Welcome to the next installment of the National Mentoring Research Center E-Newsletter! This newsletter focuses on mentoring research, the work of the NMRC Research Board, and emerging knowledge that can help you plan and implement more effective mentoring services for youth. In this issue, we:

- Feature a reading from Aisha Griffith on ways mentoring may help improve the experiences of Black adolescent girls with school staff,
- Summarize some great new research articles produced by members of our NMRC Research Board and other scholars, and,
- Highlight tools and resources including a link to the latest episode of the Reflections on Research podcast hosted by the NMRC Youth Advisory Council, a blogpost on natural mentoring in higher education, and more!

- Rachel Bennett, Research Manager at MENTOR

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Have a question about mentoring evaluation and research? Get an answer! Write to us and we’ll answer your questions in a future issue.

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Disclaimer: The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.
I began my work as a researcher looking at trust between adult youth program leaders and teens (e.g., Griffith & Jiang, 2020; Griffith & Johnson, 2019; Griffith & Larson, 2016). Teens occasionally described how leaders' actions increased their trust by contrasting these with the negative experiences they had with teachers. I previously taught middle school so these interviewees’ comments stayed with me as I began conducting research on youth-adult interactions in schools, including a project called Black Girls’ Relationships and Interactions with Staff in Educational Settings (RISES). In Black Girl RISES I use novel methods to synthesize Black adolescent girls’ voices about their experiences with school personnel across nearly 30 years of published research, creating a data sample of 286 quotes from middle and high school girls across the United States. A rewarding part of my previous work on trust was sharing it with practitioners. Because of this, I am excited to share a link to two practice briefs my team wrote inspired by Black Girl RISES titled Centering Black adolescent girls’ voices: Strategies to prevent disproportionate discipline. In this newsletter, I reflect on connections between the briefs and mentoring.

One connection to the field of mentoring is related to natural mentors, the nonparental adults youth identify from contexts they navigate (e.g., family, sports, schools) whom they feel they can go to for guidance and support. Are schools a common context for Black girls to form these relationships? The answer is a resounding “No” because of the nature of many schools. In Black Girl RISES we are finding that many girls do not see their identity reflected or affirmed across the school ecology because of the actions or inaction of adults at the interpersonal level, class delivery, school curriculum, teacher demographics, or school priorities. Girls who do see their identity reflected in school may be more likely to form natural mentoring relationships. In another study from the project, I found that girls experience differential treatment based on markers of their identity with little recourse in school to address this treatment (Griffith, 2023). Girls see school adults treat Black students less humanely and punish Black students more severely. Girls see adults apply dress code violations more frequently to Black girls than those of other identities, with one girl remarking that it “feels like a dress code for Black girl bodies.” As discussed in the briefs, other researchers have found that school adults disproportionately punish Black girls for subjective offenses like “disrespect” and “improper dress,” patterns discussed by Dr. Monique Morris in a Ted Talk on Why Black girls are
targeted for punishment at school and how to change that. Currently, the school setting is not a fertile context for natural mentoring relationships to grow for Black girls because of the above characteristics.

This then led me to wonder whether schools could be spaces for natural mentoring relationships to grow or, at the very least, positive youth-adult interactions for Black adolescent girls. In our data, we found that only 18% of the total 286 quotes were about positive interactions. There were two main categories based on common themes:

- **Staff effectively fulfills their role**: explaining content clearly, being culturally relevant, creating a warm atmosphere, and communicating high expectations.
- **Staff positively stands out from others**: going beyond one’s role (e.g., tutoring or helping with classes beyond what they teach), providing support in the midst of challenges, and being emotionally attuned to student needs and challenges (e.g., checking in on them).

As one girl said: “You know the teachers that are interested in making sure African American girls succeed.”

