical and emotional boundaries, befitting the nature of the relationship, are unmet guidelines for adults entering into a mentor relationship (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010). Because relationships have been shown to demonstrate transformational effect (Shepherd, 2006), the manner in which an adult communicates should be geared to avoid any damaging exchange, either verbal or nonverbal (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). This type of support is so lacking Deutsch and Spencer (2009) recommend ongoing training for mentors along with support for parent involvement, to address these needs and concerns.

Simply stated, mentors lack the structure themselves of understanding what they are attempting to do, what needs to be established in order for them to accomplished those goals, and then how to appropriately establish the relationship as a vehicle with which to realize those goals.

Summary

Unawareness regarding how to establish communication, relationship expectations, conduct and the construct of an appropriate relationship, make both establishing the relationship and achieving an intimate connection difficult. With a multitude of
obstacles, developing interpersonal communication to nurture an intimate bond is key to effective mentoring (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010). The literature demonstrates the positive benefits of mentoring can only be expected “to the extent that the mentor and youth forge a strong connection that is characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008, p. 255”).” As Collins and Miller (1994) state, without a connection, “involving such qualities as trust, empathy, authenticity, mutual respect, sensitivity, and attunement—the dynamics through which mentoring relationships can promote positive developmental outcomes seem unlikely to unfold (Rhodes et al., 2006, p. 696).

Given the challenges of communicating in a mentor/mentee relationship, these characteristics are not developed overnight nor achieved easily at the hands of an often unwilling youth. According to Altman and Taylor (1973), developing this level of intimacy in a relationship requires mutual self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor (1973), in response to the examination and analysis of interpersonal communication as it relates to the development of relationships, developed a theory to explain the range of interpersonal behaviors that occur in growing interpersonal relationships. These behaviors can be quantified in terms of the amount of self-disclosure in each information exchanges (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Addressing the Variables/Research Questions

The literature confirms mentoring is a vehicle to positively influence the youth of America. The benefits, both empirically and anecdotally suggest that social and emotional, cognitive, and identity development are key parameters of development when a youth is paired with a mentor (Barnard-Bark et al., 2010; DuBois et al., 2002; Jekielek
et al., 2002; Rhodes & Chan, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008; Quinn, 1999). These benefits hinge on the establishment of intimacy and a close bond, between both the mentor and mentee, which may suffer if a mentor is not given proper guidance (Jekielek et al., 2006; Karcher & Nakkula, 2010; Larson, 2006; Pedersen, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2006; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). The literature also demonstrates that too often mentors are placed in situations with youth who are culturally different or considered high risk and expected to develop a relationship (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). These situations are smothered with uncertainty (Berger, 1988; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) that hinder the establishment of a relationship and inhibit the goals of the mentor/mentee program (Rhodes et al., 2006).

Through the literature, three pertinent research questions have emerged:

RQ 1) If mentors understood the concepts of interpersonal communication better would uncertainty be reduced and relationship growth equate to more successful mentoring?

RQ 2) If mentors had a resource in which to guide the development of interpersonal relationships, specifically for culturally different or high-risk youth, would intimacy be better established and mentors achieve needed support to adequately fulfill their roles?

RQ 3) If better expectations were established for the mentor and uncertainty minimized for the mentee would deeper intimacy lead to the establishment of significant interpersonal relationships and positive outcomes for youth mentoring?
CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Many mentors enter into the endeavor of youth development without the benefit of expectations, experience, or support to effectively and positively establish the relationship at the crux of youth advancement. Potential mentors shy away from mentoring in formal organizations because they are aware of the potential for dissonance and lack the confidence to move forward. The purpose of this project was to develop a manual that offers mentors a resource guide to more confidently and successfully establish an appropriate bond with their mentee.

Mentors face a fundamental challenge in their initial interactions with their mentee. This challenge is the reduction of uncertainty in an effort to develop a relationship that will promote positive youth development. If mentors understood how to communicate through the ambiguity, uncertainty, cultural differences, and the general awkwardness of initial interactions, uncertainty would be reduced and bonds would be established more effectively, thus promoting positive development. This manual provides mentors the communication foundation, as it relates to mentoring, to establish appropriate levels of intimacy through uncertainty reduction.

Scope of the Study

This project began with a focus on the relationship between a mentor and mentee. Specifically, this project was designed and organized around the research question originally posed: 1) If mentors understood the concepts of interpersonal communication better would uncertainty be reduced and relationship growth equate to more successful mentoring? 2) If mentors had a resource in which to guide the development of interpersonal relationships, specifically for culturally different or high-risk youth, would
intimacy be better established and mentors achieve needed support to adequately fulfill their roles? 3) If better expectations were established for the mentor and uncertainty minimized for the mentee would deeper intimacy lead to the establishment of significant interpersonal relationships and positive outcomes for youth mentoring?

Through the evaluation of these questions, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, a manual was created to provide a communication resource for current and future mentors. First qualitative analysis was utilized to create a manual of best practices and communication theory through a thorough review of the literature. The first section of the manual highlights the core components of interpersonal communication, vital to the success of mentoring. The next section discusses pertinent communication theory that aid in the formation of relationship development. Section three then discusses how youth with different cultural associations or those considered high-risk respond differently to mentor relationships and offers suggestion to better establish the mentor/mentee bond.

Quantitative analysis was conducted through the utilization of a survey in the fourth section of the manual. Experienced mentors in formal organizations were asked to share their expertise and experiences while mentoring. This experience was then included in the manual in the form of case studies and provides valuable insight for fellow or future mentors that may encounter the same types of communicative dilemmas.

*Methodeology of the Study*

The project goal was to provide a comprehensive supportive guide for mentors to be utilized in their establishment of an appropriate, intimate relationship with their youth throughout the mentoring process. This manual is intended to aid the mentor in the
development of the mentor/mentee relationship that has been proven a vital and necessary vehicle of youth development. Through this manual common communication problems that arise in the mentor dynamic might be minimized and the process of positive youth development promoted.

This study first utilized message- or artifact based research methods via archival/documentation research as well as textual analysis (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, & Piele, 2010) to establish best practices for mentors. This method was chosen because it focused on “reading media content, or text” (Rubin et al., 2010, p. 216) and “record[ing] and categoriz[ing] these audience reports of experiences with selected media content, seeking explanations of how the meaning of such content is socially or culturally constructed” (Rubin et al., 2010, p. 216). The best practices include how to initiate a relationship with a youth as well as provide communication theory supporting relationship development through the establishment of intimacy and the reduction of uncertainty (see Appendix A).

Additionally to provide real world scenarios of the mentor dynamic people- or behavior-oriented research by means of survey research (Rubin et al., 2010) was also utilized. The data collection method of self-administered surveys, was chosen to “describe or to explain attitudes, opinions, and reported or intended behaviors” (Rubin et al., 2010, p. 228) of mentors in given situations with their mentee. Surveys were incorporated with the expectation of providing mentors solutions, support, and encouragement from fellow mentors (see Appendix B).

Surveys

Surveys were electronically provided to in-school and traditional mentoring
programs organized by Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Boys and Girls Club of America, both nationally recognized mentoring programs. The surveys were disseminated through each institution’s internal database of mentors. The surveys were completed and assessed November 4, 2011.

The purpose of these surveys was to identify common expectations and issues that both hinder and help develop the mentor/mentee relationship. Experienced mentors were asked to explain a situation in which they found themselves unsure of how to communicate and/or navigate the given situation. These situational experiences and their outcomes serve as case studies to support and further inform and guide mentors through the experience of others. Mentors were specifically asked to describe the action that occurred in the situation and the tactics behavior of the mentor to alleviate and mend any dissension or reward positivity. The mentors were then asked to describe the end result of the situation.

**Sampling**

Experienced mentors anonymously participated in an online, self-administered survey they received via email by their local branch offices’ internal email database. These mentors answered questions based on their socio-economic backgrounds, educational environment and family associations to identify links in mentoring effectiveness and cultural embeddedness. Mentors also answered questions about their length of experience mentoring youth and provided samples of experiences they considered a communication challenge.

This study focused on mentors in specific branches of both BBBSA and the Boys and Girl’s Club located in Asheville, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia. These
communities were chosen based on their differences to offer comparisons when given similar structures and procedures. Both communities have different economic and racial organizations though, regardless of neighborhood, each organization employs the same structures, approaches, and focus in their mentoring programs. They both provide in-school mentoring programs in their respective geographies following identical methods as their neighboring institutions. They also provide their respective communities traditional mentoring, which pairs a youth and a mentor that interact outside of the educational institution.

Survey participation was anonymously solicited by mentors in both Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Boys and Girl’s Club of America. This project took into consideration the vital components necessary for successful interpersonal communication and applied these principles to the delicate development of a relationship between mentors and mentees.

Prior research has determined that mentoring affects youth positively and has even determined the nature of the relationship that best facilitates youth development. Mentors are advocates, they are friends. However without an understanding of how to communicate to nurture the relationship pivotal for both the nature of the relationship and its outcome, youth development is never realized. This manual offers mentors support in the fundamental comprehension of how to communicate, how to become a friend, how to begin and then sustain a relationship. The project is presented in Chapter 4 and was designed to accomplish the primary goal of creating a resource for mentors.
CHAPTER 4: THE PROJECT

Introduction

Relationships are not stagnating bonds that can be easily predicted nor are they mathematical equations with known outcomes. Relationships, especially those developed with children, are subjective and ever changing. Due to the nature of relationships and their role in the development of America’s youth, mentoring requires a continued commitment to learning. It requires “training and ongoing supervision of mentors…to enhance the development of mentoring relationships” (DuBois et. al, 2002, p. 256). This project was created to develop resource materials to not only support mentors but also continue the development of mentors and their establishment of appropriate relationships with their mentees.

Data Analysis

One of the key components of the manual spawned from the results of the survey discussed in Chapter Three. The inclusion of best practices and case-study examples, taken from other mentors who agreed to share their story, was compiled based on the survey results. Upon analyzing the results of the mentor demographics, the following information was uncovered.

The majority of mentors reported they had a BA degree or higher. Specifically 50% of mentors had some variety of formal education. This means that only half of the 100 mentors surveyed had formal exposure to the disciple of communication and that same half reported a moderate understanding of basic communication principles. The other 50% of mentors establishing relationships and friendships with youth reported never having had a formal communication class and also reported less comfort with
interpersonal communication and less confidence establishing relationships with their mentees. The survey also determined the majority of mentors who participated, over 91%, were Caucasian. Despite the fact the survey was disseminated to a diverse cultural population the vast majority of its respondents were white. This allowed a wealth of best practices to arise for specific cultural orientations like African-Americans and Hispanic-Americas, though few best practices could be derived for Caucasians or Euro-Americans.

The demographic survey data concluded to find, while mentor experience ranged from one to ten plus years of experience, with the majority (34.6%) falling within the three to four year range, few mentors disclosed their participation in ongoing mentor training. In fact despite several years of mentoring the majority of the mentors surveyed expressed interest in finding and participating in continued mentor education, having only their experiences to draw from.

**Results of the Study**

This results of the data collected, in the pursuit of the project’s creation, readjusted the outline of the manual. The establishment of a significant bond is the necessary component to translate mentoring from a friendship to an opportunity for development. Because only half of the mentors surveyed expressed comfort with communication and its basic practice when establishing relationships, the project sought to include an overview of how communication impacts the establishment of relationships. Based on the lack of confidence mentors divulged the project now includes an overview of communication principles vital for establishing interpersonal relationships. The manual thus begins with an emphasis on communication as the integral component of creating bonds thus determining the success of the relationship. The manual then continues its
communication discussion by evaluating the implications of the mentoring relationship, its gravity, and its primary challenges. Both the social penetration theory along the uncertainty reduction theory are used to support this discussion.

