



# MENTORING FOR BLACK MALE YOUTH

## National Mentoring Resource Center Population Review

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### Summary

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This review examines research on mentoring for Black<sup>i</sup> boys and is organized around four topics: a) its documented effectiveness; b) the extent to which mentor, youth, and program characteristics influence effectiveness; c) the processes that link mentoring to outcomes in Black male youth; and d) the extent to which efforts to provide mentoring for Black male youth have reached and engaged these youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained by host organizations and settings. There is some preliminary evidence that:

- Both formal and informal mentoring have the potential to benefit Black boys in a range of areas, including academics (e.g., grades), social-emotional well-being (e.g., relationships with others), mental health (e.g., alcohol use), and preventing risky behaviors (e.g., sexual activity).
- Cultural mistrust may influence Black boys' perceptions of their White mentors and thus the quality of their relationships with them.
- Mentoring may be able to lessen the negative effects of racial discrimination on Black boys.
- Group mentoring approaches seem to support Black male youth's social-emotional development through group processes (e.g., unity, brotherhood, trust).
- Mentoring that promotes Black boys' racial identity may in turn lead to positive effects in other aspects of their lives (e.g., academic outcomes). This process may be facilitated by connecting Black male youth with mentors who have shared life experiences; engaging Black men as mentors has the potential to be useful in this regard, although it should be noted that research to inform the possible merits of this strategy is largely lacking.

<sup>i</sup> We use the term "Black" as the general racial category in the review, but then use the term "African-American" when it is used as the racial category in specific studies below.

- Research suggests that Black men are more likely to serve as informal rather than formal mentors and that they experience barriers to serving as mentors in formal mentoring programs.
- Developing close and supportive mentoring relationships may be a mechanism by which mentoring promotes positive outcomes in Black boys.
- Black boys may have less access to informal mentors compared to Black girls.

Implications for practice that draw on the findings and conclusions of the review are provided. These include recommendations to:

- Recognize that Black boys are likely to vary in their individual needs and, thus, in the specific types of mentoring supports that might be most effective.
- Take care to ensure that mentors of Black boys receive appropriate training about issues of race, culture, and gender.
- Recruit mentors with appropriate skills (e.g., teaching or advocacy experience) and cultural competency to mentor Black boys effectively.
- Consider activities and strategies that help Black boys to identify, and increase support from, the existing mentoring and resources they have in their lives.
- Treat parents and guardians as true partners in the mentoring process.
- Consider how efforts to provide mentoring for Black boys can be linked to the fight for larger social justice goals for these youth and their communities.

## INTRODUCTION

As evidenced by President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative,<sup>1</sup> our society has recognized the need to provide more mentoring to boys of color. Specifically, mentoring is one of four key interventions of the MBK Alliance<sup>1</sup> in order to address the needs and opportunity gaps (e.g., in education) of boys of color.

Mentoring has long been a focus within the African-American community as illustrated through the implementation of various forms of culturally focused interventions for their young people (e.g., Rites of Passage programs led by adult leaders,<sup>2</sup> and as such, the MBK Alliance is a natural fit with existing efforts across the nation.

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## QUESTIONS

With these considerations as context, the present review addresses the following four questions:

1. What are the demonstrated effects of mentoring for Black male youth?
  2. What factors condition or influence the effectiveness of mentoring for Black male youth?
  3. What intervening processes are most important in linking mentoring to Black male youth outcomes?
  4. To what extent have efforts to provide mentoring to Black male youth reached and engaged these youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained by host organizations and settings?
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This review includes studies about formal and informal mentoring relationships and activities that take place between Black boys (i.e., mentees) and older, more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who operate in a nonprofessional capacity to provide support for the youth's healthy development (see [What is Mentoring?](#) for more details). A systematic literature search was conducted to find articles, book chapters, and evaluation reports that include findings that address any of the above questions. To be included in this review, research needed to meet the following criteria: a) at least 80% of the youth in the study sample were Black or African-American or, when this was not the case, relevant analyses were conducted on Black male youth specifically; and b) youth were, on average, under the age of 18 years. In total, 18 studies of mentoring of Black male youth fit the preceding criteria and are included in this review. Eleven are evaluations of formal, volunteer-based mentoring programs whereas seven are studies of informal mentoring relationships. All but one were conducted in the United States. Fifteen studies appeared in peer-reviewed scientific journals and three were dissertations.

## 1. What Are the Demonstrated Effects of Mentoring on Black Male Youth?

### BACKGROUND

Several considerations point to the potential value of mentoring for Black male youth. Black boys in the United States face many challenges, many of which stem directly from the failures of key institutions that shape their development and prospects for healthy futures. In schools, for example, Black male students face over-referral for school disciplinary action and special education.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, within the criminal justice system, Black children are 18 times more likely than White children to be sentenced as adults.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have argued that the narrative in our society about Black boys specifically, and Black children generally, is dominated by a problem or deficit perspective;<sup>3, 5</sup> the narrative is "that Black boys are in peril, that mere survival should be their goal, and that their very futures are uncertain."<sup>3</sup> In part, this narrative may be a reflection of how adults in the lives of Black

boys view them and even how Black boys see themselves.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Rowley and colleagues<sup>3</sup> cite research indicating that Black parents view their sons as vulnerable and needing protection (which may serve as a barrier to their autonomy and self-efficacy), that teachers have low expectations of Black boys and over-discipline them, and that Black boys are more likely than other race/gender groups to disidentify with academics and engage in stereotypical behaviors that have negative consequences in the classroom and in school.

Even more disturbing is recent experimental research demonstrating that Black boys are viewed as older, less innocent, and less human than White boys.<sup>6</sup> This research further showed that police officers' dehumanizing views of Black boys was significantly related to their use of force on Black suspects, controlling for how much suspects resisted arrests or were located in high-crime areas. These findings speak directly to a view that Black boys "are not allowed to be children at all"<sup>6</sup> (p. 541) in our society. Given the dehumanizing views toward Black boys and that important adults view them in a negative light,<sup>3</sup> Black boys would potentially benefit from mentoring programs, particularly from mentoring that aims to foster the strengths and resilience of Black boys.<sup>3,5</sup> It should be noted that there is no reason to expect that mentoring alone can or will reverse the complex and persistent institutional, social, and environmental challenges described above. However, there is a basis for expecting that mentoring holds the potential to empower, engage, and promote the strengths of Black boys and to do so in a manner that is complementary to other interventions and policies that seek systemic changes to more fundamentally improve the life prospects of Black boys.