**A Call to Action**

Substantial shifts are needed to make school environments more fertile for natural mentoring relationships. For example, in the practice briefs we encourage adults to:

- Identify and affirm Black adolescent girls’ assets by inquiring about Black girls’ interests and passions and to then incorporate these within activities,
- Recognize the accomplishments of Black women to support cultural pride and advocacy, and
- Create extracurricular spaces for Black girls to express themselves.

School leaders can conduct self-audits and make changes to policies by assessing whether policies disproportionately affect Black girls by disaggregating data by gender and race and soliciting Black girls’ insights on issues such as curriculum and procedures. Schools could use funds to enact shifts through partnership with organizations outside of the institution. For instance, mentoring programs founded by Black women who specifically celebrate Black girls likely excel at identifying and affirming Black adolescent girls’ assets/interests/passions, and post-collegiate alumni chapters of historically Black sororities could inform school-based efforts to celebrate the accomplishments of Black women.

Formal mentoring can also play an important role to ensure Black girls are better supported. Thoughtful mentors reflect on the sociohistorical context they and their mentees navigate, such as
the institution of schools. Mentors could use these short briefs as a tool for this. I suggest reading the quotes from girls in the briefs first and then the text. Mentors interested in a deeper dive on this topic can watch the documentary *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. I require my research assistants to watch this film before working on Black Girl RISES and reflect on these questions: How have your thoughts changed since watching the movie? If your thoughts have not changed, explain why. What, if anything, did you see in the movie that would help inform the research questions driving the project? Mentors could come up with their own reflective questions or check out the Discussion Guide on the film’s website. Mentoring program directors interested in better understanding the sociohistorical context can check out MENTOR’s Collaborative Mentoring Webinars “Amplifying the Voices of Black Girls” and “Girls of Color Rock: How Programs Empower, Encourage, and Energize Girls” which describe school disparities, highlight barriers facing girls of color, and provide considerations specific to designing mentoring programs. MENTOR also hosts trainings driven by the Black and Brown Girl Mentoring Movement.

I am excited to continue envisioning the way the mentoring field intersects with issues raised in these briefs. If you lead a program or organization working with Black girls and have thoughts, I would love to hear them at griffit3@uic.edu.

References


Below we highlight new(ish) research articles that might be of interest to those of you planning, running, and evaluating mentoring programs. Where these articles are publicly available, we have provided a link. For those that are not, you can likely get them through the journal collections of your local public library or any academic library you have access to. In most cases, article authors are also able to share single copies with folks who contact them. Please reach out to the NMRC if you have questions about how to access one of the articles mentioned below. NMRC Research Board members are noted in bold text and Associate Board members are noted in bold italics.

**From crisis to capacity: Lessons learned from youth e-mentoring during the COVID-19 pandemic**

- by Kate Wright, Deborah K. Levine, *Maritza Salcido*, Michael Garringer, Tselza Almendra, Alicia Bazell, and *Michelle R. Kaufman*

*(Reprinted from Abstract)* The COVID-19 pandemic and associated need for social isolation left in-person youth mentoring programs scrambling to keep mentees and mentors connected, and many programs turned to e-mentoring. To better understand the transition period and to inform e-mentoring practice in a post-COVID world, this study explored the experience of mentoring programs shifting to e-mentoring during the first year of the pandemic. Seven remote focus group discussions were conducted with twenty-three staff members from twenty U.S. youth mentoring organizations that used the iCouldBe e-mentoring platform during Spring/Summer 2020 or Fall/Winter 2020-2021. Thematic content analysis was used to uncover insights from the data. E-mentoring was successful overall for keeping mentees and mentors in touch, especially for matches with a strong connection before the pandemic. Zoom and text messaging were the most used virtual communication methods. Programs faced many challenges but also experienced unexpected positives, including a strong interest in future e-mentoring implementation. Participants recommended that programs interested in e-mentoring start small and with intention; they also requested a central website with e-mentoring support and ways to connect with other programs and mentors. Although the literature on e-mentoring remains limited, this study contributes a picture of e-mentoring success even during a global crisis.

