



NATIONAL  
**MENTORING**  
RESOURCE CENTER

A Program of **OJJDP**

## **Tailoring Mentoring to Youth Needs**

**Dr. Manolya Tanyu**

**Dr. Roger Jarjoura**

**Dr. Carla Herrera**

**Dr. Thomas Keller**

# Disclaimer

The development of these materials was supported by Grant 15PJDP-22-GK-00946-MUMU awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice.

The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in the materials and in their presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Justice.

---

# Webinar Objectives

---



Provide context for our research study and our purpose



Share our findings and takeaway messages for program staff and administrators



Gather your insights on how our findings and interpretations may apply to your program activities

# Study Team

---

## AIR Team



Dr. Manolya Tanyu  
Project Lead



Dr. Roger Jarjoura  
Senior Advisor



Dr. Mark Lachowicz  
Data Analyst

## Consultants



Dr. Carla Herrera  
Herrera Consulting Group  
LLC



Dr. Thomas Keller  
Portland State University



Dr. Sarah Schwartz  
Suffolk University

# RESOURCES

## TECHNICAL REPORT PRACTICE GUIDE

### ON OJP'S WEBSITE

<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/309883.pdf>  
<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/309882.pdf>

### ON AIR'S WEBSITE

<https://www.air.org/project/tailoring-mentoring-youth-needs-secondary-data-analysis-ojdp-mentoring-enhancement>

## Examining Mentoring Practices Tailored to Youth Needs

### Technical Report

Manolya Tanyu, Mark Lachowicz, Carla Herrera, G. Roger Jarjoura, Thomas Keller, Sarah Schwartz  
Grant 15PNII-22-GG-01425-MENT

September 2024

## Tailoring Mentoring to Youth Needs



Manolya Tanyu (American Institutes for Research), Carla Herrera (Herrera Consulting Group, LLC), Thomas Keller (Portland State University), Roger Jarjoura (American Institutes for Research)



**We know it!** Caring and supportive relationships with adults are central to healthy child and youth development.

**We believe in it!** Program-based mentoring relationships can make a positive difference in the lives of youth. High-quality research studies show

**In this brief, we** review findings from a research study on mentoring in nontargeted programs and how mentors tailored their approaches to address youth behavioral, emotional, or academic needs.

behavior, Surgeon General's Advisory has from today's epidemic of social

studies is typically small—some youth comes. This pattern highlights (e.g., in their social, emotional, their interactions with them.

ponsive to youth's specific needs, t review indicate programs that posed youth) or specific challenge tion specifically designed to meet effects than nontargeted would be more apparent in those aligned with the actual mentoring is of each youth.\*

mentoring—particularly in orts nationwide." In this brief, we ns about whether and how this

PROJECT

## Tailoring Mentoring to Youth Needs: A Secondary Data Analysis on OJJDP's Mentoring Enhancement Demonstration Program



Mentoring can be a vital support for some youth, especially in marginalized communities, offering a caring and supportive relationship with an unrelated adult. Research shows that mentoring relationships can improve youth's social competence, cognitive skills, and emotional well-being, and reduce mental health, behavioral, and academic problems.

Despite the popularity of youth mentoring in some communities, the average size of youth benefits in research studies is typically small—some youth make big gains while others may not benefit at all in the measured outcomes. This pattern highlights diversity among young people who participate in mentoring programs (e.g., in their social, emotional, relational, and academic needs) and in the approaches mentors use in their interactions with them.

This study investigated whether mentor strategies that are intentionally responsive to youth's specific needs, or tailored mentoring, could yield stronger positive outcomes even if the program may not have a targeted approach.

“AIR's randomized controlled trial on youth mentoring that concluded in 2018 included more than 2,000 mentor-mentee pairs. We will benefit from this rich dataset to contribute to knowledge of evidence-based mentoring

### Contact



Manolya Tanyu  
Senior Researcher

### Related Work

A Quick Word About Mentoring With: Manolya Tanyu, Senior Researcher >

Evaluation of OJJDP's Mentoring Enhancement Demonstration Program >

### Related Topics

- Education
- Youth Development
- Human Services
- Youth Mentoring

awarded by the National ice. The opinions, ation are those of the stice.