Discussion

*Mentoring Matters: A Communication Guide for Mentors* provides mentors an avenue for support as mentors endeavor to create a meaningful relationship with a child, ultimately aimed toward their positive development. This resource provides an overview of communication and the importance of uncertainty reduction so that mentors first and foremost understand what they are trying to accomplish through the relationship and comprehend an appropriate means to accomplish it. The manual explains the gravity of mentoring, its potential positive repercussions, and provides expert feedback on its role in the development of youth. The case studies are designed to unite these principles, binding them in an applicable and practical setting so that other mentors may derive value from the experience of others. The manual is available in Appendix B.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

Relationships by their very nature are subjective. This makes their analysis difficult and the guarantee of success unrealistic. While the manual provides a broad understanding of communication, the implications of mentoring and addresses how to communicate effectively with youth from different status or cultural background, this information is open to interpretation. The successful implementation of this knowledge will ultimately vary based on the individual, their experience, the dynamic between mentor and mentee, the mentees experience and their willingness to be open to the relationship.

Another factor limiting the data pool and manual construction is the compilation of case studies. Though the studies were disseminated to a broad range of individuals, the majority of the respondents were Caucasian/Euro-American, limiting the scope of the results. Also, the case studies overall lacked the integral steps implemented to achieve success, despite an obstacle, within the mentor relationship. Interviews may have been a more effective means to uncover the specific action items mentors employed to overcome issues, solve problems, and initiate positive growth within their relationship.

Further Study or Recommendations

To expand upon the data, a more in depth evaluation of mentors, their struggles and their path to overcoming obstacles in their mentoring relationship may lead to more effective case study examples for current and future mentors. Also, in an effort to better understand the needs of a child in this type of relationship, gathering data from mentees in an appropriate setting may lead to the discovery of more specific goals and
expectations for mentors. While involving children in any form of research presents challenges it may be an appropriate place to gather more informed rationale for relationship development.

Conclusions

The goal of this project was to understand how mentoring relationships affect youth development and uncover what may inhibit these positive outcomes. The goal of this project was also to take that understanding of mentoring, its influence on positive youth development, and provide mentors a foundation to better understand how to establish these positive relationships despite natural obstacles. This endeavor led to the creation of a manual or resource guide, which included a compilation of the above information in addition to case studies from fellow mentors. This manual’s primary goal is to offer communicative support to mentors when attempting to connect with their mentee and establish that vital relationship. The manual also reinforces the importance of mentoring and defines the various roles in which mentors often find themselves.

The transcendence theory explains the importance of relationships and their ability to shape us, to create our person through shared meaning and knowledge. Gregory Shepherd (2006) posits that our interactions with others are the pathway to our future selves. With this assumption in mind, it is reasonable to attribute mentoring to the positive present and future development of children. This assumption gave birth to the manual. The manual offers a more effective and efficient guide to establishing mentor-mentee relationships to positively shape youth.

Relationships affect our development, our choices, and our lives. As the social penetration theory and uncertainty reduction theory suggest this connection, capable of
shaping our future selves, is impossible to accomplish without establishing intimacy and reducing uncertainty within our relationship. The positive development associated to mentoring proves this theory’s premise is true. Relationships can affect our development, our choices, and our lives. As the social penetration theory and uncertainty reduction theory suggest this connection, capable of shaping our future selves, is impossible to accomplish without establishing intimacy and reducing uncertainty within our relationship. The creation of this manual is vital because it may cut down on the inevitable uncertainty within a relationship and allow the mentor to better create a meaningful connection, which may ultimately lead to the positive development of their mentee. By providing a resource to our mentors the youth of our nation may be more effectively reached and more positively impacted.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

Mentor
Case Study

- Educational Background: Please indicate the highest level of education received.
- Please identify ethnicity.
- How long have you been a mentor? (This may include your participation in either formal and/or informal mentoring programs perhaps through a community, a close bond, or an organization like a sports team or a national entity.)
- Beyond the first six months of your first mentoring experience (orientations excluded), have you participated in any form of mentor training or education specifically geared towards mentoring?
- Have you ever mentored a youth considered high risk?
- How confident do you feel establishing a relationship with a youth? How comfortable are you communicating with them and creating a bond? Please explain.
- Please describe a time or event, in your tenure as a mentor that you remember as a significant. This could be a time you had a breakthrough with a youth, a time when you experienced particular trouble with a youth, or perhaps a “win” that was memorable. Please describe the situation, the action that occurred, the steps you took, and the end result.
Mentoring Matters

A Communication Guide for Mentors: Successfully develop a relationship with your mentee through uncertainty reduction

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Introduction

Relationships are believed to have power. They are attributed to the growth and development of individuals, their beliefs, their ideologies, their attitudes and values. When we enter into a new relationship, the connection we establish serves as a catalyst, molding our person, influencing our decisions and directing our life path. When a mentor enters into a relationship with a mentee, they have the unique opportunity to shape the growth and development of a child.

This manual is meant to highlight the mentor mentee relationship, explain its significance and also its dependence on the development of a relationship. Unlike other manuals, this body of work focuses on the communication responsible for the establishment of a close bond between mentor and mentee. Without this close bond the effects of mentoring are modest as best. When mentors understand how to communicate effectively with their mentee, despite their potential high-risk status or cultural difference, relationships are more easily established and enduring.
Mentoring and Why it Matters

Do you remember, years ago, a time when riding your bike was more important than making money? Think back, do you remember climbing trees or playing with friends? Think back to the time of your youth, whom do you remember? Was there an individual in your young life that helped shape you? How did that person impact your life? Did their wisdom become part of your value system? Did their encouragement inspire a leap of faith that led you to your future goals? Take a moment to reflect back to a time when a friend, a teacher, perhaps a parent made a difference in your life.

There is no denying our relationships shape us. They open us up to new ideas, new perspectives, and give us glimpses of the type of people we want to become. You now have an opportunity to be that difference in the life of a youth. As a mentor, you have the opportunity to contribute to the positive development of a child.

What can Mentoring Accomplish?

Most volunteers enter into mentoring relationships with a single goal: to volunteer their time in an effort to do something good and to help a child. Our society agrees that mentoring is a good thing. Most of us would agree that it is a positive way to help youth, especially those underperforming at school or those in an unstable home environment.

However few mentors know exactly how mentoring helps youth.

Based on the most recent research what we now know is that mentoring is more than a good idea or a way to help kids stay in school and out of trouble. Mentoring actually
helps develop a child’s person, their attitudes, their beliefs. In fact research shows that mentoring positively influences youth development on three basic parameters:

- **Identity Development**
  - Mentoring serves as an example of a youth’s “possible self.”
  - Mentoring offers youth an opportunity to witness a different life, to take part in different cultures, and different experiences. Each mentor has expertise and influence, likes and hobbies, their mentee may otherwise never have an opportunity to experience or take part in. This outlet may inspire the youth to contemplate a different life, perhaps one including these new activities.
  - Mentoring can also serve as a safe haven for youth to discuss their dreams or anxieties without the fear of rejection from peers or family. Mentors have an opportunity to nurture the secret desires and dreams of their mentees, offering them encouragement and support they may otherwise not have or be open to.

- **Social and Emotional Development**
  - Research shows mentoring affects a youth’s perceptions, especially about their self-worth. Mentors have the distinct opportunity to model social and emotional health and build a child’s self image and validate their self-worth.
  - For this reason mentoring can also boost self-esteem and teach kids positive coping skills. Many youth lack healthy coping skills and thus act out in reaction to the stress in their lives. Often mentors act as emotional coaches, helping youth to better understand their feelings and react in healthy, productive ways.
  - The mentor/mentee relationship can also teach the youth positive values.
  - Mentoring can expose youth to social situations and experiences they may not be familiar with and develop the youth’s social aptitude, while encouraging the development of social skills.
  - Mentoring also helps youth foster more effective and healthy relationships with their peers, family and friends.

- **Cognitive Development**
o Last but not least mentoring has been shown to help youth develop logic and critical thinking skills.

o Mentors have an opportunity to teach youth how to organize their thoughts and express ideas in a concise and comprehensive manner.

o Mentors often act as tutors and can coach youth on how to approach their studies and organize their time in productive, efficient ways.

o Mentoring has been proven to help improve a youth’s grades and the rate of their future high school graduation.

o Mentoring has also proven to be a direct contributor to the academic success of youth in the realm of college enrollment and higher education.

Mentoring can create stability in the life of a youth. The consistency and dependability of a mentor often inspires youth to create an internal sense of wellbeing that prompts positive investigation and exploration of skills, advances knowledge, and eventually results in the development of emotional and social competence.

Because of the dependability mentors present to their mentees, your mentee may look to you for support before making important decisions. This gives the mentor an opportunity to provide the youth with valuable adult wisdom and perspective they wouldn’t otherwise be receptive to. This helps guide the youth down positive and productive life paths.

The Role of a Mentor

Research proves mentoring is a healthy and positive way to help a child grow. If mentoring can offer such benefit to mentees, why aren’t more volunteers lining up to help America’s youth? While giving your time might sound simple, mentoring can be intimidating without the proper support. Luckily most mentor programs understand the gravity of what a mentor can accomplish in the life of a youth and, in an effort to more successfully achieve these positive outcomes, are investing more time in supporting and educating their mentors. Organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters have meetings with
their mentors to explain the value of their position, what is and is not appropriate, and orient their mentors with their resources. In an attempt to encourage mentoring BBBS provides their mentors with an organized orientation program to promote effective mentoring and minimize any initial confusion about mentor roles and expectations. However some programs allow more flexibility in their descriptions of a mentor’s role and responsibility with their mentee.

Depending on the organization and their efforts to support their volunteers, mentors often feel unsure of what their function is in the life of a child. This ambiguity surrounding a mentor’s roles and responsibilities often deters mentors from volunteering their time. This naturally presents the question, “what is the job of a mentor?”

Research shows mentoring is most successful when the mentor sees themselves as a friend. Your job as a mentor is not a particularly difficult one, though there may be challenges. Your role is not to reform your youth or to “save” them. In this new age of mentoring mentors are most productive and successful when they simply support their youth, when they become a friend.

A Mentor’s ROLE

- Be a FRIEND
- Have Fun
- Be Positive
- Be Present
- Be an Advocate
- Invest your time
- Offer your trust and be trustworthy
- Remember expectations are a MUST and they should be realistic
and they should be fair

- Give your mentee the ability to choose your activities and your discussions

- CREATE BOUNDARIES. Depending on the presence of sufficient parenting mentees may develop intense emotional bonds with their mentee that aren’t healthy and use the relationship to fulfill an emotional void. For this reason it is imperative that you create appropriate boundaries for the health of your mentee.

- YOU are responsible for establishing the relationship and the relationship is vital to the success and positive development of your youth

Remember: Your youth may resist trusting a stranger because they have been let down by the adults in their lives. You are tasked with a challenging objective, to build trust in order to develop a relationship. This may take time. But the more you remember the roles and responsibilities of a mentor the easier trust will build and the relationship will grow.