**Relevance for practitioners:** As many service providers consider expanding or supplementing in-person services with e-mentoring, this study highlights key considerations and potential benefits of implementing virtual mentoring. The flexibility to meet online, for example, eliminated many of the challenges related to proximity or time constraints that may have otherwise prevented mentor-mentee matches from meeting in person. Some programs noted that with proximity of volunteers to potential mentees no longer being a concern during the initial matching process, they were able to place a greater emphasis on matching based on common interests or youth needs. If offering e-mentoring, programs will need to establish or enhance policies related to online safety and confidentiality, while also keeping practical challenges like equitable access to devices and high-speed internet for participants in mind.

**Available at:** [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2024.100400](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2024.100400)
Long-term impact of the Fostering Healthy Futures for Preteens program on suicide-related thoughts and behaviors for youth in out-of-home care: A randomized controlled trial

- by Heather N. Taussig, Anthony Fulginiti, Sarah J. Racz, Rhiannon Evans, and Colleen Cary Katz

(Reprinted from Abstract) Youth in out-of-home care are at high risk for suicide-related thoughts and behaviors (STB), yet there are no known efficacious interventions that reduce STB for this population. Fostering Healthy Futures for Preteens (FHF-P) is a 9-month community-based mentoring and skills training preventive intervention for children in out-of-home care. A randomized controlled trial enrolled 156 participants aged 9–11 years who were placed in out-of-home care over the prior year. Participants were 48.9% female, 54.1% Hispanic, 30.1% Black, and 27.1% American Indian. Follow-up interviews, conducted 7–12 years postintervention (85.2% retention rate), asked young adult participants, aged 18–22, to self-report lifetime STB as indexed by non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal thoughts, plans, and/or attempts. There was a nonsignificant reduction in the odds of STB for the intervention group at follow-up (OR = 0.74; CI, 0.32, 1.69). However, FHF-P significantly moderated the effect of baseline STB; control youth who reported baseline STB had 10 times the odds of young adult STB (OR = 10.44, CI, 2.28, 47.78), but there was no increase in the odds of adult-reported STB for intervention youth. Findings suggest that FHF-P buffers the impact of preexisting STB on young adult STB for care-experienced youth. Further research is needed to identify mechanisms that may reduce STB in this population.

Relevance for practitioners: Emotion regulation, problem-solving, and coping skills have been shown as critical strategies for suicide prevention. For youth involved in the child welfare system, Native American youth, and LGBTQIA2S+ youth, who are all at higher risk for suicide-related thoughts and behaviors (STB), programs that integrate these skill-building components can provide a much needed, non-stigmatizing option to safeguard against STB in late adolescence and early adulthood. In fact, previous research highlights that youth development programs which include mentoring tend to be preferred over traditional therapy particularly for LGBTQIA2S+ youth and youth of color. Though not a substitute for mental health treatment, youth service providers can play an important role in bridging the gap of available mental health support by providing youth with opportunities to learn and practice skills necessary to mitigate the risk of STB.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12745
A longitudinal examination of types of natural mentor support and college adjustment among underrepresented students

- by Aaliyah J. Churchill, David S. Freire, and Noelle M. Hurd

(Reprinted from Abstract) Underrepresented college students, particularly those attending a predominantly White institution (PWI), face unique challenges that undermine well-being and academic performance. However, support from natural mentors may mitigate the harms caused by these challenges and promote more positive college adjustment. The current study investigated how cumulative appraisal support, emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support from up to five natural mentors during students’ first year of college were related to various concurrent and longitudinal outcomes. We found that 3 out of 4 types of social support were related to more positive, concurrent psychological or academic outcomes. Based on the results, we suggest that natural mentorship during students’ first year of college has the potential to set a foundation for more positive adjustment among underrepresented students.