## RESEARCH

Available research has addressed the effects that informal mentoring relationships and formal mentoring programs may have on a variety of outcomes for Black boys, including academic, social-emotional well-being, mental health, and preventing risky behaviors.

**Academic.** A few studies revealed that mentoring was related to better academic achievement, such as test scores or grades, in Black male youth. In a study of the Helping Hands group mentoring program targeting African-American boys in grades three through eight, Anderson<sup>7</sup> examined school records for 26 elementary and middle schools over a three-year period. Participants were 722 students in the mentoring program and 722 in a comparison group who were a random sample of African-American male students by each grade. Three cohorts of students were compared. Although there were no statistically significant differences between students in the mentoring program compared to those in the comparison group on math or reading standardized test scores in any of the cohorts, there was more growth during the first and second cohorts (i.e., 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 academic years) in standardized math scores for mentored students compared to control students.<sup>7</sup> A quasi-experimental study of the Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) mentoring program with a sample of mostly African-American (83% and 17% Latino) middle school students found that participants in the mentoring program (n = 29) had higher grade point averages (GPA) than the students in the comparison group (n = 32).<sup>ii,8</sup> It is important to note that the intervention and comparison students did not differ only in whether or not they received mentoring as those in the mentoring program were also in a single sex cluster within a coed school whereas the comparison students were enrolled in coed classes. Thus, it is unclear to what extent the differences between the two groups were because of mentoring, the single- versus mixed-sex classrooms, both or some other factor.

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ii Quantitative research findings that are reported in this review are statistically significant, unless otherwise noted.

In an evaluation of the Brotherhood, an after-school group mentoring program for African-American high school boys, Wyatt<sup>9</sup> reported an increase in GPAs from 2.43 to 2.83 over a three-year period among 307 participants that was not tested for statistical significance. When 16 African-American college students reflected back on their high school experiences in the New Brunswick (NJ) Kappa League mentoring program, they reported that their grades improved after getting involved with the program.<sup>10</sup> Finally, in the Young Men of Distinction program,<sup>11</sup> an after-school group mentoring program, it was found that the 40 African-American seventh- and eighth-grade male students had, on average, higher math and language arts grades compared to the 40 in the nonprogram comparison group. However, participants were not randomly assigned to the mentoring program or the control group, and the author did not control for any differences in grades before the mentoring program began. Hence it is unclear whether the program actually caused the academic benefits for students.

In research on informal mentoring, a representative sample of 283 mostly African-American (98%) male youth in Philadelphia between the ages of 10 and 24 (average age of 17.8) from low-income neighborhoods were asked whether they had an informal adult mentor by indicating that “there are adults in my life that I look up to” and that they can go to these adults “to help me through tough situations”.<sup>12</sup> Eighty-six percent of the sample reported having an informal mentor, and it was found that the presence of informal mentors predicted 2.8 times the odds of getting good grades, while controlling for age.

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Mentoring programs targeting Black male students have also reported other kinds of academic and school benefits. For instance, middle school students in the BEMI mentoring program reported higher identification with academics compared to the control group.<sup>8</sup> Participants in the New Brunswick (NJ) Kappa League mentoring program retrospectively reported school behavior improvements, that they were more confident in school and more motivated to do well in school, and that they were more likely to apply to college after participating in the program.<sup>10</sup> The majority of the African-American high school students of the Brotherhood evaluation reported that the mentoring program helped them with college readiness and with connecting their education to the real world.<sup>9</sup> Controlling for age, African-American male adolescents with informal adult mentors were more likely to report 2.9 times the odds of feeling safe at school<sup>12</sup> compared to youth without mentors.

**Social-emotional well-being.** A few studies examined whether mentoring promoted social-emotional outcomes in Black male youth. In a qualitative investigation of 13 African-Caribbean boys with psychological and behavioral difficulties and 5 African-Caribbean adults, who served as mentors, mentors and mentees reported improvements in boys’ communication with their family and new friendships.<sup>13</sup> Mentors and mentees also discussed that boys learned that they could trust and depend on others and that it is acceptable to ask for and receive support rather than trying to resolve problems on their own and avoid talking about personal issues. Participants also reported that the most important way in which the mentoring program impacted boys was by helping them to become

more empathic, to consider the consequences of their behaviors, and to take responsibility for their actions. In a longitudinal retrospective study of the Beaux Affairs Rites of Passage Program (BAROPP), which targeted African-American male high school students ages 16 to 18 years, former participants (n = 100) who completed the program between 1990 and 2011 and their parents reported that benefits of the program included improved confidence, self-esteem, leadership skills, relationships with others, and responsible behavior.<sup>14</sup> Participants also reported that the program prepared them for their current role as fathers, husbands, and/or mentors. A case study of an Afrocentric therapeutic group mentoring program for African-American boys in the foster care system similarly reported that boys (n = 6) were able to develop healthy and positive relationships with Black male role models.<sup>15</sup> None of the previous studies had a comparison group, and thus, it is possible that the positive changes observed would have occurred without the mentoring programs.

Mental health and risky behaviors. The African-American male children and adolescents in Culyba et al.'s<sup>12</sup> study revealed that, controlling for age, the presence of an informal mentor predicted a lower likelihood of ever using alcohol; getting into a fight at school, being jumped, or having access to a gun; and witnessing violence, seeing someone holding a gun, and seeing someone get shot. Another investigation of informal mentoring relationships of African-American high school seniors (average age = 17.6 years) revealed that male participants (n = 292) with informal mentors had steeper decreases in self-reported depressive symptoms during the five years after high school compared to their male participants without mentors,<sup>16</sup> while controlling for age, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and parental support.

In an evaluation of the Adult Identity Mentoring (AIM) program, 20 seventh-grade classrooms were randomly assigned to either the six-week AIM program or a standard health education curriculum.<sup>17</sup> Based on the theory of possible selves, the goal of the AIM program was to reduce sexual risk behaviors by increasing youth's interest in successful adult development. Students were encouraged to think about their desired future and how their current risk behaviors could negatively affect their future goals through the use of small groups and role models that created and sustained group norms of delaying or abstaining from sexual activity. There were 156 African-American students in the study between the ages of 12 and 14. Findings indicated that the AIM program influenced positive changes in sexual behavior among boys. Specifically, one year after the intervention and controlling for baseline differences, fewer male students who were in the AIM program (47%) reported any sexual intercourse than male students who received the standard health education curriculum (54%). Furthermore, for participants who were previously sexually active, 77% of boys (n = 20) who received the AIM intervention were still sexually active at the one-year follow-up compared to 92% (n = 11) of boys who were in the standard health curriculum, although this finding was not tested for statistical significance.