# Acknowledgements

---

We share our gratitude for all the individuals who contributed ideas, time, and effort to the project and in the development of our products:

## Practice Brief Reviewers

- ✓ Rivu Dasgupta, Professional Mentor, [Friends of the Children](#), Portland, Oregon
- ✓ Mike Garringer, Senior Director of Research & Quality, [MENTOR](#), Portland, Oregon.
- ✓ Evan Hubbard, Director of Quality Assurance, [Silver Lining Mentoring](#), Boston, Massachusetts
- ✓ April Riordan, Chief Operating Officer, [Bolder Options Youth Mentoring](#), Minneapolis, Minnesota
- ✓ Andre Thaddies, Executive Director, [Connect to Greatness](#), Lake Worth, Florida
- ✓ Susan Walsh, Chief Officer of Research and Quality, [Friends of the Children](#), Portland, Oregon
- ✓ Steven Witt, Youth Mentee, [Friends of the Children](#), Portland, Oregon

## NIJ

- ✓ Barbara Tatem Kelley- (Retired) Grant Manager
- ✓ Audra Thomas- Grant Manager

## AIR

- ✓ Lauren Stargel
- ✓ Pete Rehder
- ✓ Amy Syvertsen
- ✓ Kelly Peters

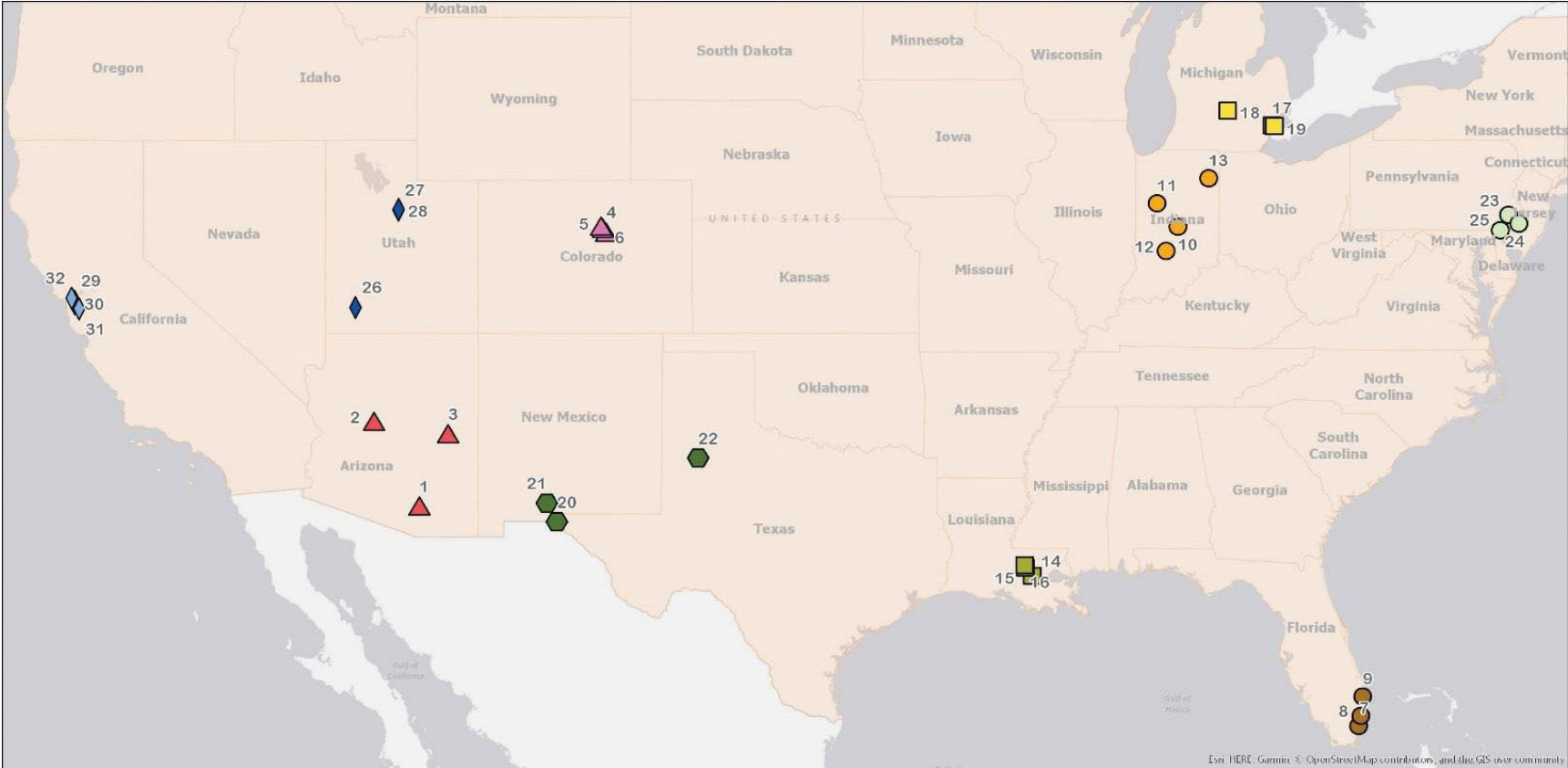
# Original Study (2012-2018)