**Do’s and Dont’s of Mentoring**

Your role as a mentor may have a degree of variability depending on the expectations set forth by the mentoring organization you are affiliated. Certain programs, typically originating within the school system, ask mentors to serve as tutors. Other programs, either formal or informal, seek mentors to serve as friends and confidants. Each mentor has their own personality which gives birth to their own style of mentoring. There is no right or wrong way to mentor a youth though there are general and widely accepted “do’s” and “don’ts” of mentoring.

*Regardless of the expectations set forth by your organization, research has uncovered universal and generally well-known “do’s” and “don’ts” of mentoring.*
Do

- Be a FRIEND!
- Listen
- Be a role model
- Be accepting
- Be patient
- Be Empathetic
- Be a sounding board
- Be a guide and a confidant
- Encourage your mentee
- Be a self-esteem booster
- Try to be as open as possible
- Avoid judgments or prejudice
- Be supportive and be your mentee’s biggest fan
- Share in their interests and show interest in their lives
- Be a link to other cultures, attitudes, and experiences
- Try to direct your mentor to productive and positive solutions
- Be aware your mentee may not be receptive to your help. They may not want or think they need your help. Don’t be discouraged. You are there to be a friend.
- Remember, you are not alone and if/when you need assistance, help IS available
- Remember, establishing a relationship that is meaningful is the primary goal of mentoring and this is YOUR responsibility, not your mentee’s.

Do NOT

- Try to be a parent or a savior
- If you are not licensed or qualified to give social or psychological advice, don’t. If your mentee is having an issue that requires this type of intervention, seek help and support from your organization or community.
- Do not judge your mentee or assume you know the depth and breadth of their situation
- Try not to lecture your youth or tell them what to do. Rather attempt to engage your mentee and offer them positive alternative options.
Try to avoid expectations about how mentoring is “supposed to go” and be flexible both with the process of mentoring and your youth.

Try not to break your youth’s trust. Rather, maintain your youth’s confidence by respecting their privacy unless it could be detrimental to their health and/or safety.
Communicating Effectively

Mentoring is an effective way to impact a child. The ultimate goal of mentoring is to develop a friendship with your mentee in order to facilitate their present and future development. As a mentor, communication is key!!! Communication is the pathway to develop a friendship with your youth and ultimately unlock the benefits to mentoring. Understanding your role as a mentor is imperative, as is your understanding that these positive benefits hinge on the development of a relationship.

This sounds easy in theory. However, how easy is it to establish a relationship with an often-unwilling youth? A relationship cannot be developed without interpersonal communication and when mentors understand how to communicate with their mentee, often developing the friendship becomes easier.

What is Communication?

Effective mentoring hinges on the establishment of an appropriate, intimate bond with your mentee and that bond is established through communication. In order to develop a friendship with your youth and access their potential you must learn how to communicate with them. The words you use, they manner in which you interact with your youth, this is all a process of engaging and sharing. You are not only sharing words, a ball game, perhaps a meal, you are sharing yourself. Learning what communication is and how to engage more effectively can ultimately lead to more effective mentoring.

So what is communication?

- **Definition:**
  - Communication is more than talking and mostly about sharing.
Communication is both an art and a relational process. It is the fabric of our relationships, our communities, businesses, and societies. Communication is an ever changing, ever evolving process of sharing oneself and seeking to understand others.

Communication is often described as an attempt to share meaning between a sender and a receiver. It is a process of information exchange between individuals through a system of common sights and symbols, behaviors and words.

*Communication is a process that has more to do with relationships than it does with content. Communication is what we do to relate to other people and how we relate to others fosters bonds.*

Remember: People have an innate need to be accepted and recognized for their uniqueness and their individuality. Everyone, children perhaps more than others, want to feel special. People desire the feelings of being needed and wanted, feeling like they belong. Communicating in a purposeful manner allows you to convey these messages to your mentee.

**Components of Communication**

Communication involves more than words. Perhaps most importantly it involves listening. Your mentee may lack the awareness to convey messages that adequately reveal the truth of a situation and limit your ability to understand them, their situation, or even their words. Your mentee might not respond to your particular method of communication which could result in dissonance that hinders the relationship. In order to communicate effectively with your mentee it is important to understand what communication is and the basic components of communication that facilitate relationship development.
Elements of Communication:

- **Active Listening:** Listening is a choice. Listening involves more than using your ears to receive a message. Listening involves reflection, self-awareness and the ability to perceive the truth of a situation. Listening is a process of intuitively and compassionately understanding the real issue, the real meaning behind the words shared. Some scholars even describe listening as a creative endeavor where individuals step outside their comfort zone and indulge in their differences.

- **Self-Disclosure:** Self-disclosure is an act of revealing information about yourself. This act can be either voluntary or involuntary and reveals information about personal history, ideas, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. This knowledge acts as the very foundation of interpersonal relationships.

- **Interrogation:** Interrogation is a another way of saying, direct questioning. When we ask people questions they tend to disclose information in response to those questions that allow us insight into who the person is, what they value, their likes and dislikes.

- **Nonverbal Components:** Nonverbal communication occurs through a variety of nonverbal components such as gestures, nods, touch, body language, posture, facial expressions, and eye contact. This type of communication often sets the tone for your interactions.

Remember: In order to be a successful communicator you must start with awareness. Understanding that communication is a process and dedicating your efforts to open communication actually improves relationships and promotes their evolution. Utilizing the various components of communication and maintaining openness can actually improve self-disclosure, improve closeness, manage conflicts and even decrease the uncertainty surrounding the relationship.

What is Interpersonal Communication?

There are a variety of subsets of communication that discuss, in more detail, the intricate nature of how, why, and through what means individuals send and receive messages. For
the purpose of mentoring we are going to look at the specific type of communication that facilitates the growth of relationships.

- **Interpersonal Communication, Definition:**
  
  - While some individuals refer to interpersonal communication as face-to-face communication between two individuals, others prefer a more in depth description of what this type of communication entails.
  - When you have uncovered someone’s personality, their individual traits, beliefs and attitudes, when you have learned who they are beyond an initial, superficial level, this is when you have achieved interpersonal communication.

Research suggests that mentoring is only beneficial to the extent the mentor and mentee develop a connection, through interpersonal communication which can be characterized by friendship, trust, authenticity, respect, empathy, sensitivity and mutuality.

*Interpersonal communication is the type of communication that helps foster intimate bonds and creates a path to establishing relationships.*
Establishing Relationships through Uncertainty Reduction

Research suggests that initial interactions are laden with uncertainty. When you meet someone, there are so many “unknowns” that it can deter effective communication and detour the development of the relationship. As uncertainty is reduced, as both mentor and mentee uncover information about one another, each feels more comfortable within the relationship. This comfort spawns intimacy, which is again, the vital component of relationship development and the indicator of whether the mentor mentee relationship will promote positive youth development.

You cannot promote youth development without an appropriate, intimate relationship and you cannot achieve this bond without the reduction of uncertainty. Understanding how to communicate and actively attempting to communicate with your youth can reduce the uncertainty surrounding the initial establishment of a relationship. Communication promotes understanding, a reduction to uncertainty, and this is the basis of relationship development.

Theory of Uncertainty Reduction

In the early 1970s social scientists sought to uncover how relationships were developed successfully, what made them thrive, and what contributed to their deterioration. Through overwhelming data and research emerged a theory that explained the birth, evolution and death of relationships. Charles Berger created the uncertainty reduction theory to explain how relationships were initially developed and what primary factor promoted either intimacy and evolution or decline. Essentially the amount of uncertainty present in a relationship will determine its success or failure. He found that people
perceive uncertainty as negative and are highly motivated to eliminate it, especially if they want the relationship to continue.

- **Uncertainty Reduction**
  - Uncertainty reduction is highlighted, by communication scholars, as a core mechanism in the development of relationships.
  - When we meet someone new we are both voluntarily and involuntarily motivated to reduce uncertainty in order to predict their current and future behavior.
  - Communication is the vehicle with which we decrease levels of uncertainty.

Remember: High levels of uncertainty limit the knowledge base necessary to establish a bond. When people cannot make inferences about the relationship or when they simply lack the knowledge to interpret relational cues, uncertainty is increased and intimacy is diminished.

**What Creates Uncertainty?**

Uncertainty revolves around the unknown and is highest in initial interactions. When you meet someone for the first time, what do you do? Do you listen carefully to their introduction? Do you glance at their attire, notice their jewelry, their mannerisms and even their accent? When people meet they make natural, often involuntary observations. The question is why? According to Berger and like-minded scholars, we make initial observations like these in an effort to reduce uncertainty, to find commonality, to relate to others.

- **Initial interactions**
  - Generally speaking people experience anxiety and uncertainty about their communication skills, emotional states, goals, beliefs, and future plans.
Engaging in open communication and asking questions may reduce uncertainty surrounding initial meetings.

**Lack of Expectations**

- Expectations are more than understood action items or behaviors. Individuals develop expectations based on their attitudes, beliefs, experiences, interactions, and the characteristics of others (their hair, their style, their mannerisms, etc.).
- These expectations, true or false, create uncertainty and may also manifest into stereotypes. For example if a mentee comes from a low socio-economic status and has low self-esteem and they meet a well dressed, well educated mentor, with high self esteem they may naturally stereotype their mentor based on their clothes and their perspectives. The youth may presume, based on their expectations (experiences and their own self perception), their mentor cannot possibly understand them and wouldn’t want to.
- When expectations like this are uncovered, there are less assumptions and thus less uncertainty surrounding the emotions and thoughts about the nature of the relationship and the individuals.
- A well-dressed mentor may have been raised in poverty and understands exactly what the youth is dealing with, but unless the youth uncovers their common ground, their expectations will create a rift in the relationship.

**How can Uncertainty be Reduced?**

Uncertainty is reduced primarily when both individuals in a mentor mentee relationship understand what is occurring within their relationship. In fact when reducing uncertainty becomes a relationship goal, uncovering information and seeking to understand will involuntarily transpire.
- **Open Communication**
  - Open communication creates a culture of openness that supports the reduction of uncertainty. When you meet your mentee for the first time set the standard of high verbal communication and open communication. The more you verbally interact the less uncertainty there will be.

- **Self-Disclosure**
  - Self-disclosure promotes the reduction of uncertainty in large part due to its natural reciprocity effect. When you tell someone something personal about you they naturally feel they should share something personal about themselves. This promotes shared intimacy.

- **Nonverbal Communication**
  - Appropriate nonverbal communication reduces uncertainty by increasing comfort through affirmation. As nonverbal expressiveness increases, uncertainty decreases.

- **Interrogation or Information Seeking**
  - High levels of uncertainty are typically the result of a lack of knowledge or information about the other person. Either directly or passively inquire about your mentee, their life, their culture, their family and friends. As you obtain more information about an individual and they have access to increased information about you, uncertainty is reduced.

- **Find Commonalities**
  - Youth in particular respond to people they feel they can relate to. As you seek to understand your mentee and ask them questions share the areas you have common interests or similarities. If your mentee can relate to you uncertainty is reduced and appropriate intimacy can be more easily established.

- **Set Expectations**
  - Not only do behavioral expectations need to be set for the life of the mentor mentee relationship but the relationship should also have transparent goals. If the relationship is built on academic need then specific, fair, measurable goals should be set.
  - Emotional goals should also be set. Your mentee should know your primary goal is to be their friend. You are asking questions about them because that’s how you get to know your friends.
Setting basic behavioral and emotional goals reduces uncertainty and sets the stage for the development of a healthy relationship. It also establishes boundaries! While relationships require an intimate connection, this connection comes with appropriate boundaries for the health and safety of the child.