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## CONCLUSION

1. Available research points to a range of potential benefits of both formal and informal mentoring for African-American boys, including in the areas of academic, social-emotional well-being, mental health, and preventing risky behaviors. However, because of limitations in the rigor of this research (e.g., there have been few evaluations in which African-American boys are randomly assigned to mentoring versus a control group), the evidence in support of such benefits is at present tentative and preliminary.

## 2. What Factors Condition or Influence the Effectiveness of Mentoring for Black Male Youth?

### BACKGROUND

As briefly discussed below, the effects of mentoring on Black male youth might vary because of program, mentor, or youth characteristics.

Program characteristics. Practitioners serving Black male youth have often developed and implemented culturally tailored mentoring programs. Theoretically, these types of programs may offer enhanced benefits for Black boys because the approaches may be consistent with their cultural values and take into consideration the cultural context of the lives of Black boys. A meta-analysis of mental health interventions targeting emotional and/or behavioral problems in youth of color found that culturally tailored interventions did not differ significantly in their effectiveness compared to standard interventions.<sup>18</sup> A similar analysis of culturally tailored mentoring programs has not been conducted. However, as discussed below, there are evaluations of several individual programs of this type.

Some mentoring programs for Black male youth have had what Resnicow and colleagues<sup>19</sup> refer to as “deep structure” adaptations. These types of adaptations are focused on addressing the cultural, psychological, social, environmental, and historical factors that influence the behaviors of the target group<sup>19</sup> and thus, theoretically, could be of particular value in supporting Black boys. An example of a deep structure adaptation is when a program is designed to incorporate cultural values or traditions of Black or African-American culture. Both BAROPP<sup>14</sup> and the Brotherhood<sup>9</sup> were aimed at African-American high school boys and incorporated Nguzo Saba into their curricula. The Nguzo Saba are eight principles or values that serve as the basis for Afrocentric movements in the U.S.: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, faith, and respect. These values have been used to connect African-Americans to their heritage and understand their experiences with racism, slavery, and the influence of the dominant European worldview and culture.<sup>20</sup>

Further examples of programs incorporating deep structural adaptations include the Umoja mentoring program, in which African drumming circles (Spir-rhythms) were utilized as a cultural arts tool to provide group mentoring to African-American male adolescents.<sup>21</sup> Utsey et al.’s<sup>15</sup> therapeutic group mentoring program for African-American boys in the foster care system, for example, emphasized the following principles: a) group above self, b) respect for self and others, c) responsibility for self and community, d) reciprocity, and e) authenticity. Implicit in the design

of several programs is also the idea that effectiveness may be enhanced when attention is given to cultural tailoring with respect to not only race, but also issues of gender and its intersection with race. For instance, in the aforementioned therapeutic group mentoring program, participants learned what it means to be an African-American male in an anti-Black society<sup>15</sup> and in BAROPP youth received Black manhood development training.<sup>14</sup>

Also of note are mentoring and other kinds of culturally tailored interventions that have been designed with the aim of addressing the achievement gap between African-American and White students. Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht<sup>22</sup> found that African-American and Latino youth who were randomly assigned to mentors who received training and support in the use of messages and activities that were directed toward changing mentees' beliefs about intelligence (i.e., fixed vs. malleable) in order to address stereotype threats exhibited greater improvement in standardized test scores during the transition to middle school compared to those assigned to mentors who did not receive this type of training and support. In related research, Yeager et al.<sup>23</sup> conducted a series of studies to investigate the use of "wise feedback" from teachers as a strategy for breaking the cycle of cultural mistrust toward education among African-American middle school students. Wise feedback referred to the student's teacher communicating high expectations for the student and the belief that the student can achieve them. These researchers found that students who received wise feedback from their White teachers on an essay that they wrote were more likely to turn in a revised essay, improved their essay scores, and even improved their grades compared to African-American students who did not receive wise feedback. Some of these effects were not observed in the White students in the studies or the effects were stronger for African-American students compared to White students. For instance, White students' grades in the wise feedback condition did not improve as they did for African-American students, thus suggesting greater sensitivity of African-American students to wise feedback. Yeager et al.<sup>23</sup> did not find gender differences in their research. However, these findings combined with the results from the Good et al.<sup>22</sup> study suggest ideas about factors that, when incorporated into formal or informal mentoring, could enhance benefits for African-American boys.

An approach in which Black boys are viewed as partners in the delivery of mentoring rather than only as recipients of mentoring may influence the effectiveness of mentoring programs for these youth. For instance, the Young Men for Change,<sup>24</sup> a school-based group mentoring program for African-American male high school students, utilized a critical pedagogy<sup>25</sup> approach in the curriculum. Rather than using a hierarchical approach in which the mentor imparted knowledge onto the mentee, mentors and mentees co-constructed knowledge and reflected on the institutional and societal forces that influence their experiences as African-American teenage boys. This approach challenges the status quo and is used to empower youth to understand their life circumstances, make choices, and to take action to improve their lives.<sup>24</sup> Based on critical pedagogy, the Young Men for Change curriculum had three phases: a) dialogue, in which arts-based activities were used to help mentees express themselves emotionally without sacrificing their masculinity, b) problem posing, in which mentees were encouraged to make connections between their own lives and the broader society; and c) taking action, in which mentees generated and implemented strategies for creating social change.



Program features that are responsive to the existing relationships and sources of support that Black male youth have available to them also have the potential to be important. DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper's<sup>26</sup> meta-analyses revealed that more parental involvement in mentoring programs promoted positive youth outcomes. In the Village Model of Care mentoring program that targeted African-American male and female adolescents, more parental involvement, as reflected in program staff's ratings of parental participation, was related to greater increases in GPA.<sup>27</sup> However, more parental involvement was also related to higher parental level of education, and thus, the GPA increases could be due to parents' educational level rather than parental involvement.

Finally, another program characteristic not to be overlooked as potentially significant is dosage—that is, the amount and intensity of mentoring that is received by each participating youth. The evaluation of the Village Model of Care<sup>27</sup> program found that students who attended half or more of the group mentoring sessions had greater increases in their GPA from the first to fourth quarter than those who attended less than half of the sessions. Although participating in the mentoring program longer could theoretically lead to higher academic achievement, it is possible that the students who attended more group mentoring sessions were simply different (e.g., more motivated, come from more stable homes) than those who attended fewer sessions, and thus they would have had higher GPAs regardless.