## Evaluation of the Mentoring Enhancement Demonstration Program (MEDP) (Jarjoura, Tanyu, Forbush, Herrera, & Keller, 2018)

- 30 "non-targeted" mentoring programs across the U.S.
- 2,265 mentor-mentee matches from community-based and school-based mentoring programs



# MEDP Study Sites



# Background of Original Study (2012-2018)

---

## Motivating questions

- Can programs encourage mentors to adopt teaching and advocacy behaviors in their mentoring relationships?
- Does teaching and advocacy promote better youth outcomes?

## Design

- Randomized controlled trial comparing mentors who received enhanced teaching/advocacy interventions to mentors in standard programs

## Primary Source of Data

- Surveys collected from mentors, mentees, and their caregivers at baseline and follow-up

## Main findings

- No experimental group differences on youth outcomes
- No indication that mentors in the intervention group took on significantly different teaching/advocacy roles
- Mentors who received a higher dose of program enhancements had stronger relationships with their mentees and contributed to more positive mentee outcomes

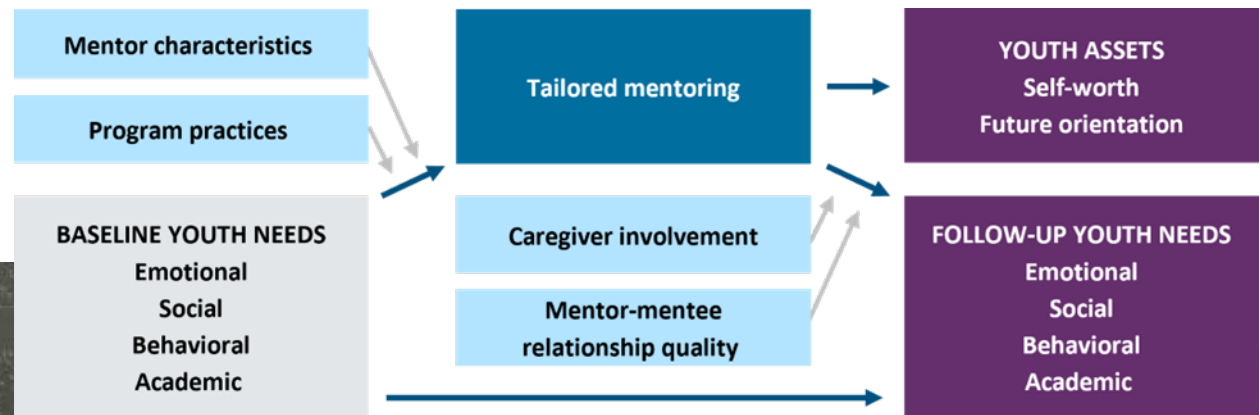
# Why this Study?

---

- ✓ **Meta-analyses of average program-level outcomes tend to show small positive effects of mentoring on youth outcomes.**
- ✓ **Targeted programs tend to yield larger outcomes than non-targeted programs.**
- ✓ **What outcomes do we see when we examine individualized mentoring practices focused on specific youth needs?**

# Current Study

1. Are youth coming to these non-targeted mentoring programs with significant needs?
2. How do mentors tailor their activities to different levels of need?
3. How do mentors determine whether and how to tailor their activities?
4. How is responsive, tailored mentoring associated with relationship quality?
5. How is mentoring tailored to youth needs associated with youth outcomes?