Awareness and open communication may not always reduce uncertainty and thus produce intimacy within your relationships. But regardless of the immediate outcomes, engaging in communication about your mentees fears, their dreams, their doubts or their concerns fosters an open communication environment and a culture of respect.

*People are naturally drawn to individuals they relate to and share similarities. Research shows the more you find in common with an individual the more you tend to like them.*

Remember: People have multiple layers. The human personality is like an onion. We have superficial layers of likes and dislikes, deeper layers of attitudes and beliefs, and core layers of values. If relationships are expected to evolve, the layers must be continuously peeled. In order to establish a relationship through intimacy and shared meaning you have to peel back the onion, one layer at a time, until you reach its core. Relationships involve not only reducing uncertainty in an initial interaction but constantly peeling back the layers of a person to get to the heart of who they are.

**Uncertainty and High Risk Youth**

High-risk or at-risk youth are among some of the most challenging youth to mentor. For this reason many mentors shy away from mentoring this category of youth. Some mentors feel their efforts are in vain when attempting to break the cycle of disruption and chaos most high-risk youth have in common. For this group of children it is vital that mentors understand what to expect and how to communicate in order to establish a relationship that will yield significance and positive outcomes.
While these youth may be considered the most volatile and challenging, they can also be considered the most rewarding. When mentors see, first hand, the influence they’ve had on a youth with unfortunate circumstances result in less violence or more respectful behavior, perhaps better school attendance or high school graduation, these mentors experience genuine satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment with their mentee. These youth have great potential and when mentors understand their perspectives, when they learn to expect certain behaviors and seek to reduce uncertainty to establish a relationship of trust, these youth can truly flourish within multiple levels of development.

- **WHO is considered High Risk and WHAT does that mean?**
  - When a youth is considered “high-risk” uncertainty is increased and forming a close bond becomes more difficult.
  - A youth with this kind of status may acquire it for any variety of reasons. The youth may be determined high-risk based on their behavior or “acting out” typically in response to either their economic situation or their home life.
  - If a youth is from a low economic household, from a broken home consisting of neglect, inconsistent parenting or parenting issues, drug or alcohol abuse, emotional or physical abuse, or extreme situations like loss, the youth is highly likely to be “high-risk” and distrusting of adults. Consequently mentees may lack the emotional health to positively engage with their mentor.

- **How is mentoring a High Risk youth different?**
  - When a youth has experience negative relationships with adults they are likely to perceive you as synonymous with those experiences.
  - They may question your motives, your availability or consistency since their models of relationships are burdened with inconsistency and unavailability. This leads to damaging emotions such as anger, anxiety, uncertainty and mistrust.
  - These experiences make them less likely to confide in another, especially an adult in times of stress
Mentors who are consistent and sensitive in their relationships with high-risk youth often inspire feelings of self-worth and help to mend self-esteem. This is why setting expectations, setting deliverable and measurable goals is vital. This allows the youth to associate their relationship with you to accomplishment and positivity.

Mentors who are consistent and caring with their mentee often find their mentees become, over time, more open and emotionally healthy. They begin to develop emotional support systems outside of their relationship with you and begin to cope with stressful events and adversity differently, positively.

The mentor/mentee relationship holds particular value with at-risk youth when the relationship provides the mentee an outlet to express themselves without the fear of rejection, voice sensitive issues or pursue interests otherwise discouraged. In this way mentors aid in identity development of the youth as well as overall confidence by not only providing an opportunity for the youth to honest about themselves, but an opportunity to seek positive adult advice, seek an understanding of positive value systems, and motivating perspectives

Because uncertainty is highest in a relationship with a high-risk youth, it is important to seek to reduce uncertainty every day. They are more likely to engage positively in a relationship with perceived rewards.

When Mentoring a High Risk Youth:

- **Set Expectations:**
  - Make sure, in an attempt to minimize uncertainty and set positive boundaries, the youth knows why you are there and what you are both there to accomplish.
  - Engage your mentee by asking if they have any goals, any academic or athletic endeavors, interests that might be used to influence the maintenance of a certain grade point average or behavior. Setting expectations and setting goals of accomplishment demonstrate a reward system youth respond to positively.
  - Set the expectation of how you want your mentee to behave and lead by example. Mentors in this situation can provide a “corrective experience” for youth without the benefit of stable parenting or positive adult experiences.
  - Set the expectation of being a “sounding board” for your youth. By serving as a
trusted individual your mentee knows they can vent their emotions to you. You also offer them a model of effective adult communication and have the opportunity to help the youth better understand, express, and regulate both their positive and their negative emotions.

- **Should conflicts arise:**
  - Should conflicts arise, which are likely in this type of relationship, maintain a calm tone, attempt to remove your own emotions from the situation, and seek common ground. Find similarities in values and life experiences, likes and dislikes, to help the youth to see your perspective.
  - Do not be afraid to ask for help. Should you face a situation you are uncomfortable, unsure, or simply would benefit from another perspective ask for help. Most mentoring programs have support staff responsible for providing you and your mentee resources specifically for conflict resolution.
  - If you are mentoring a youth without these resources from your organization, reach out to the child’s school counselor; engage the child’s parents if they are available and it would be constructive to do so.
  - There are a variety of local, free social work networks that also provide no cost support for the community.
  - Bottom line, ask someone. Never be afraid to enlist help or a fresh perspective when it comes to managing a relationship with your mentee.

Remember: When mentoring a high-risk youth you may find that uncertainty is high and your mentee distrusts you. They may even act suspicious, disrespectful, angry, unavailable, and create challenges. Common ground can be a redeeming link in managing conflict with an “at-risk” youth.

**Uncertainty and Cultural Diversity**

Potential mentors often shy away from mentoring youth because of the uncertainty that surrounds their perceived ability to mentor effectively. This insecurity is exponentially increased when the potential mentor is faced with the potential opportunity to mentor a
youth of a different nationality or ethnicity than his or her own. The potential of mentoring a child with a different cultural orientation brings with it a gamut of uncertainty that may prevent the mentor from giving their time or feeling confident in the relationship.

When you understand the manner in which different cultures communicate the pressure of employing interpersonal communication to establish a relationship with a youth is greatly decreased. This understanding allows mentors with potentially different cultural associations to connect with a youth and forge the close bond that is essential for sustainable youth development.

When mentoring a youth from a different cultural background from your own (or one more closely identified with their culture than yourself) there will be differences in both communication style and in the manner in which communication with the youth establishes a bond and thus a relationship. The primary difference to note, the difference that will dominantly affect the establishment of a relationship, is the youth’s cultural identification. Cultures differ in terms of their individualism and their collectivism.

- **Individualistic Cultures**
  - Individualistic cultures, like the United States, emphasize an individual over a group. The individual’s goals, needs, and wants take precedence. In this situation, as is typical for the average American, youth from an individualistic culture will communicate in a direct manner and develop relationships through the gathering of information about you and about themselves.
In the United States, an individualistic culture, in order to reduce uncertainty individuals use direct communication. We ask questions specifically about who the individual is, what their interests are and we try to understand their personal goals and values.

This is an active gathering of information about the individual’s attitudes, values and behaviors. This is a highly effective manner of uncertainty reduction for an individualistic culture. However, this person-based focus is primarily valuable to an individual raised with this similar cultural value system.

### Collective Cultures

- The opposite is true for individuals from collective cultures like Latin Americans. In collective cultures the group, the family associations, these take precedence over the individual. In collective cultures individuals communicate in an indirect manner, often deflecting personal questions or questions about themselves directly.
- Relationships are developed through an understanding of group membership.
- In collective cultures, to reduce uncertainty, the focus must be group based. In this setting it is inappropriate to place too much emphasis on the individual without first understanding their group or family environment.
- Using indirect communication and gathering information about their family status, family hierarchy, perhaps even their family legacy or cultural associations is the most effective way of establishing a relationship with an individual from a collective culture.

When mentoring youth with different cultural associations than your own, you have an opportunity to create an open, positive intercultural communicative environment for a youth potentially exiled or alienated from the larger culture they are now associated. You have an opportunity to foster positive personal and social identity development.

### Mentorship of a Caucasian/Euro American:

- When mentoring a Caucasian or Euro American youth, research shows these youth associate themselves with the principles of an individualistic culture.
- This means when establishing a relationship, the factors that are most beneficial and proven to lead to the establishment of a close bond include the disclosure of
others (in this case the mentor), their own self-disclosure, non-verbal communication (such as pats on the back, nodding, smiling etc.) and direct verbal questioning.
- These behaviors lead to a higher uncertainty reduction with this particular cultural group as well as lead to the more effective establishment of an appropriate, intimate bond between mentor and mentee.

**Mentorship of an African/African-American:**
- When mentoring an African or African-American youth, research shows these youth may associate themselves with one or both the principles of an individualistic and collective culture. Because of their heritage, traditionally collective, and the influence of the West, traditionally individualistic, African-Americans may identify with one or both cultural associations.
  - This means when establishing a relationship it is important to observe which identity the youth seems more connected to, the identity of the group or of themselves.
  - Research also shows that regardless of cultural identification, African-Americans respond primarily to others’ disclosure (in this case the mentor). Studies show that uncertainty reduction is achieved only through the disclosure of others in this type of interaction.
  - For “African-Americans it is not how I act but how you act” that leads to the development of a close bond.

**Mentorship of a Hispanic/Hispanic-American:**
- When mentoring a Hispanic or Hispanic-American youth, research shows these youth associate themselves with the principles of a collective culture.
  - This means when establishing a relationship, the factors that are most beneficial, and through research proven to lead to the establishment of a close bond, include the focus on the youth’s identity derived from the group with which they belong.
  - Specifically research shows this culture establishes relationships through uncertainty reduction in the form of others’ disclosure, self-disclosure, and non-verbal communication (such as pats on the back, nodding, smiling etc.).
  - For Hispanic-Americans, the establishment of appropriate intimacy within a relationship spawns from an understanding of who you are (in this case the
mentor) and a genuine interest in who the youth is and the group they belong to.

- **Mentorship of a Asian/Asian-Americans:**
  - When mentoring an Asian-American youth, research shows these youth associate themselves with the principles of a collective culture.
  - This means when establishing a relationship, the factors that are proven to lead to the establishment of a close bond include others’ disclosure and non-verbal communication (such as pats on the back, nodding, smiling etc.).
  - Asian-Americans’ heritage is rooted in collective cultures so the need to gain knowledge of others may be less of a focus. Their goal when establishing a relationship is not focused on self but rather on the group.
  - Asian-Americans will potentially be less open to revealing details about themselves individually and be less responsive to the attempt.

Remember: People communicate largely based on their individual and social identities when establishing relationships. This means, for example, they may belong to a culture other than the American culture but still personally identify with American priorities and social norms. When you identify which association has dominance, you have the opportunity to more effectively build intimacy and trust. Keep in mind both the youth’s personal and social identity will impact the way in which they communicate with you and how they establish a friendship.
Case Studies

Being a mentor can be intimidating. Often mentors wonder if they are “doing it right” or if anything they do with their mentee “really matters.” There is not one “right” way to be a mentor and what you do with your mentee does matter and will often be reflected in their future behaviors and decisions. Some mentors discover the magnitude of their affect on their mentee long after their mentor relationship ends. While you may question if your role has effect rest assured it does. The following case studies have been provided by mentors across the country in an effort to offer fellow volunteers their support through their own experiences. These case studies are meant to offer current and future mentors support should they encounter a difficult situation with their mentee or simply question if their relationship has value. These case studies also allow mentors an opportunity to see how their relationships encourage positive development in the life of a child.