**Mentor characteristics.** A mentor characteristic that has received attention in the literature is whether cross- versus same-race mentoring relationships matter in youth mentoring programs. There are no studies, however, that have examined the implications of matching Black male youth specifically with a Black mentor. A study of 74 African-American male college students who were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in which they listened to mock mentor-mentee interactions revealed that participants rated African-American faculty mentors as more culturally sensitive and a more credible source of help than White faculty mentors.<sup>28</sup> Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, and Lee<sup>29</sup> compared cross- and same-race mentoring relationships in a sample of youth of color (i.e., African-American, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, Biracial) in the Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring program. Among male mentees specifically, and controlling for the length of the mentoring relationship, Rhodes et al.<sup>29</sup> found that boys in same-race matches (n = 70) had smaller decreases in confidence in school work and feelings of self-worth at 18 months after starting the mentoring program compared to boys in mentoring relationships with European-American mentors (n = 39). No statistically significant differences were found, however, on several other outcomes (e.g., grades, skipping class, alcohol use). DuBois et al.'s<sup>30</sup> meta-analysis of youth mentoring programs did *not* find that programs that specifically matched youth to mentors by race/ethnicity were more effective than programs that did not. Summarizing the extant evidence, Sánchez and colleagues<sup>31</sup> concluded that “findings of research that compares whether being in a cross- versus same-race relationship [is beneficial] are mixed and not suggestive of the importance of racial/ethnic similarity per se” (p. 149).

Two other mentor characteristics that could influence the effectiveness of mentoring for Black boys are mentor gender and the shared life experiences between mentors and mentees. Theoretically, having a male mentor with similar life experiences could help facilitate closeness in the relationship and foster positive identification of a Black male youth with his mentor.

**Youth characteristics.** One factor to consider that could influence the effectiveness of mentoring for Black male youth is the youth's experiences with life stressors, such as racial discrimination. Resilience theory suggests that youth who have faced adverse situations, but have access to resources, can avoid negative outcomes.<sup>32</sup> Thus, theoretically, mentoring is a strategy that might be especially helpful for Black boys who face significant risks and stressors in their environments.

**Interdependencies of program, mentor, and youth characteristics.** It should be noted, too, that all of the above types of factors (i.e., program, mentor, and youth characteristics) have the potential to interact in shaping the effectiveness of mentoring for Black male youth. Illustratively, with regard to cultural mistrust, research on Black male college students has revealed evidence that cultural mistrust may influence their mentoring relationships with White mentors.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, students' perceived that African-American mentors were more culturally sensitive than White mentors, but this effect was strongest among participants with the highest levels of cultural mistrust toward White mentors. This suggests the potential for same-race mentoring relationships to be particularly important for youth with higher levels of cultural mistrust and thus implicates youth and mentor characteristics together. Yet, the potential also exists for this type of dependency to be mitigated by program practices, such as training for White mentors aimed at promoting use of culturally responsive approaches to supporting Black male youth (e.g., wise feedback).

## RESEARCH

**Youth and families.** With relevance to the potential importance of fostering family resources, the mentors in the Garraway and Pistrang<sup>13</sup> study of African-Caribbean boys discussed that they provided support and guidance to their mentees' families. These mentors perceived their efforts as having helped to improve parents' attitudes toward mentoring and in turn made their mentoring more beneficial for their mentees. With regard to youth characteristics, in the evaluation of the Helping Hands mentoring program referred to above, it was found that there was an interaction between the number of years in the program and whether the student had a disability<sup>iii</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, participating in Helping Hands for more years was related more strongly to higher standardized math test scores for students with disabilities than for those without.

**Program dosage.** With relevance to program dosage, in the evaluation of the Helping Hands program there was a trend in that more years in the program was related to higher standardized reading test scores.<sup>7</sup> Further, students who participated in this program for at least one year had higher reading scores than students in the control group, whereas there was no statistically significant difference in reading scores for students who participated in the program less than a year compared to the control group.

**Program approach.** Researcher observations of the Young Men for Change program and interviews of 11 mentees in this program<sup>24</sup> suggested that the critical pedagogy approach used in the program seemed to offer several benefits for participants. First, the dialogue phase appeared to create a sense of belonging and to help mentees express their emotions within a safe space, both of which may have improved their social-emotional well-being. Second, it also seemed that students' critical thinking skills improved as a result of the problem-posing phase. Last, the praxis (taking action) phase, in which students organized a community forum to dispel negative stereotypes about

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iii Disability status was gathered from school records, but the author did not specify the type of disability.

African-American boys and men, appeared to empower students to utilize and further develop their leadership skills.

**Mentor characteristics.** With relevance to the potential significance of mentor gender for Black male youth, analyses of data from a study of informal mentoring relationships among 659 African-American older adolescents found no difference in school outcomes among male participants based on the gender of the reported role model.<sup>33</sup> However, another study of informal mentoring using data from a nationally representative sample found that reporting a male mentor during adolescence was associated with an average 88% increase in self-reported economic earnings in adulthood among both African-American boys and girls, whereas the presence of a female mentor was not significantly related to earnings, controlling for gender, age, educational attainment, and childhood income.<sup>34</sup> It was also found that African-American male adolescents who did not have a father figure and who reported a male mentor reported earning 214% more during adulthood than youth without a father figure and without a mentor. They further found that African-American adolescents without a father figure who had a male mentor earned more during adulthood than African-American adolescents with a father figure.<sup>34</sup> Although not unique to boys, these latter findings suggest that the presence of an informal male mentor during adolescence may be particularly important for the future economic earnings of African-American boys without a father figure in their lives.

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Some research also has touched on the potential significance of whether Black male youth and their mentors share life experiences. In the Garraway and Pistrang study,<sup>13</sup> mentors and mentees reported that shared life experiences (e.g., similar school struggles, being an African-Caribbean boy/man in the United Kingdom) helped mentors have empathy for their mentees, and in turn, mentees trusted their mentors. When asked about cultural similarity with their mentors, mentees stated that it was not so much the shared cultural identity that was important as it was their shared life experiences. However, as the authors state, the boys' and mentors' shared cultural experiences and shared life experiences (e.g., discrimination) were inextricably linked to being an African-Caribbean boy growing up in the United Kingdom. All but two of the mentoring programs that were the focus of research considered in this literature review recruited African-American men exclusively as mentors. As such, a combination of a shared cultural identity and similar life experiences may have helped to promote bonds between Black boys and their Black male mentors and thus contributed to the observed positive outcomes.