# Current Study

## MEDP dataset allows us to continue to explore mentoring relationships

- Surveys collected from mentors, youth, and their caregivers
- Surveys administered at baseline (prior to start of mentor-mentee match) and at follow-up (about 12 months after match was made)



The screenshot displays the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) website. The header includes the NIJ logo, the text "National Institute of Justice" and "STRENGTHEN SCIENCE. ADVANCE JUSTICE.", and navigation links for "About", "Contact Us", "Subscribe", and "Topics A-Z". A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the header, a navigation menu highlights "Funding & Awards". The main content area features the title "Exploring mentor practices using data from OJJDP's Mentoring Enhancement Demonstration Program". Underneath, the "Award Information" section lists: "Awardee: AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH IN THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES", "Award #: 15PNIJ-22-GG-01425-MENT", "Funding Category: Competitive Discretionary", and "Location: ARLINGTON, VA". On the right side, a sidebar menu lists funding categories: "Current Funding", "Forthcoming Funding", "Expired Funding", and "Awards: Listing of Funded Projects".

# Current Study

- We used survey data collected from 1,741 MEDP community-based matches, both from the enhanced or business-as-usual group.
- The matches in this study had been meeting, on average, a little under a year (344 days).
- Youth were, on average, 12 years old. Mentors were, on average, 30 years old.
- Close to half of the youth were Black (43%) followed by White (31%), Hispanic (28%), Native American (6%), Asian (2%) and other (2%).
- Most mentors were White (63%) followed by Black (20%), Hispanic (16%), Native American (4%), and Asian (4%).

# How We Measured Youth Needs

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), completed by the caregivers (Goodman, 1997)

Response options: 0 = not true; 1 = somewhat true; 2 = certainly true.

<p><b>Conduct Problems</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often loses temper</li> <li>Generally well behaved, usually does what adults request</li> <li>Often fights with other youth or bullies them</li> <li>Often lies or cheats</li> <li>Steals from home, school or elsewhere</li> </ol> <p><b>Baseline N = 1,650 M = 2.25 SD = 2.05; Follow-up N = 1276 M = 1.65 SD = 1.92</b></p>
<p><b>Emotional Problems</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness</li> <li>Many worries or often seems worried</li> <li>Often unhappy, depressed or tearful</li> <li>Nervous in new situations, easily loses confidence</li> <li>Many fears, easily scared</li> </ol> <p><b>Baseline N = 1,647 M = 3.04 SD = 2.33; Follow-up N = 1277 M = 2.30 SD = 2.29</b></p>
<p><b>Peer Relationship Problems</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would rather be alone than with other youth</li> <li>Has at least one good friend (reversed)</li> <li>Generally liked by other youth (reversed)</li> <li>Picked on or bullied by other youth</li> <li>Gets along better with adults than with other youth</li> </ol> <p><b>Baseline N = 1,648 M = 2.64 SD = 1.99; Follow-up N = 1276 M = 2.03 SD = 1.93</b></p>

A score of 0-3 is considered "average," and describes about 90% of the population.

High Need (clinical cutpoints)  
 Conduct problems: Score of 4 and above  
 Emotional problems: Score of 5 and above



# How We Measured Youth Needs

Youth-reported academic performance

A 4-item measure that reflects the academic performance of the youth in the most recent grading period. (Herrera, Grossman & Linden, 2013)

*Response options 1= Not Good at All to 5 = Excellent.*

<b>Academic Problems</b>
How are you doing in each of these subjects?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mathematics</li><li>• Reading or Language Arts</li><li>• Social Studies</li><li>• Science</li></ul>
<b><i>Baseline N=1,683 M=2.63 SD=.87; Follow-up N=1,224 M=2.50 SD=.99</i></b>

A 3.0 GPA is considered "average,"  
High need: A GPA below 2.0

*Each response was recoded from a 1-5 scale to a 0-4 scale to more closely reflect a measure of grade point average (GPA).*

*We then calculated an average grade for each student across the four core academic subjects.*

# How We Measured Mentoring Tailored to Youth Needs (Mediators)

## MENTOR FOCUS ON BEHAVIORAL NEED

Item	Follow-up
“To what extent have you focused on this activity? Decreasing my mentee’s negative behaviors (e.g., impulsive behavior, aggression, poor decision making).”	n = 1233 M = 3.52 SD = 1.36

## EMOTIONAL NEED

“To what extent have you focused on this activity? Decreasing my mentee’s worries, fears and anxieties.”	n = 1232 M = 3.43 SD = 1.28
--	-----------------------------------

## RELATIONAL NEED

“To what extent have you focused on this activity? Strengthening my mentee’s relationships with peers.”	n = 1246 M = 3.76 SD = 1.14
---	-----------------------------------