Relevance for practitioners: In addition to the psychological and academic benefits (e.g., greater life satisfaction and use of effective study skills) related to support from natural mentors, this study also revealed a significant gap in natural mentoring for underrepresented students. Among undergraduates, nearly 30% reported having no natural mentor during their first year of college. The researchers also found that larger networks of natural mentors were only better when they provided greater levels of support; students receiving relatively low levels of support appeared to benefit the same whether this support came from only one mentor or many. While higher education institutions can prime campuses to foster more natural mentoring relationships by equipping staff and faculty with training and tools to act as supports for students, programs supporting underrepresented students can offer opportunities for youth to identify and practice the skills needed to cultivate natural mentoring relationships well in advance of the transition between high school and college. Mentoring programs can also think about which types of appraisal, emotional, information, and instrumental support mentors provide and the right ratio of each to meet the needs of mentees.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2024.2334564
**Mentorship for young gay men in Hong Kong: A pilot mixed-methods randomized controlled trial**

- by Yu-Te Huang, Eddie S. K. Chong, Chi-Chung Lau, and Leo Z. Chow

*(Reprinted from Abstract)* This study examined whether mentorship could promote young gay men's identities and well-being, and whether a mentor’s sexual orientation matters. A randomized control trial compared outcomes across three conditions: Arm A (a mentee matched with a sexual minority mentor), Arm B (a mentee matched with a heterosexual mentor), and a control arm receiving psychoeducation only. A community sample of 60 mentees aged 18–25 years was randomly allocated to the three arms and completed questionnaires at baseline, 3 months into the intervention, and at the end of the 6-month program. Fifteen mentees recounted their mentoring experiences through in-depth interviews. Linear mixed effects models showed that for both intervention and control conditions, internalized homonegativity declined while resilience, loneliness, and body acceptance improved over time. No time and group interactions were found. Meanwhile, a mentor’s sexual orientation did not drive differential quality and outcomes of mentorship. Interviewees cited various benefits of mentorship, including providing companionship, enriching connection with lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) communities, and adding knowledge and perspectives of LGB lives and identities. Although quantitative data did not support any exclusive benefits of mentorship, most mentees recognized mentorship as a vital source of affirmation and companionship. Implications for research and mentoring programs are discussed.

**Relevance for practitioners:** Mentoring by credible messengers and others with relevant lived experience, a current priority of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, is an area the mentoring field is still learning more about. When paired with mentors who shared similar identities relative to gender and sexual orientation, mentees in this study reported a variety of anecdotal benefits such as feeling their mentor could better understand their needs and offer relevant advice, and noted they may have felt burdened to educate a heterosexual mentor about issues impacting the LGBTQIA2S+ community. While some mentees paired with heterosexual mentors expressed a lack of closeness in the relationship due to differences in identity, they also noted this provided an opportunity to feel accepted and understood by heterosexual people. Regardless of shared or dissimilar identities between matches, mentees noted their mentors helped to expand their social capital and provided emotional and informational support. As the field learns more about implications and potential benefits of shared identity and similar lived experience in mentoring, this study offers insights into when lived experience mentoring may be appropriate and beneficial based on program participants and intended outcomes.

**Available at:** [https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12749](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12749)
“Scaling Out” a Mindfulness-Based Intervention Through a Youth Mentoring Program: Preliminary Evidence for Feasibility, Acceptability, and Efficacy


(Reprinted from Abstract) Objectives Past studies indicate that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) promote mental health for adolescents. However, most adolescents with mental health vulnerabilities do not have access to a MBI. The goal of the current study was to explore the feasibility, acceptability, and potential efficacy of scaling out a MBI through a mentoring program targeted at adolescents experiencing multiple adversities.