Each case study or story begins with the general situation. This situation is based on the either the mentor’s initial interactions with their mentee or their briefing on their child’s status and reason for being in the mentor program. Following the situation is the action taken, implied, or suggested. This heading breaks down the actions the mentor took in order to set expectations, encourage the youth, overcome a particular situation or handle an issue that was presented. You may find yourself in a mentoring relationship right now that mirrors one of these stories but are conflicted on how to handle the situation. This heading allows you an opportunity to see what other mentors did and evaluate if these actions would offer you valuable options in handling your situation. The next heading, result or potential outcome, offers you the unique opportunity to see the result of the actions taken. This heading demonstrates the outcomes or suggested outcomes of the actions taken and allows other mentors to learn from the experience of others. The last heading, personal mentor profile, is provided to demonstrate the mentoring background of the individual sharing their story. It is also included to demonstrate both struggles and victories in mentoring occur regardless of your tenure or experience. Following the headings and the mentor’s story is a quick tip that correlates to the situation. This tip is derived from the information provided in the manual. It is included to add context, value, and further recommendations for effective and successful mentoring.
Mentee Victories

The following case studies highlight the successes mentors have experienced with their mentees. These successes vary and demonstrate mentoring’s positive effect on youth development.

- **Situation**
  - A youth struggles with deceit and challenges his mentor’s trust

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Mentor sought expert support and advice through a qualified BBBS social worker and confronted their youth about their lying and stealing
  - Repeated discussions about ethics and the importance of trust along with open lines of communication
  - Mentor allowed the youth to reenter their home on a trial basis, to reestablish trust and allow the youth the opportunity to earn trust again

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth better understood the principles of ethics and the repercussions of dishonesty
  - The youth learned the value of trust

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 3-4 years of experience, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My initial interaction with my mentee was troublesome. About a year into our relationship, he took a roll of Mentos from my desktop when my back was turned. There were a couple of other similar incidents about that time that made me wary: he tried to walk out of my home with a magazine I had lent him, and lost a book I had lent him that was part of a set. I didn’t exactly know what to do so I reached out to my BBBS social worker. After discussion with the social worker, I confronted Austin. I let him know that his actions had negatively affected my trust and that I didn't feel comfortable re-admitting him to my home. After he'd had a few months to think this over, we had a lunchtime discussion of ethics. After he seemed to understand the implication of his actions, after he admittedly missed having my trust and my respect, he was then allowed to return to my home on a trial basis. After this event he has not misbehaved again to my knowledge.

*Quick Tip*: Remember, use your resources and never be afraid to ask an experienced, qualified adult for help confronting your mentee about negative behavior. If your mentee is lying or stealing there are likely to be other issues prompting the behavior and dealing with these events in a healthy, productive way may provide a “corrective experience” for the youth. This experience may also serve as a vital example of healthy adult communication.
Situation
  o A youth struggles with weight and academic performance

Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested
  o Mentor stressed the importance of wellness through a connection to nature and regular exercise
  o Mentor used weekly exercise as an opportunity to talk about academic performance

Result or Potential Outcome
  o The youth learned valuable principles of health and wellness and positively affected his health and future wellness
  o The youth gained confidence academically through their positive self perception

Personal Mentor Profile:
  o 3-4 years of experience, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

I made serious progress with my youth in an unexpected way, his weight. I'm in my 60’s with heart disease so weight, health, and general wellness is important to me. I wanted to pass this interest on to my mentee so we spent our time together during the day taking hikes. At age 13 he couldn't keep up with me on hikes. Nevertheless every week we hiked, we talked about his schoolwork, about life, and his interests. Two years later, he's lost 50 pounds and not only stays ahead of me on strenuous climbs but also has started to carry the backpack. I see this as the fruit of repeated discussions of healthy lifestyle and changes he's made in his diet and exercise habits. We have also discussed the importance of education and he responded by gaining admission to the local Early College program where he is now doing well. He has also changed career focus from writing apocalyptic romances to biochemistry research. Once his weight dropped it seemed that everything else became less difficult. Maybe that was the confidence bump he needed to achieve success in other aspects of his life as well.

Quick Tip: Remember, unlocking your youth’s key to self-esteem may lead to a succession of other positive events that have lifetime implications.

Situation
  o A mentee remembers the day of their mentors’ meeting and shares a personal story

Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested
  o Consistency, the mentor is on time and present each and every time they are scheduled to meet with their youth
  o The mentor continually observes and looks for positive signs of reinforcement the relationship holds meaning

Result or Potential Outcome
  o Constantly assessing a relationship leads to constant uncertainty reduction which thus creates an increase in likeability and the creation of a bond
  o This allows the mentor and mentee to more easily and successfully create a relationship that have effect

Personal Mentor Profile:
I don't have a specific situation in mind. I've had 4 mentees. When I've noticed that they care about our relationship, I think that is incredibly significant. For example, (I've always been a school-based mentor) when I show up at school and they are waiting for me to arrive, remember that I'm coming that day, I think it shows they value the relationship. When they open up about something important to them, it shows they trust me and they value our friendship. It's not so much that these instances are gratifying to me, although they are, but most importantly I believe they show me the relationship is "working." When they show they value having a relationship with an adult my hope is if they ever need support they will consider me, our relationship, as a part of their support system.

Quick Tip: Remember, the small things are big things. When your mentee remembers the day you are supposed to meet or the name of your pet, these are signs they value your relationship. Don’t take them lightly. These cues can be the biggest signs the relationship holds meaning for the youth.

- **Situation**
  - A youth was asked to schedule mentor meetings and it became a question of her commitment to the relationship.

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Responsibilities were given to the youth to increase accountability and develop social skills
  - Mentor sought advice from the youth’s mother to establish value in the relationship and determine if the relationship was productive and should be continued

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The mentor and youth’s mother came together in a united front as a support unit
  - The youth learned a valuable lesson about life and the nature of relationships
  - The youth came to understand the give and take of an adult relationship that can and should be applied to her social and personal relationships

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 1-2 year of experience, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

As an expectation of my mentee relationship I gave my youth certain responsibilities. The goal was to teach her better social skills and the end result was an in depth conversation about how to conduct herself in a relationship. I would ask my youth to do specific things like check her calendar and speak to her mother to schedule our time together. We spend one day a week together and her job was to schedule that time after communicating with her mother. I would ask her to call me to let me know to let me know the outcome and what day was best. What seemed like simple tasks to me never got done; she didn’t call. She wouldn’t schedule our meetings and I was left, at the last minute, to figure out the logistics of her schedule, her mother’s schedule, and what time and day would be best to meet. My frustration increased as her interest in performing this simple task decreased. I took this as a sign she was not interested in continuing our
relationship. I spoke with her Mom about ending our participation in the program if her
daughter did not think the relationship was worthwhile, and asked her mother to speak to
her about how much she valued our time together. After her mom spoke to her, she really
wanted to continue the relationship. We met soon after and had a nice dinner out at her
favorite restaurant. We were able to talk about relationships and how two people have to
give to make a relationship work. It turned into a wonderful discussion about all life
relationships and what she needs to do to foster a relationship and what she should expect
of other's in a relationship. It was a difficult topic that turned out to be a learning
opportunity about life. Since then we have better communication, and hopefully she will
take this lesson into future relationships with bosses, friends, and spouses.

Quick Tip: Remember, something simple to you may be difficult for your youth and even require
an explanation of importance. Common knowledge is only common if it is shared. Try not to
assume your youth understands the value of your relationship or performing tasks that nurture
that relationship. Help them understand by reducing uncertainty through increasing your
communication surrounding your expectations.

Side Note: Try to avoid vague action items. If you ask your youth to perform certain tasks make
the task specific and give them specific timelines for their completion. If possible, be as
consistent with your mentee as possible by scheduling your time together on the same day and
time to establish dependability and continuity.

- **Situation**
  - A youth expresses concerns to her mentor about her living situation
- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - The mentor created an open environment with positive verbal and nonverbal
    communication
  - The mentor contacted their support system and developed a plan of action to
    remove the youth from a dangerous home environment
  - The mentor created a safety plan for the youth
- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth was removed from an unstable home and placed into a healthy
    environment where they have the opportunity to be happy, successful, productive
    youth
- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 5-6 years of experience, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My youth has a questionable parental support network. Her mother is more interested in
her boyfriend than her daughter and my mentee is left to her own devices more often than
not. I never really knew much about her home life until one day she wasn’t feeling very
well. I tried to talk to her, asked her questions, but she wasn’t interested in talking. I
didn’t know what to ask her or what to do, so I just sat with her, put my hand on her
shoulder, and waited. Eventually she looked up at me and asked me, “How do you know
when you’re safe?” She began discussing concerns about her mother's boyfriend. He
made her feel uncomfortable. At this point I was concerned for her safety so I created a
safety plan. We developed a code word. I instructed her to call me whenever she felt
unsafe. If she called me with our code word we both agreed I would pick her up no questions asked. Fortunately, she never had to call and we never had to use our code word. Fortunately she was moved out of her house shortly after and into a safer environment.

Quick Tip: Remember, communication is more than words. A hand on the shoulder may be all your youth needs to feel connected to a dependable adult and divulge a dangerous situation they may otherwise be silent about. Your relationship may serve as a catalyst or inspire the confidence boost your mentee needs to change their lives for the better.

Side Note: This is a delicate situation and one that should not be handled alone. If your youth expresses concerns for their safety, contact your support network immediately to determine next steps. (This may include your youth’s teacher, principle, your mentor organization’s social worker or coordinator, perhaps even the department of social services or a similar community support group.)

- **Situation**
  - Mentee was having trouble focusing on school work and meeting academic expectations in school

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Continued focus on academic performance
  - Mentor uncovered their mentee’s values, likes and dislikes and used those as rewards, creating a system that established priorities and reinforced positive behavior

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth began turning in classwork and homework early and is excelling academically
  - The mentor and mentee haven’t missed a playtime since and have plenty of quality time to exercise and enjoy each other’s company.

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 8-9 years of experience, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My mentee is a bright young child that had trouble focusing on their schoolwork. We had talked about the importance of completing his assignments and paying attention in class but he still wasn’t focused. I wanted him to do well in school so I began negotiating. I asked my mentee what his favorite things to do were, then we made a deal. I told him that we could no longer play and do his favorite things, like play ball, until his homework and classwork were completed. If he acted up in class we wouldn’t play at all.

We talked about priorities and how establishing things that are most important and honoring those priorities frees us up to have fun and play and spend time with friends. He started turning in his work early and we haven't had to miss any playtime since.

- **Situation**
Mentee was having trouble focusing on school work and meeting academic expectations in school.

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Continued focus, encouragement, and attention on academic performance
  - Mentor used the youth’s positive home life to implement a support system with accountability and structure to improve the youth’s academic performance.

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth learned a systematic approach to solving a problem that will be transferable to other areas of the youth’s life.
  - The youth experienced continued academic success and, as a result of making A’s instead of F’s, the youth’s confidence skyrocketed and prompted her to try out for her school’s basketball team.

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 3-4 years of experience, working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My mentor needed help with her grades. They were failing their current grade so the school asked if she could be mentored to keep her in school. I came to encourage and motivate my mentee and hopefully help her establish better habits to be successful. I met with her teacher every Tuesday for 14 weeks. It was phenomenal to see her success. We used a planner to write down her work assignments and give her a timeline to make sure they were completed on time. Her mother helped us to use the planner, update it, and check her work assignments. I came in as an encourager, a tutor, but mostly a friend. We established a system that worked for her. When asked later how she made the honor roll (at the end of the school year) she said, “Because my Big Sister told me I could.” When I asked her why she worked so hard she said, “Because I knew you would always come back.” It was a great day.