**Life stressors.** A study examined whether mentoring lessened the negative effects of racial discrimination on youth outcomes<sup>35</sup> among 1,942 African-American adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 (41% were male). The researchers controlled for age, family structure, social class, self-reported grades, and daily stressors in the statistical analyses. They found that among boys without a mentor, more interpersonal racial discrimination (i.e., youth's perceptions of the frequency of routine and subtle experiences of unfair treatment during the last year; e.g., "others being afraid of you," "people acting as if you are not smart") predicted more school suspensions and less

school engagement. However, for boys who reported an informal mentor, racial discrimination was related to fewer school suspensions and more school engagement. One potential interpretation for these findings is that mentoring helped to reduce or buffer the effects of experiences of racial discrimination among African-American boys.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. It is possible that mentoring programs for Black male youth are more effective when they take into consideration Black/African-American culture, history, and values in their design and implementation (i.e., are culturally tailored); research addressing this possibility is lacking.
2. Cultural mistrust may influence Black boys' perceptions of their White mentors, which may influence the quality of their relationships. Research directly addressing this possibility, however, is lacking.
3. Group mentoring, rather than one-on-one, is a model that may be more culturally congruent with African-American culture and may be useful in promoting brotherhood and belonging; research, however, has not compared the effectiveness of group versus one-on-one mentoring for Black boys.
4. Available research suggests that mentors and teachers who provide feedback to African-American students emphasizing that they have high expectations of their students/mentees, that they believe that their students/mentees can meet these expectations, and that they believe that their students/mentees can grow their abilities could be more effective in improving the academic outcomes of African-American youth; research addressing these possibilities specifically for Black male youth, however, has not yet been conducted.
5. Mentor gender (i.e., male mentors) and similar life experiences (and perhaps shared cultural similarity) between mentors and mentees may be important in the mentoring relationships of Black boys; however, research addressing these possibilities is limited.
6. It appears that mentoring has the potential to lessen the negative effects of interpersonal racial discrimination on Black boys, although available research is again limited and preliminary.

## 3. What Intervening Processes Are Most Important in Linking Mentoring to Black Male Youth Outcomes?

### BACKGROUND

Rhodes'<sup>36</sup> theoretical framework of youth mentoring suggests that one of the processes by which mentoring influences positive youth outcomes is through youth's identity development. Of particular importance to Black boys could be strengthening their ethnic and racial identity. A recent literature review concluded that a positive ethnic and racial identity is related to better academic, psychosocial, and health outcomes in African-American adolescents.<sup>37</sup>

Theory and research in youth mentoring also underscore the importance of the quality of mentoring relationships in linking participation in mentoring programs to positive youth outcomes.<sup>36</sup> Specific aspects of quality that are important in promoting positive youth outcomes is relationship closeness and emotional intimacy<sup>38</sup> as well as the kind of social support provided to youth.<sup>39</sup> Stereotypical notions about male friendships and relationships suggest that boys would not have a need for emotional intimacy like girls.<sup>40</sup> However, research shows that boys desire emotional intimacy and vulnerability in their mentoring relationships.<sup>41</sup> Mentoring programs that target Black male youth tend to emphasize a group mentoring approach not only because it is culturally congruent with communal cultures but also because it is expected to promote bonding and brotherhood. Based on a shared experience of oppression, African-American men and boys have historically valued loyalty, connection, and emotional expression with other Black males (e.g., Million Man March).<sup>40, 42</sup> Research delving into racially and ethnically diverse boys' friendships, including African-Americans, reveals a strong desire for emotional intimacy in their male friendships, but this emotional intimacy decreases and distrust toward other boys increases as they age during adolescence.<sup>40</sup> To the extent that mentoring can offset such trends, this could be an important process linking formal and informal mentoring experiences to positive outcomes for Black boys.

In line with this possibility, research on boys of color in group mentoring programs has pointed toward the importance of feelings of brotherhood and emotional connection that are developed among participants. A qualitative study was conducted of 14 African-American and Latino male adolescents in the Umoja Network for Young Men (UMOJA), a school-based, group, male mentoring program at an alternative high school for students who are overage and under-credited (i.e., at least two years behind in age and credit toward the high school diploma).<sup>43</sup> Based on observations of the group mentoring sessions, observations of the students in their English class, and three focus-group discussions over a two-year period, Jackson et al.<sup>43</sup> found that participants reported feeling a sense of unity, brotherhood, and reciprocal love, which referred to openly expressing love and care for one other and in turn feeling loved and cared for. They also reported a collective responsibility in which they felt they were responsible for one another's school success and emotional well-being. Finally, the research<sup>43</sup> found that trust was established in the mentoring program, which enabled students to open up and talk about their personal lives. The researchers concluded that group processes seemed to have contributed to students feeling that they have the potential to succeed and to have higher personal aspirations (e.g., complete school). Similarly, the Young Men for Change program staff engaged in a dialogue phase to allow African-American high school boys to express their emotions and to create a safe space for peers and adults to support and care for one another without sacrificing their manhood.<sup>24</sup>

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Black boys live in a society in which they are stereotyped as **hyper masculine**, and research suggests that their environment may influence them to behave in **negatively stereotypical ways**. For instance, Swanson, Cunningham, and Spencer<sup>44</sup> found that Black male adolescents who reported negative perceptions of Black males in their community were **more likely** to report **exaggerated stereotypical ideas about male attitudes** (bravado).

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Theoretically, promoting an ethos of care and brotherhood may be a mechanism for promoting positive outcomes in Black boys in particular because it helps to directly combat the negative images and stereotypes projected upon them in their schools and communities.<sup>24, 43</sup> Black boys live in a society in which they are stereotyped as hyper masculine, and research suggests that their environment may influence them to behave in negatively stereotypical ways. For instance, Swanson, Cunningham, and Spencer<sup>44</sup> found that Black male adolescents who reported negative perceptions of Black males in their community were more likely to report exaggerated stereotypical ideas about male attitudes (bravado). In contrast, those with positive teacher experiences were less likely to report bravado attitudes. The researchers posited that participants' bravado attitudes were a coping strategy to deal with school and community stressors. The extent to which the mentoring relationships and experiences of Black boys promote positive images and emotional connection to other Black males thus could be important in processes linking them to positive adaptation and healthy development.