Method We conducted a randomized feasibility trial comparing mentoring alone to mentoring plus MBI. Assessments occurred at baseline and post-intervention, including reports gathered from adolescents and their parents. Results The addition of an MBI to the mentoring program did not affect attendance, but was associated with small increases in overall program acceptability. Additionally, adolescents who received mentoring plus MBI showed larger improvements in two aspects of emotion regulation (emotional clarity and managing impulsive behaviors during distress), attention problems, externalizing behaviors, and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. In contrast, adolescents who received mentoring alone demonstrated more favorable change in another dimension of emotion regulation (accessing effective emotion regulation strategies) and internalizing symptoms. Many but not all of these effects were more pronounced when focusing specifically on older, high school-aged adolescents, compared to the effects observed in the entire sample of 10–18-year-olds. Conclusions Results suggest that it is feasible, acceptable, and potentially effective to expand MBI via mentoring programs for adolescents at high risk for mental health symptoms.

Relevance for practitioners: The current study explored the potential benefits of integrating the Learning to BREATHE (L2B) curriculum into preexisting activities of a therapeutic mentoring program, Campus Connections. Researchers found that although mentoring alone did produce favorable outcomes for emotion regulation and reduction in PTSD symptoms, supplementing mentoring with the mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) did seem to boost these effects. For youth serving organizations targeting outcomes related to impulse control, attention problems, or managing symptoms of post-traumatic stress, MBIs may be well suited to enhance these results. The authors also highlight that due to different levels of cognitive development, adolescents seem to reap the benefits of MBIs more than younger children. To learn more about one approach to mindfulness in mentoring, read the Attunement in Mentoring Relationships chapter, co-authored by NMRC Research Board member Julia Pryce, featured in Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People.

Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02334-5
New NMRC Blogpost, Nurturing Natural Mentoring in Higher Education for Student Success

NMRC Research Board members, Drs. Lidia Monjaras Gaytan and Thomas Keller, describe how natural mentoring can support students of color and transfer students to build a sense of belonging on campus and contribute to their academic success. The post highlights how higher education institutions can enhance opportunities for natural mentoring on campus and offers several examples of programs working with youth and young adults to expand their support network.

Available at: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/blog/nurturing-natural-mentoring-in-higher-education-for-student-success/

New Season of Reflections on Research Podcast

This season of the podcast will feature interviews led by members of the NMRC Youth Advisory Council! Episode 1 features a conversation between Youth Advisory Council member, Kamal Amirnani, and Research Board member, Dr. Crystal Aschenbrener, about Hope Theory, its applications in the mentoring field, and how Dr. Aschenbrener utilized this theory to inform her work implementing a mentoring program for Native American high school students.

Available at: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/research-tools/reflections-on-research-podcast/
Research Board Office Hours #3: Supporting Youth’s Racial and Ethnic Identities

Join Kristian Jones, Assistant Professor at the University of Washington's School of Social Work, and Bernadette Sánchez, Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, to explore the vital role of mentoring in supporting mentees’ racial and ethnic identities. Gain insights into practices and resources for mentor training and program activities aimed at fostering positive identity development among mentees.

**June 24 from 2:00 - 3:00 PM ET**

[Register Here](#)

Youth and Law Enforcement Mentoring Guide

Written in collaboration with the National Association of Police Athletic/Activities Leagues, this guide provides an overview of youth and police mentoring programs, describes how these programs can be beneficial for both youth and police officers, and offers recommendations for implementing these programs.


Youth Voice Webinar Series Part 1, Media Literacy 101 for Mentors and Mentees: A Skill to Learn

Join us for our three-part miniseries highlighting youth voices on topics important to them in the world of mentoring! Our first part will focus on mentee/youth perspectives on media literacy; secondly, we’ll focus on mental health; and last, we’ll highlight the youth voice guide they’ve been putting together!

**Pt. 1** What is media literacy, and how does it relate to mentoring? In this webinar, NMRC Youth Advisory Council (YAC) members Aaryan Nema and Gabriel Capella discuss the importance of media literacy, and how you and your mentoring program can start practicing it. The presentation spotlights recent definitions of media literacy, current trends in the media around misinformation and disinformation, and techniques on how to practice media literacy. The role of a mentoring relationship will be emphasized throughout in building and enhancing skills of media in both mentors and mentees.

**July 30 from 1:00 - 2:30 PM ET**

[Register Here](#)