*Quick Tip: Remember, helping your mentees develop systems to solve their problems in a positive, productive way are life skills they will carry with them forever.*

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**High-Risk Youth**

The following case studies present mentor experiences specifically with high-risk or at-risk youth. High-risk you can be among the most challenging but also the most rewarding mentees. These are the children that most benefit from mentoring. The following stories are provided to offer support but also advice should you find yourself in a situation that requires the attention of an outside party.
### Situation
- An at-risk youth from a troubled background including drug and alcohol abuse, misdemeanors, and a poor parental support network learns to have honest fun.

### Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested
- Constant encouragement through open lines of communication about struggles learning or feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth’s schoolwork, learning, and overall academic performance.
- Mentor included the girl in group activities with other youth to promote social skills and positively reinforce the youth could make friends and have fun in a safe, healthy manner.

### Result or Potential Outcome
- The youth had a “corrective experience” and learned a new way to feel like part of the crowd and have a good time.

### Personal Mentor Profile:
- 1 year of experience, working with culturally different and at-risk youth with multiple organizations.

In my experience with working with at-risk/adjudicated youth, I have been blessed to witness so many wins and breakthroughs. I think the key to the little wins I’ve experienced over the years is to minimize my expectations. I approach the youth with one concern: what do they need most and what can I give them that might fulfill that need. One such experience, one that is perhaps the most memorable was with a 14-year-old girl I mentored with very little to no self-esteem. She had been in the juvenile court system for minor offenses with no support or parental guidance. She had a hard life. She had a rough life. Despite the turmoil, disappointment and challenges this girl was determined to work through her issues, face her fears, forgive her perpetrators and set new and healthy standards for herself. She changed so much in only six months of mentoring. I was the best example I knew how to be. I listened and I encouraged her and I set the expectations for emotional health and positive relationships. I realized our time together had accomplished huge feats the night she learned to have simple fun, fun without drugs or alcohol, fun with good people that were trustworthy. It was New Years Eve - we had a party for the girls in her class. To get the party started we did some trust exercises that included dancing blindfolded. My mentee refused to take part until she realized how much fun everyone was having. I knew she would have fun so we talked about it and finally she decided to try it. She had a blast! During our debrief circle, she said that that was the most fun she has ever had. From running with the wrong crowd, having her fun with dangerous activities, what a win! She was learning how to be a kid again. She was learning there was a different way to live.

**Quick Tip:** Remember, many of your youth will have the desire to live a different life, to be a different person, but they will not know how. They will not naturally have the tools to actualize what their will pushes them towards, a better life. This can be one of the most influential roles of a mentor. This is an opportunity to teach a youth how to turn that will into a way.

### Situation
An at-risk youth living in a bad area, shows him mentor how much their relationship means to him

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Mentor establishes a schedule, a routine that provided consistency for the youth
  - The mentor also established verbal confirmation of the importance of the time they spent together through establishing positive communication and reinforcement

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The mentee learned, for the first time, what it was like to be cared for by someone who was dependable and consistent. The mentee learned what it meant to be loved.

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 8-9 years of experience, working with at-risk and culturally diverse youth with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Under1Sky; ManKind Project; Journeymen (BoysToMen)

I mentor a youth is now almost eighteen. We have been together for over three years. He lives in a bad area, in project housing and I would pick him up from his home and return him when we spent time together. Every time I dropped him off I would make sure he knew when we would be together again and I’d say, “stay out of trouble” or “be good,” or something else appropriate for the occasion. But before he got out of the car, the last thing I always said to him was “I love you.” As you can imagine, even from the beginning as a thirteen year old, this would often prompt an eye roll or the beloved scoff! He would look at me, blankly, and without saying a work leave my car. While that’s not typically the response you prefer after telling someone you love them, I didn’t mind. I didn’t tell him I loved him for a response, I simply wanted him to know I valued him and loved him regardless of what he thought about it. After we’d spent some time together I returned him home and as we kidded each other and played I pulled the car over to say goodbye. As I pulled over, before I could even utter my blank-stare evoking close he looks at me, stares me directly in the eyes, and with more conviction than I’d ever heard he said “I love you.” He said it first. He let me know that day he had heard me the countless times I had said it to him. I sat there, stunned, and with tears welling up in my eyes and my heart filled with love for this young man, I knew he meant it. He let me know, for the first time, that our time mattered. Suddenly, I became the student. I became the mentee.

*Quick Tip: Remember, you never know what your relationship will mean to your mentee. They may not show it, they may even hide it from you, but your relationship could mean the difference for these kids. Your love and concern could be the one thing they’ve always needed.*

- **Situation**
  - An at-risk youth with anger issues, stemming from childhood traumas and neglect, is sent to a juvenile center as in response to fighting in the school

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Open lines of communication about struggles or feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth
Mentor provided the youth with healthy, positive alternatives to control anger. Utilizing exercise as a substitute for fighting establishes a positive association to controlling negative emotions.

**Result or Potential Outcome**
- The youth learned how to substitute positive activity for negative emotions like anger. The youth learned how to bypass the overwhelming emotional experience of anger and channel that energy in a positive way.

**Personal Mentor Profile:**
- 5-6 years of experience, working with at-risk youth with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My mentee just turned sixteen. We have been together since he was ten. Our time together has been a challenge largely because of his anger issues. They stem from a childhood full of trauma and neglect. He didn’t know how to handle the rage that would well up inside of him. Eventually his anger spilled over into school. He hit a fellow student he said had been bullying and taunting him and was sent to a school for problem children for a week. After he acted out in school we met. Without judgment, I began to explain to him that I get angry sometimes too. I started to explain that when I get angry, instead of lashing out I do something productive and something physical. Instead of bottling up that energy I have to get it out. I explained that when I’m angry, sometimes I just run. I run until I’m exhausted or until the anger is gone. Sometimes I told him I run until I cry, until I get the emotion out, instead of bottling it up inside where it has the potential to negatively affect who I am. After the wave passes, then I deal with why I’m upset or the emotional side of my anger. We kept talking and he seemed to relate. As we continued to talk we discussed why he became so angry and alternatives to acting out as a result. I have him a stress ball as a gift and we set some plans for a daily routine of healthy exercise to manage those negative emotions and serve as an alternative to fighting. Just by talking it out, he has been done so much better. I think because I don’t judge him and he knows I’ll be honest with him, he trusts me. I don’t pretend his problems are unique to him, they happen to all of us, including me. We have a bond, and I do hope our relationship helps him going forward.

*Quick Tip: Remember, offering your mentees healthy substitutes and alternatives for dealing with negative emotions can unlock the key to positive emotional health. It can also teach them healthy, transferrable coping mechanisms for daily stressors.*

**Situation**
- An at-risk, neglected youth living in a children’s home with anger issues makes a friend before losing her mother and moving away

**Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
- Mentor reached out to friends, counselors, and social workers for advice, support, and direction on how to establish a positive relationship with her mentee.
- The mentor provided the youth with a calm, stable environment to experience relief from a difficult home life

**Result or Potential Outcome**
Through this relationship the youth was provided an escape, a sanctuary of friendship where her problems weren’t the focus and having fun proceeded negativity.

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 8-9 years of experience, working with at-risk and culturally diverse youth with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My very first mentee was eight years old. We were together for four years. When I met her she had significant anger issues with her mother and a significantly troubled past. She lived in a children’s home for troubled youth for two years until moving into therapeutic foster care. While her temperament with me was pleasant she lashed out at her mother and has challenged social skills. Each time we met I had to fill out a form describing our outing and noting any challenges, problems, or events that occurred. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I had no background or education in social work or psychology and had no experience with “high-risk” youth so as you can imagine, I was intimidated and a little scared. Since I did not know how to approach my time with this mentee I reached out to friends. I spoke to counselors and social workers to gain perspective. Each time we went out together I tried to make sure that she had the best time possible. I never knew what to ask her or what to say so I just focused on as much positivity and fun as possible. We would laugh and play and I tried to make each experience an escape, a time of happiness. One day I went to pick her up and found out that her mother had passed away suddenly from a heart attack. She had moved out of state to live with family elsewhere. I never got to say goodbye. I kept mentoring. I think of her often and miss her. She was my first mentee. She offered me a tremendous growing experience and knowledge I still draw upon as I continue developing relationships with youth.

*Quick Tip:* Remember, not all mentor/mentee relationships will have a happy ending. Not all of your experiences with your mentees will result in an “ah hah” moment or a blinding success. Some will end like this, abruptly and with no knowledge of your impact on the life of that child. Keep in mind; this mentor has no idea that their youth may credit her for many miracles and success in her life. You may never know the full extent of your kindness in the life of a child but never forget that your kindness, your friendship matters.

- **Situation**
  - An at-risk youth having academic struggles and battling chronic lying finds the support he needs to turn his grades around and start telling the truth

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Open lines of communication about needs and feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth’s school work, learning, overall academic performance, and feelings of worth.
  - The mentor actively engaged the youth’s support network to begin correcting problem behavior

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth turned his grades around making A’s and B’s and for the first time told the truth
The youth learned how to receive attention in a positive way

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 10+ years of experience, working with at-risk youth with diverse socio-economic backgrounds

I’ve been mentoring a youth for over four years that has been struggling in school. He has not only academically struggled but also socially met challenges. He tells lies, chronically, and doesn’t seem to understand the difference between fiction and reality. His teachers reached out to me to inform me about his academic situation and also in an attempt to stop his lying. They encouraged me to confront him and discuss the importance of being honest and telling the truth. In the past, when confronted with lying, he never admitted his guilt and created a more elaborate web of lies to deflect the obvious reality of his actions. However, lately all of his teachers, volunteers, and myself included have been gently addressing the importance of being honest. Over the course of the past several months I have seen improvements in his accountability and this is perhaps the reason his teachers felt this was a good time to address the lying more aggressively. I sat him down, and we talked. I told him how important being honest was to me and set the expectation that is also what I expected from him. We talked about it openly and it appeared to be more of an attention tactic than anything. I supposed negative attention was better than no attention at all. We traded focuses and talked about all the positive attention doing well in school would generate. I tried to switch his focus from a perceived need for attention through lying to a more constructive solution. He is now making all A’s and B’s on his report card! When I asked him what his grades were he said “all A’s!” I paused, asked if he was telling the truth, and he said, “well mostly A’s but some B’s too!” It’s the first time he actually corrected a statement to be factual! It was a huge moment.

*Quick Tip:* Remember, getting to the root of why a child is lying is often the easiest and best solution to correcting the problem long-term.

- **Situation**
  - An at-risk youth struggles with academic performance

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Continued focus on academic performance
  - Games to enhance learning skills and cognitive function
  - Open lines of communication about struggles learning or feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth’s school work, learning, and overall academic performance.

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth made honor roll
  - Most importantly, showing continued benefit from the mentoring relationship, after their relationship ceased the youth was honored for outstanding achievement within the community.