## RESEARCH

There is some research that tests the processes that link mentoring to positive (or potentially negative) outcomes in Black boys. Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman, and Caldwell<sup>45</sup> found in a study of 541 African-American older adolescents (average age = 17.8 years) that the reported presence of an informal mentor indirectly predicted the belief that school was important for future success through participants' racial identity or their positive perceptions about people from their own race (e.g., I am proud of Black people). Evidence in support of this pathway did not differ significantly across male and female study participants, thus supporting its relevance to Black male youth in particular.

A longitudinal study of the informal mentoring relationships of 354 rural African-American high school seniors found that mentoring relationships with more instrumental and emotional support and affectively positive interactions predicted less anger, rule-breaking behavior, and aggression in youth about one year later,<sup>46</sup> while controlling for earlier problem behaviors, youth gender, intervention dosage, and first choice of mentor. The authors tested these associations separately for boys and girls in the study and found no differences. Thus, these findings stand for male participants.

Some qualitative research findings are in line with the idea that emotionally close relationships between youth and mentors may be an important mechanism. Based on findings of their qualitative research, Garraway and Pistrang<sup>13</sup> concluded that African-Caribbean boys' relationships with their mentors afforded them the opportunity to learn how to ask for and receive support and that this helped them trust and depend on others. Some evidence also suggests that information and guidance provided by mentors may promote positive outcomes for Black male youth. For example, participants in the New Brunswick Kappa League program reported their mentors' support and guidance is what helped them apply, enroll and prepare for college.<sup>10</sup> This finding is broadly in line with research considered earlier in this review suggesting the potential for guidance from mentors to be beneficial for promoting positive academic outcomes when directed toward countering the effects of negative stereotypes and feelings of cultural mistrust within the educational context.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Theory and research suggest that developing a positive ethnic and racial identity could be important in linking mentoring to positive outcomes in other areas (e.g., academics) for Black male youth; however, research directly examining this possibility is lacking.
2. Group mentoring programs that develop a sense of unity, brotherhood, caring, and trust among program members may be particularly helpful to Black male youth; however, research on the role of these group processes in the outcomes for Black boys in mentoring is limited.
3. Developing close relationships with mentors may benefit Black boys by providing them with opportunities to develop healthy help-seeking strategies and to trust and depend on others for support; research addressing these processes, however, is very limited.
4. Mentoring relationships with more instrumental and emotional support may prevent behavioral problems in Black boys, but research is limited.
5. Information and guidance provided by mentors may have the potential to promote positive educational outcomes for Black boys, but research is again lacking.

## **4. Have Mentoring Programs and Supports Reached and Engaged Black Male Youth, Been Implemented with High Quality, and Been Adopted and Sustained?**

### BACKGROUND

Organizations such as the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey have provided a Readiness to Engage Report Card for programs that are specifically interested in serving Black male youth.<sup>47</sup> They ask that relevant stakeholders and staff members examine whether their organization and program meet certain criteria in order to work with Black male youth, such as whether they engage from both a race equity and gender lens, whether they have engaged in a social justice analysis of the outcomes of Black male youth, and whether they seek to address the needs and challenges that Black male youth experience specifically versus their peers. In related work, MENTOR The National Mentoring Partnership<sup>48</sup> created a guide for organizations, programs, and mentors who work with Black male youth. The guide can be used to facilitate trainings aiming to prepare mentors to adequately serve Black male youth, better understand their own biases and assumptions when working with them, understand how our communities and contexts influence Black male youth's development, and to guide mentors in facilitating the positive growth of Black male youth. Informed by needs assessments discussed below, Grimes<sup>47</sup> provided suggestions for a culturally relevant social marketing campaign to recruit African-American men to serve as mentors as well as suggestions on how to overcome the identified barriers. Theoretically, resources such as these could be valuable for ensuring that mentoring programs intended to serve Black male youth are more effective in reaching and engaging these youth, implemented with high quality, and sustained over time.

## RESEARCH

*The Mentoring Effect*<sup>49</sup> study revealed that approximately two in three of the 18- to 24-year-old young people surveyed in this nationally representative study report having had a mentor while growing up. It is unclear if Black male youth are more or less likely to report having a mentor in their lives. Notably, *The Mentoring Effect* study found that African-American youth, in general (i.e., without consideration of gender), were significantly more likely to report having had either an informal or formal mentor in comparison to White and Latino youth. Other research, however, suggests possible gaps in access to certain kinds of mentors for Black male youth. In a study of 1,929 African-American youth between the ages of 12 and 18, it was found that girls were more likely to report an unrelated mentor in their community (e.g., minister, teacher, counselor, older friend).<sup>35</sup> An older study of 122 Black and White high school students<sup>50</sup> similarly found Black girls (58%) to be more likely to report an impactful relationship with a nonparent adult male than were Black boys (41%). Furthermore, Black girls reported more grandparent involvement in discussions about peer relationships compared to their Black male counterparts.<sup>50</sup>

A potential factor to consider in reaching Black male youth is recruiting Black men to serve as mentors in order to provide Black boys with successful models from their community. Two needs assessments were conducted to understand the barriers for African-American men serving as volunteers in youth mentoring programs. In a survey study of 576 African-American men across the United States, only 7% reported that they were involved with formal mentoring programs.<sup>51</sup> Although this finding suggests the possibility that African-American men might be less likely to volunteer for formal mentoring programs, comparative data (e.g., corresponding rates for White men and other men of color) are lacking to determine if this is the case. Importantly, too, there is evidence from a focus-group study that African-American men may be more inclined to volunteer in different kinds of community-based programs or as informal mentors to youth in various settings (e.g., church, fraternities, 100 Black Men<sup>52</sup>). This finding is consistent with an earlier MENTOR<sup>53</sup> study that found that non-Whites are more likely to serve as informal rather than formal mentors. The previous studies revealed multiple barriers, among Black men, to volunteering as formal mentors in traditional programs. Examples are time constraints and concerns about making a long-term commitment, lack of information or misinformation about formal programs or about mentoring African-American male youth, mistrust toward government sponsored programs, and a need for mentoring themselves.

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There is also some research that reports the dosage of mentoring that Black male youth receive in their programs as well as the level of parental involvement. In the Helping Hands school-based mentoring program for African-American boys, the majority (n = 223) participated in the program for one school year, while 77 participated for two years and 38 for three years.<sup>7</sup> The Village Model of Care evaluation included a rating for parent participation in the program. It was found that program



staff rated the participation of a third (n = 88) of the mentees' parents as *good* to *excellent* whereas the remaining 145 parents were rated as *fair* to *poor*. Incorporating opportunities and support for parental involvement has been found to be related to greater effectiveness in evaluations of youth mentoring programs.<sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Various resources are available that may be helpful to organizations and programs in determining if they are ready to adequately serve Black boys within a mentoring framework and for building their capacity in areas such as mentor training and recruitment; although in many cases informed by available research, these resources have not been examined with respect to their potential to benefit programs in areas such as reach and engagement, quality of implementation, and sustainability.
2. It appears that Black boys may have less access to various kinds of informal mentors in their communities compared to Black girls; therefore, the need for engagement in formal mentoring programs may be especially high for male youth within the Black community.
3. Research suggests that Black men are more likely to serve as informal rather than formal mentors and that they experience barriers to serving as mentors in formal mentoring programs.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(Mike Garringer, *MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership*)

The review of the evidence around mentoring young Black males above is helpful in highlighting just how difficult it can be to determine the effectiveness of mentoring (and factors that *influence* that effectiveness) for specific groups of youth in real-world applications. In spite of the fact that many mentoring programs are geared specifically toward youth of color, or boys of color in particular, the youth mentoring field to date has generated very little concrete evidence that mentoring can be broadly impactful for Black male youth and even less information about the specific strategies or factors that can ensure that their mentoring relationships are beneficial, both in terms of individual success and in addressing long-standing social barriers and injustices.

There are several reasons for this dearth of strong evidence, but two stick out as being especially challenging:

- Most program evaluations either don't examine differential effects for certain groups of youth participants or, even if they wanted to, lack the large number of mentees needed to generate meaningful statistical power in examining outcomes for subsets of youth.
- Within a category like Black male youth, there is still tremendous diversity that makes it hard to talk in absolutes about what "works": urban vs rural, high poverty vs middle class, American-born vs immigrant, high individual risk vs low individual risk, and so on. As with many other groups of youth, it can be very challenging to talk about effective practices without also painting them with a broad (and often stereotypical) brush.

Yet, in spite of these challenges, meaningful public policy efforts like [My Brother's Keeper](#) and the [Campaign for Black Male Achievement](#) have put considerable energy into promoting mentoring as a cornerstone tool and intervention in the fight for equality and better outcomes for the nation's young Black men. We have every reason to believe, on paper, that mentoring is an invaluable resource for these young people in particular. It makes both theoretical and conceptual sense, especially in light of more general research on mentoring's effectiveness for youth with higher levels of risk and limited social capital. But the fact that Dr. Sánchez had only 19 studies to draw from in this review—and that those studies often had little in common in terms of the questions or programming they examined—illustrates just how challenging it is to determine "what works" for mentoring this group of youth. Our conceptualization of the value often far outpaces the actual science.

But that doesn't mean that practitioners are totally in the dark about how to design effective services for Black male youth. Given the lack of definitive answers in the research base, what should mentoring practitioners keep in mind as they think about serving Black male youth more effectively?

## 1. **DON'T ASSUME THAT ALL BLACK MALE YOUTH WILL NEED THE SAME MENTORING.**

One of the biggest challenges in serving any subset of youth is determining how to meet the broader, collective needs of that group while also allowing for mentoring to be tailored to the needs of the

individual. This certainly comes into play when thinking about Black boys and young men in our programs. As noted previously, each individual will have diverse needs, life histories, and life goals, even if there are some aspects of being Black in our society that are perhaps more universal.

Pending evidence to the contrary, programs should avoid assuming that youth must have a particular “flavor” of mentoring based on their race or background. This is a trap that much of the practice literature (activity guides, training curricula, etc.) on mentoring boys, or boys of color, can fall into. These types of materials tend to emphasize the general struggles of the group and thus at least implicitly assume that all involved in a program (e.g., all Black males) will have the same viewpoints and lived experience and thus will benefit from the same messages and mentoring approach. That may not always be the case and programs should avoid making too many assumptions here.

Now, there is nothing wrong with operating a targeted program that does specific things for a specific group, and many programs serving boys of color do exactly that. But the type of mentoring that a Black male youth from the suburbs who is exploring college options may be radically different than the mentoring a young man exposed to extreme violence in an inner-city neighborhood might need. A Black child who just arrived from Somalia will need different support than a young man whose family has been in the same house for generations. So look below the surface level and learn the details about why Black male youth wind up at your program’s doors. What do they need help with individually? And are there themes that seem more universal? If your program serves a diverse array of kids, what can you say about the needs of the Black boys that is substantively different than the needs of other groups? By considering these types of nuances, you can be sure that the services you design and the mentor preparation you offer will be relevant and meaningful to these youth, both at an individual and aggregate level.

## 2. PROPER TRAINING OF MENTORS IN ASPECTS OF RACE AND CULTURE MAY BE CRITICAL.

Even though we just emphasized that programs should look at these youth at a more individual level, there are some universal things programs can do with the aim of helping make mentoring a good fit for the Black male youth they serve. Perhaps the most important is training mentors to be comfortable, respectful, and effective in talking about issues of race, culture, ethnicity, and social justice with youth of color. It’s been a few years since the mentoring field has done a thorough study on who exactly serves as mentors (although MENTOR plans on doing exactly this in 2017), but most estimates indicate that the majority of volunteer mentors are individuals who identify as White while the majority of mentees identify as being youth of color. Given that the typical mentoring relationship involves this racial

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Given that the typical mentoring relationship involves this racial divide (as well as equally challenging class divides), it seems essential, ethically, if not for reasons of fostering measurable effectiveness, that **mentoring programs serving Black male youth train mentors to be culturally responsive, competent, and even humble** (this term implies that “competency” is a never-ending process of personal growth and reflection and that no one individual is ever perfectly culturally competent).

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One first step in this type of training is to work with mentors to unpack their own understandings and biases around race and culture. They arguably must do this in order to understand the lens through which they see the world—including race and ethnicity—and to recognize their privilege, their own personal history, and how those factors shape their understanding of other people and cultures. It may be difficult for mentors to help youth think about their own racial identities if they have not explored their own and may struggle to demonstrate cultural competence and understanding if they have not unpacked their own histories and biases to some degree.

In addition to this exploration of self, there are several specific training topics that may be particularly useful when mentoring Black male youth:

- Identity development and how to foster it in others (such as by negating stereotype threats or developing positive mind-sets).
- Strategies and activity ideas for exploring race, ethnicity, and culture.
- Developing a “critical consciousness” that allows youth to respond to and even thrive within institutions and environments steeped in racism and inequality.
- Strategies for sharing one’s own culture and values in a mentoring relationship while also accepting others’.
- Helping youth understand and positively address experiences of racism in their communities.
- Taking a strengths-based approach (these youth and their families have access to far more social capital, and other forms of capital, than people often recognize).