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 10+ years of experience, history of working with at risk, culturally different youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
It was with my first mentee. We had been together for about 4 years at that time. He had struggled for years in school. I think he had been held back at least one grade. We were walking through his school one day when he was in 5th grade, and he directed me to a board for me to see. There was his name. He had been recognized for being on the honor roll. He had never before been on the honor roll, and I could see how proud he was. While he was never negative about school, learning was not easy for him. This was a great accomplishment for him, and I felt that our time together, on some level, really made a difference. After our time together ended I learned that he had been nominated as one of the outstanding youth of our community at the Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast. I was so proud of him.

Quick Tip: Remember, you may be your mentee’s only fan. Share in their successes!

- **Situation**
  - An at-risk, pregnant youth with a poor parental structure tries to obtain her GED after dropping out of high school

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Focus on academic performance, specifically on obtaining a GED
  - Tutoring, skills workshops, practice tests, encouragement
  - Open lines of communication about struggles learning or feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth’s school work, learning, and overall academic performance.

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth not only obtained her GED but also a scholarship to attend college and continue her education
  - The youth was asked to speak a Governors’ dinner honoring youth academics

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 10+ years of experience, history of working with at risk, culturally different youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

I worked with a student that had dropped out of school with a pregnancy and poor parental support. She decided to go back for her GED. I wanted to support her so I helped through tutoring and study skills building. She got her GED and a scholarship to college. We were invited to a dinner with the Governor at which she was asked to speak on behalf of all the students in the program that had gone back to school and successfully fulfilled the requirements for graduation. This was a great moment for her and the program.

Quick Tip: Remember, nurturing a relationship with your mentee also means nurturing their dreams. For some mentees, you will have the opportunity to help them explore their “possible selves” and maybe even rewrite their futures.
- **Situation**
  - A high-risk youth that has significant anger and entitled issues

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Mentor sought expert support and advice through a qualified BBBS social worker and coordinator.
  - Mentor confronted their youth about their anger on multiple occasions utilizing available support networks like teachers, BBBS staff, and family friends.
  - Open lines of communication about struggles learning or feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth’s school work, learning, and overall academic performance as advised.
  - The mentor continues to write their youth and support them from a distance.

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth is currently taking a break from their mentor while they learn to better deal with their anger.
  - The hope is the mentee will fill the void of their mentor and take positive steps to deal with their anger. Meanwhile, the youth’s mentor will be waiting.

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 10+ years of experience, working with YWCA, Navy Kids Program, Project STEAM Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My current mentee and I have been matched for 7 years. I’ve seen her blossom through her adolescents, through her teenage years, and enter into early adulthood. She is now 17. Since we met she has had anger issues. She vents her anger toward everyone. She unleashes her rage on everyone, even those not involved in the source of her anger. Over the years the mentor organization’s coordinator and I have tried several approaches. We have supported her in several programs specifically designed for at-risk youth and academic reinforcement for struggling students struggling. I have constantly tried to set an example for her, opening the lines of communication as wide as possible. Unfortunately her life situation is playing a larger role than the support system we have tried to instill over the years. She is convinced that life should go her way without her efforts. She's learning this isn't going to happen, and rather than work on what she wants to achieve, she gets angry and shuts down. I can't tell you what the end result will be because right now we are not in a good place and are taking a 2-month break. I’m hopeful that the hard lessons she’s learning will bring her back to me, and the rest of her support network. I’m staying positive and when she becomes less hostile will attempt to reconnect. Meanwhile, I’m staying available and staying on her side.

**Quick Tip:** Remember, after careful consideration and advice from your organization’s support team, if your mentee is not respecting you or the boundaries of your relationship, temporarily disconnecting may be a necessary option. This doesn’t mean deserting or giving up on your youth, it means leading by example. As an emotionally healthy adult you wouldn’t continue a relationship with a disrespectful friend. If expect respect, a vital component of all relationships, you set that expectation through leading by example.
Cultural Diversity

The last case studies are provided to offer mentors perspective and support when dealing with a youth from a different cultural background. Remember different cultures develop relationships in different ways and it is your job to determine how to communicate with your youth to develop that bond. Youth from different backgrounds than your own may establish relationships relative to their cultural norms, but the goal is still the same, to be their friend. These case studies show how being consistent and being a friend builds bridges among the culturally diverse.

- **Situation**
  - A Mexican-American youth was struggling with her classes while her mentor struggled to connect.

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Continued focus on academic performance through games, mnemonics, and “tricks” to enhance learning skills and retention
  - Constant encouragement and collaboration with youth’s teacher to monitor challenges and successes through the develop a positive plan of action

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth made a 100% on her spelling test
  - Most importantly, showing continued benefit from the mentoring relationship despite the summer separation, the youth became more confident

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 1 year of experience, working with culturally different youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

My mentee is very shy, respectful, and obedient. I first met her, near the end of the school year, I only had about six weeks to spend with her before summer vacation. While we seemed to have fun I had trouble connecting with her. She was so reserved. Since I was an in-school mentor I didn’t have any contact with my mentee unless through the school system. So when school started back so could our relationship. She was standing in line in the hallway when I arrived and was introduced to her new teacher. When she spotted me, she ran over, exclaiming "My Sister!" She was all smiles and much more talkative than usual that day. I couldn’t believe she was so excited to see me or that our short time together had made such an impact. It seemed she had become more confident, more gregarious. One day during our time together, before we played games or sports her teacher gave us some schoolwork to finish beforehand. Her teacher had told me that she was struggling in spelling and had a test the next day, so we practiced her spelling words.
She told me that she hadn't studied yet, so I tested her to see what she knew. She got about half of them right. Then I told her what was wrong and how to fix her words. After correcting them, she took a good look and thought she was done. But I told her to erase them all and we'd do the ones that she had missed next. We did this twice, and she missed less and less. I helped her fix them along the way by encouraging her to sound them out and giving her tips on how to remember their spelling. I congratulated her on her success when she was done. We had time left so we played a game, but before it was time to return to class, I told her we were going to go through her spelling words once more. This time I wasn't going to say anything, she had to do the words all by herself. This time she only missed one! I told her that as long as she practiced with a classmate the day of the test, she'd probably get a 100! Two weeks later, on our next visit, I asked her what she made on her spelling test. She nonchalantly told me that she had earned a 100%. I congratulated her! While she said it causally she was beaming! When I first met her, I was told that she struggled in school and discovered she was taking some special classes to keep up with her grade. I was surprised because, based on my experience with her, I can tell she is very smart. I think she just needs someone to motivate her to do her best. I think she just needed to learn how to be successful.

Quick Tip: Remember, if you’re having trouble connecting to your mentee and they are Mexican or Hispanic-American, try asking questions about their families. Research shows these youth typically associate themselves with a “collective” culture. This means establishing a relationship is easiest when the youth has an understanding of who you are through your own disclosures, and when you understand who they are through asking questions about the group the youth and their culture belongs to.

- **Situation**
  - A African-American youth equates having “things” to being happy and her mentor tries to show her how to be happy with the simple joys in life

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - The mentor made special efforts to help the youth find joy in activities that didn’t involve the social expectations of having or owning your happiness
  - The mentor took the youth to a place where they could connect with nature and experience simple fun
  - The mentor used their communication as reinforcement to teach the youth values beyond material goods

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth experienced simple fun free of material goods.
  - The youth began to learn the value in finding happiness in moments and in life rather than through their possessions

- **Personal Mentor Profile**
  - 1-2 year of experience, working with culturally different, at-risk youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

When I began mentoring I had a mentee that always seemed to want something. She wanted me to buy her things or she wanted to take things from me. I guess you could say she want “stuff” from me. She was motivated by materials, by things. She saw our
relationship as an opportunity benefit in this way instead of an opportunity to develop a relationship or make a new friend. On one of our scheduled outings we were discussing what we could do and how we could spend our time together. She recommended a place called Fun Depot. It’s essentially a glorified arcade where you play video games, climb rock walls, drive go-carts, etc. It’s not the type of place you can really bond. It’s the type of place you spend a lot of money to spend four hours playing games by yourself. I was more interested in trying to develop a relationship with my mentee so I suggested we play outside instead took her to one of my favorite spots. I took her to a local creek where we could wade, skip rocks, maybe swim. At first, she was not excited. But when we got there she LOVED it! For the FIRST time she stopped, in the middle of the fun, to say "Thank you for bringing me here. This is awesome!" She had never done that, not even once. She had never thanked me. I couldn’t believe it. It was a major win as far as I was concerned. I had been trying to teach her that having fun was more than having things. I wanted her to learn that living in the moment and being happy has nothing to do with what you own, it’s about who you are. She has asked since, several times, to go back to the creek. After that moment she began to trust me. She began to learn there are other ways to have fun; there are other ways to be happy. She was used to a lifestyle of expensive, flashy “things” that represented happiness.

Quick Tip: Remember, if you are mentoring an African-American youth it is important to observe their cultural identification. Are they more connected to their culture or their individualism? If they are more concerned with their social orientation, especially to their peers or pop culture, this will determine how they perceive you and your relationship. This is important because it will determine how to get to know your mentee and how to connect on a deeper level.

- **Situation**
  - A Mexican-American youth abruptly loses her previous mentor and gains a new one, slowly opening up to the relationship

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Open lines of communication about the previous mentor, their successes and their activities to promote as much continuity as possible
  - Mentor understood the gravity of the loss for the mentee and didn’t try to ignore of avoid this loss but rather addressed it directly, leaving the mentee room to heal
  - The mentor learned from the previous mentor’s success and attempted to continue it, not recreate it

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The detrimental effects of a significant relationship ending, a significant loss for the mentee, was hopefully deterred by the openness of the current mentor
  - A productive, beneficial relationship for the young girl

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 1-2 years of experience, working with culturally different youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

When I first met my mentee, she got off the school bus and stared at the ground. I introduced myself, told her I was excited to meet her, and asked her how she was doing. She shook her head and started to tear up. I asked her if she was okay, told her that it was
okay if she didn't want to talk about it but asked if there was anything I could do to help? She asked me where someone was, a name I'd never heard before. I said, I'm not sure, who was that? She told me it was her mentor from last year who I later found out left the program. Through that day and the days since, I have had this moment in my mind to remind myself that the relationship between a mentor and mentee can yield great emotional involvement. Her initial resistance towards me could have hurt our chances of establishing a bond. Fortunately I looked at it more like a window into the potential of the mentoring relationship. The steps that I have taken, including letting her know through my open and constant communication, through my consistency and dependability, that I am a trustworthy person. I made sure to talk to her about her old mentor and ask why they had so much fun together, leaving her a little space if she needs it. I understood she probably felt a little betrayed so I didn’t push her. Slowly but surely she is beginning to trust me and we are beginning to bond.

Quick Tip: Remember, regardless of cultural association, the loss of a relationship can be devastating for a mentee. Never underestimate the power of your relationship or its meaning to your youth.

- **Situation**
  - An African-American youth struggling to stay focused hones his attention and becomes a role model for fellow students

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Continued focus on academic performance and communications skills
  - Open lines of communication about struggles learning or feelings (both negative and positive) that affect the youth’s school work, learning, and overall academic performance.