Mentors, especially those who are mentoring youth with lives very different from their own, may routinely need meaningful training to be able to successfully navigate the choppy waters of race and ethnicity. The “Recommended Reading and Resources” section at the end of this review offers some materials that may help programs with developing an effective curriculum.

### **3. RECRUIT MENTORS WHO HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS AND VALUES TO MENTOR BLACK MALE YOUTH EFFECTIVELY.**

Every mentoring program tries to recruit mentors that they feel are a good fit for the program, but programs can sometimes focus too narrowly on race and gender when thinking about the ideal mentors for Black boys. Programs serving this population are encouraged to think more holistically about the characteristics that would make someone a good fit to work with a young man of color. This builds on the idea above about taking a deeper look at the needs of the youth who come into your

program and thinking about them as individuals and not a homogenous group. Too often, mentoring programs think of this aspect of their work reflexively or through a narrow lens and assume, despite lack of strong evidence, that Black boys can really only be mentored by Black men. Although there are many good reasons to consider such same-race, same-gender matches (as detailed in Dr. Sánchez's review above), the reality is that there may be other lived experiences and personal histories that would make someone an effective mentor to a Black child or teen. Other cultures and groups can experience marginalization, prejudice, or systemic barriers. You may find that plenty of other characteristics beyond just race or ethnicity make someone a good fit for the youth you serve. We already have some hints from research that programs may be more effective when mentors take a teaching and advocacy role (this was a major finding of the 2011 DuBois meta-analysis) and, given that many mentors for Black youth will be discussing serious community problems or institutional failures and addressing systemic racism, experience in those roles may be especially salient here.

One area that could be useful to be particularly mindful of during recruitment and screening is the willingness of the potential mentor to engage openly and honestly about issues of race and culture. It stands to reason that engaging in this work with young Black men, and going through the personal reflection and training recommended above, takes someone who has an open mind and the right motivations. With this in mind, programs may be well-advised to avoid volunteers who don't seem open to reflecting on their own biases or privilege, as well as those who see mentoring one child as their opportunity to address widespread social ills. The last thing boys of color need is someone who is set on "fixing" them or who does not respect the cultural values and experiences of the youth and families you serve. And these are traits that can cut across adults of all races; as such, don't assume that just because a potential mentor has the same background or life experience that they are necessarily going to be a good fit for the work your program will ask them to do. Make sure that your recruitment messages are clear about what the mentoring you provide these youth looks like. And make sure that your vision for an ideal mentor goes beyond skin deep.

#### **4. CONSIDER ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES THAT GET YOUNG BLACK MALES TO RECOGNIZE THE MENTORING THEY DO HAVE IN THEIR LIVES AND TO FIND ADDITIONAL MENTORS.**

In early 2015, the MENTOR held a roundtable discussion with several prominent mentoring providers, informal mentors, and community representatives to talk about the mentoring that happens in the communities of boys and young men of color. The participants in this focus group expressed a frustration that the boys and young men they were working with often didn't recognize the mentoring they *did have* in their lives. Yes, they could use more (we all could), but there was a consensus that it can sometimes be hard for young Black men to see that they do have mentors in the various institutions and community settings where they spend time (sports leagues, school, church, local business, etc.).

Programs may consider activities that allow mentees to map out the array of caring adults they have in their lives. They may benefit from seeing that there is more support available to them than previously thought. This may also help them identify aspects of their life where mentoring, or a specific type of mentor, is missing.

In addition to more purposefully counting the mentoring these youth do receive, programs can consider teaching youth how to identify potential new mentors and how to ask for this type of help in the future. While this is arguably a good thing to teach all youth, Black male youth in particular might benefit from this type of skill building as they try to navigate systems and institutions in which they may not always feel welcomed or have a sense of belonging. Teaching a young person how to find their *next* mentors in life may ultimately be the most valuable thing a program can do. (For further information on the research on this type of mentoring approach, please see the National Mentoring Resource Center review of [Youth-Initiated Mentoring](#), which was rated as “Promising” by our Research Board and is further detailed in the accompanying [insights for practitioners](#).)

## **5. MAKE SURE THAT PARENTS AND GUARDIANS ARE TREATED AS PARTNERS, NOT OBSTACLES IN THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP.**

As with the mentor-youth relationship, the relationship between program staff and the parents of Black mentees can also be fraught with cultural misunderstandings, differing values, and biases. Programs should strongly consider providing cultural competence training to all staff and make sure that parents are engaged in the program and involved in meaningful ways throughout the matching and monitoring and support processes. Once again, this is inherently good advice for dealing with *all* parents and guardians, but as we have more research to go on, it could turn out to be especially helpful in ensuring that boys of color and their families feel welcome in the program and that they have a strong working relationship with the mentor and staff on behalf of their child.

## **6. FIGHT FOR LARGER SOCIAL JUSTICE GOALS IN YOUR COMMUNITY.**

The famous religious scholar William Sloane Coffin once said, “To show compassion for an individual without also showing concern for the structures of society that make him an object of compassion is to be sentimental rather than loving.” The mentoring movement needs to make sure that its work does not slip into sentimentality. The last two or three years have seen a tremendous shift in the conversation about race in America as events in Ferguson, Baltimore, and beyond have cast new light on the ways in which Black America is treated by institutions and systems and how citizens should respond to the injustice they see happening around them.

Mentoring programs are encouraged to be bold actors in this conversation and to work with other community leaders to address the systemic and deeply rooted reasons behind the inequality and injustice that haunt too many of the Black male youth who come looking for mentors. The focus of a program’s work should always be on the quality and consistency of the mentoring provided. But purposefully engaging in actions to address root causes of poverty, inequality, and injustice is also essential to the work. Mentoring is always about building up the potential of individuals to live the lives they want, but there also needs to be a recognition that those lives don’t happen in a vacuum and that mentored youth will have an easier time reaching their goals if there are efforts to improve the communities they live in. Programs should consider making it a priority to offer mentees and mentors a chance to be engaged in their community, to give back through service projects or other activities. Also, look for opportunities for your program to work with others to reduce the inequality and systemic racism that plague so many American cities.

## RECOMMENDED READING AND RESOURCES

These materials can support practitioners in understanding the nuances of mentoring young Black males more effectively and in training mentors to navigate issues of race and culture.

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