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth’s confidence skyrocketed as did his academic success
  - The youth not only excelled academically but became more confident socially, making friends and engaging with his peers thereby establishing relationships beyond that of his mentor
  - The youth became a mentor, nominate by their teachers, within his school reading to younger children and encouraging them to learn

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 8-9 years of experience, history of working with culturally different, at-risk youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

I had been working with a young boy that had been diagnosed with ADHD. He was a hyperactive child that couldn’t keep eye contact, hold a conversation, or sit still for even a minute. As you can imagine this cause a variety of problems, especially with his grades. He did not like writing or reading. It was difficult for him to complete all his schoolwork. Once he started on his medication, it was a lot easier for us to establish a relationship because I could actually talk to him. It was also a lot easier for me to begin working with him on his class assignments. We began learning about each other, establishing trust, chatting, and working on his assignments. Over the next several years
we spent our time reading books, drawing pictures, playing games, and talking. In my last year with my mentee, I began to notice him waving to other kids in the school - his confidence level had soared. In response to his continued academic progress he was actually chosen by his school to read stories and act out plays to kids in younger grades. Socially he was beginning to serve as a role model to his younger peers. He became so much more open and welcoming and academically he improved leaps and bounds. I know that our friendship was a direct result of that success.

Quick Tip: Remember, talking is important, especially in relationships with African-American youth. Research shows that youth within this particular demographic establish relationships through the disclosure of others, specifically their mentor. For this reason it is always a good rule of thumb to talk, often, and open the lines of communication with your youth.

- **Situation**
  - An African-American youth battling extreme shyness and social anxiety

- **Action Taken, Implied, or Suggested**
  - Incorporated both oral and written language to facilitate positive social development
  - Mentor incorporated other positive individuals in a controlled setting to desensitize the youth from the shock of social interaction and familiarize her with how social settings work, their expectations, and their benefits.

- **Result or Potential Outcome**
  - The youth began to come out of her shell, communicating with others on a regular basis
  - This advance in the youth’s social development carries heavy implications of also positively affecting the youth’s confidence and self perception which in turn may positively affect her successes at school and at home

- **Personal Mentor Profile:**
  - 3+ years of experience, history of working with culturally different youth at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

The child I was matched with was nine when we first started spending time together and she battled extreme shyness. When I say extreme I mean she refused to look at other people, anyone in fact, in their eyes or even their general vicinity. She wouldn't talk to others and wouldn't even order at restaurants. She was misunderstood, often perceived as rude because of her shyness. Over the past three years I've been working with her to develop her social skills and boost her self-esteem. I have occasionally incorporated other adults or children, I knew would be kind to her, into our time together. I never pushed her to communicate but wanted to bring others into her space in a safe, monitored and controlled way to develop her social skills and establish normalcy with others. Along with incorporating a variety of people into her routines we also incorporated thank you letters and notes. I have always attempted to model polite behavior, please and thank you, etc, and thank you notes was a part of that process. We talked about the people we had met, how they made her feel, how they made others feel, and we wrote thank you notes based on that evaluation. I wanted her to begin to view others, not as a threat, but
as a part of her world by understanding their role in her interactions. In the past six months she has began speaking to the people we have spent time with or have been a part of our time together. She is initiating communication and has become very good at verbally thanking others that do something nice for us. She now orders all of her food when we eat out and even told me she was grateful that she didn’t feel as shy anymore.

*Quick Tip:* Remember, teaching a mentee the tools or giving them the opportunity to shed the shroud of shyness can be as healing as removing a thorn from your foot or a cancer from your body. Confidence is something a youth will carry with them for life.

Discusses the foundation of relational closeness through voluntary self-disclosure, the establishment of intimacy, and the progression of a relationship from superficial layers of personality into deeper realms of self.


Two separate studies were compared to evaluate the fluctuating levels of uncertainty and their correlation to relational intimacy and the desire for feedback. The studies found the desire for feedback, usually generated through the reciprocity of self-disclosure, could not be separated from the natural desire to reduce uncertainty. Both studies proved that relational intimacy involves a desire for feedback and an inseparable desire for uncertainty reduction.


This article applies Aizen’s theory of planned behavior to explain youth mentoring behavior. The purpose of this study is to give the mentor relationship a structural model with which to evaluate predict behaviors and attitudes toward diversity to potential develop better mentoring processes.


This paper discusses uncertainty and its role as a motivator and crucial component in the development of personal relationships. This paper highlights strategies for reducing uncertainty and emphasize, in order to create a personal relationship, uncertainty must continually be reduced.

This paper offers theoretical insight into relationship development and an understanding of interpersonal interactions through beyond Berger’s preliminary research on initial interactions. This paper elaborates on the challenges of developing relationships due to the uncertainty.


This paper offers insight into relationship development and an understanding of interpersonal interactions through Berger’s theoretical perspective. The paper is meant to open the discussion of interpersonal interactions and priorities research on interpersonal relationships.


This body of works explains uncertainty as it relates to communication, primarily within initial interactions and relationship development.


Study suggests interpersonal communication is wrought with “mindlessness” which interferes with the ability to communicate effectually in social transactions. This study specifically looks at social issues such as reducing stereotype and minimizing cross-cultural misunderstandings and evaluates mindful interpersonal communication’s role in minimizing communication and social dysfunction.


This book explains, discusses, and challenges the process of both creating and maintaining relationships through the process of communication. It explains, in depth, the connection between communication and relationship development and challenges its readers to think critically about the link between thought and expression.


This body of work investigates youth participations defined as the process of involving youth in the decisions and institutions affecting their lives and the associate impact on the community. This article identifies youth engaged in positive social activities within the community and outlines these youth characteristics, rationale for youth engagement, as well as participation. This article outlines the environment of social change in which youth flourish.

This article investigates attributional confidence, either in an effort to predict the actions of another or in an effort to retrospectively explain their actions, as a primary means to digest uncertainty.


This article assesses the quality of youth mentoring relationships on two levels, the process and characteristics of individual mentor relationships as well as the individual components that support their development. This article evaluates mentoring relationships on interrelated planes of relationship and program. Not only does it evaluate the relationship and supporting program but also insinuates links to more positively correlate the two. This study offers specific criteria for the evaluation of the effectiveness of youth mentoring.


The parental structure is often the root of success or failure in a youth’s ability to develop relationships. Due to high rates of certainty and stability a supportive parental structure offers, when children are raised in remarried homes and uncertainty is inherently higher significant differences in perceived relational support lead to the perception of less intimate relationships.


This body of work begins by focusing on the complexity of youth mentoring relationships. It evaluates the benefits of youth mentoring and explores the methods in which mentoring programs and like research have been conducted. This article provides support and concern for more investigation of mentoring programs and rational for more tailored research utilizing state-of-the-art methodologies.


This meta-analysis evaluated the effects of youth mentoring and found an overall, modest benefit from mentoring programs. The analysis discovered significantly enhanced benefit when the mentoring relationship is characterized as a “strong connection” and the youth is considered high-risk.

This study examined the impact of informal mentoring relationships on overall, health-related development in youth. This study found that informal programs, while beneficial, may need further support to meet the needs of America’s youth, specifically it’s at-risk youth.


This study sought to explain the pursuit of uncertainty reduction in youth serves as a motivator. In this study youth were willing to risk objects perceived as valuable in an effort to uncover truth or decrease uncertainty.


This article investigates youth as competent citizens capable of adding value to their communities. With this theory in mind the researches investigated community based initiatives involving youth and the related community evolution.


This article utilizes Charles Berger’s uncertainty reduction theory and its recent extensions to examine attributional confidence in specific relationships (acquaintances, friends, and dates) within the cultural context of Japan, Korea and the United States. This article demonstrates the culturally significant differences in achieved attributional confidence in relationship development.


Study compares two theories examining uncertainty and its role in group motivation and personal uncertainty reduction. The competing theories evaluate personal and group motivations to reduce uncertainty based on their dominant identification to either the group or self.


This article evaluates the process of electing and training mentors, matching mentors with protégés, setting goals and expectations, establishing mentoring programs and implications for staff developers.

This study sought to investigate if mentoring programs with at risk youth actually work and benefit the youth involved since popularity in community service doesn’t equate to effectiveness. The article evaluates several research studies and their conclusions of impact. The article finds correlations between positive mentoring and school, drug and alcohol usage and relationship building.


This body of work defines and evaluates focus, purpose, and authorship between effective and ineffective mentoring relationships and styles. The purpose of this study was to understand the difference between structured and nonstructural mentoring as it relates to effective and relevant mentoring programs for youth. Primarily this study evaluated mentor’s attendance as it relates to mentee self-esteem, social skills, and behavioral competence and found a direct correlation to consistent mentor attendance and positive development in these parameters for mentees.


This body of work illuminates nonverbal communication as a vital component of human interaction, often misunderstood and intricately woven into the fabric of our interactions.


This article investigates relational uncertainty and its correlation to an individual’s ability to process information. This article highlights the importance of a person’s perceptions and ability to interpret the status of their relationships based on inferences and relational cues.


This article evaluates positive youth development as a direct process by their capacity to be motivated. The conditions of inciting motivation as well as the obstacle to constructive activity are also evaluated along with how adults/mentors play a role in that motivation and development. In this effort several frameworks are also discussed that can add support to adult involvement and youth evolution.

Jean Piaget, a philosopher and developmental psychologist, is perhaps best known for his work with children and their developmental progression through a series of stages. He offers cognitive and emotional insight on the necessary development of youth into healthy adults.


The article explores quality in mentoring programs using ten year longitudinal studies focusing on frequency and length of matches and types of contact.


This article evaluates youth programs. It focuses on the various sports teams and recreational events that are designed for youth and the various structures and philosophies associated with these programs. The article then identifies best practices of these organized programs and specific challenges associated with them. These challenges include five different areas associated with participation and effectiveness.


This book offers both the risks and rewards of mentoring in today’s environment of prejudice and globalization. It highlights both the struggles and successes of mentoring today’s youth.


This article offers a model of youth mentoring that effectively perpetuates youth development. This article highlights a model of effective mentoring and its ability to create positive youth outcomes.


This article questions the link between adult mentors affiliated with religious ideologies and ethics and youth mentoring. According to the article adults associated with religious institutions mentor and volunteer more than any other group. This article primary poses the question to the link between the effectiveness of youth mentoring with faith-based mentors versus their secular counterparts. Little conclusions are made about this link in faith-based mentoring/mentee relationships however the article did conclude to disclose a close bond and an enduring relationship is vital to any program.

This article acknowledges youth mentoring is positively linked to developmental outcomes. However, this link is minimal and depends on the practice and depth of the relationship developed. This study suggests that mentoring is only effective in prompting positive developmental outcomes for youth if the mentor and mentee establish a close and enduring bond. This identifies the importance of mentor support and further research into the mentee relationship if effective mentoring is to be accomplished.


This article focuses on what is considered to be missing in previous evaluations of mentor, mentee relationships. This article focuses on the processes, which affect developmental results. This body of work focuses on a conceptual model of the actual processes of mentoring proven most effective in relationship development. The article concludes with a set of recommendations for future relationships.


Study looked at the reduction of uncertainty among ethnicities in the United States utilizing standard principles of uncertainty reduction communication i.e. self-disclosure, others disclosure, interrogation, and nonverbal communication. The study found significant differences in the manner in which each culture established relationships and sought to reduce uncertainty in order to develop connections.


This book provides a wealth of communication theories and practices and each originator’s ideologies on how these theories should be both interpreted and applied.


This study examined uncertainty as it relates to intimacy in interpersonal relationships. The amount of uncertainty present in a relationship, the openness of communication regarding inevitable uncertainties, as well as the uncertainty reduction process itself were each separately evaluated to determine which mechanism most positively related to the establishment of intimacy. The results of this study emphasize the importance of the uncertainty reduction process as a means to create intimacy in personal relationships.

The demonstration of mentoring within developmental domains such as interpersonal relationships has been positively correlated to mentoring. This article evaluates youths’ perceptions of their interpersonal relationships and related positive outcomes.