## ACADEMIC NEED

(For youth academic performance) Single item that asked, “To what extent have you focused on this activity? Helping my mentee with academics and schoolwork.”	n = 1243 M = 3.08 SD = 1.47
--	-----------------------------------

**Response options** 1=Not at all, 2=Not very much 3=A little, 4=Some, 5=A lot, 6=Most

# How We Measured Youth Assets

Measure	Items	Follow-up
<p><b>Youth Self-Worth</b></p> <p>An 8-item measure reflects the youth perception of their own self-worth. (DuBois, 1997)</p> <p><b>Response options</b></p> <p>1=Not at All True to 4=Very True.</p> <p>Scores for all items were averaged, with higher scores indicating a more positive self-worth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am happy with myself as a person.</li> <li>• I am happy with the way I can do most things.</li> <li>• I am as good a person as I want to be.</li> <li>• I wish I had more to be proud of.</li> <li>• I sometimes think I am a failure (a “loser”).</li> <li>• I am the kind of person I want to be.</li> <li>• I like being just the way I am.</li> <li>• I often feel ashamed of myself.</li> </ul>	<p>n = 1275</p> <p>M = 3.41</p> <p>SD = .56</p>
<p><b>Future Orientation</b></p> <p>A 3-item measure reflects the extent to which the youth had been thinking about and planning for their future (Arnold, Nott &amp; Meinhold, 2012):</p> <p><b>Response options</b></p> <p>1=Not at All True to 4=Very True.</p> <p>Scores for all items were averaged, with higher scores indicating a greater focus on the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have goals for my life.</li> <li>• I know what I want to do for a career (or job).</li> <li>• I am interested in learning about careers (or jobs) I could have.</li> </ul>	<p>n = 1273</p> <p>M = 3.34</p> <p>SD = .60</p>

*Response options 1=Not at all, 2=Not very much 3=A little, 4=Some, 5=A lot, 6=Most*



# How We Measured Supporting Factors (Moderators)

## Mentor characteristics (data from baseline mentor survey)

- Helping profession - Do you have a job or role (paid or unpaid) for 10 or more hours a week in a “helping” profession in which you help people (either youth or adults) directly?
- Growth mindset

## Program practices (data from program documents)

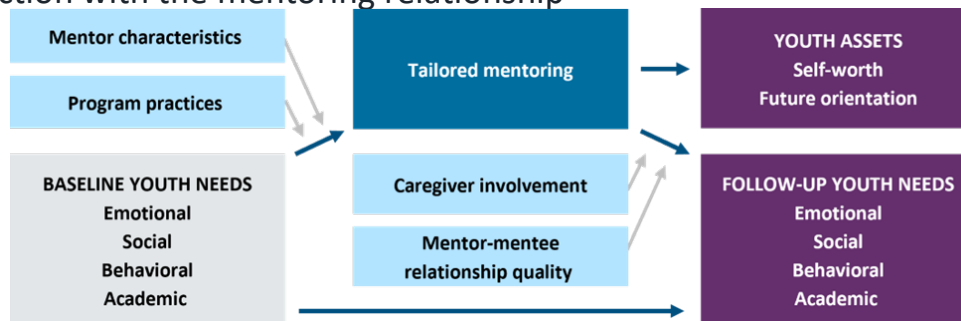
- Match made based on interests
- Match made based on youth needs/mentor skills
- Number of hours of training mentor received

## Relationship quality (data from mentor and youth follow-up)

- Youth sense of closeness, conflict, pressure, criticism
- Mentor sense of closeness

## Caregiver involvement (data from parent follow-up survey)

- Parent satisfaction with the mentoring relationship



# How We Measured Relationship Quality

Construct	Items
<b>Conflict</b>	<p>A three item scale. Sample item: "My mentor and I disagree and quarrel (have upsetting arguments)."</p> <p><i>Response options range from 1=Not at All True to 4=Very True</i></p>
<b>Criticism</b>	<p>A three item scale. Sample item: "My mentor points out my faults or puts me down."</p> <p><i>Response options range from 1=Not at All to 4=Very True</i></p>
<b>Youth-Rated Closeness</b>	<p>Single item: "How close do you feel to your mentor?"</p> <p><i>Response options range from 1=Not Close at All to 4=Very Close.</i></p>
<b>Mentor-Rated Closeness</b>	<p>Single item: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following... I feel close with my mentee."</p> <p><i>Response options range from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree.</i></p>

# Peer sharing



## POLLING QUESTION:

**How are you currently identifying mentee needs in your program?**

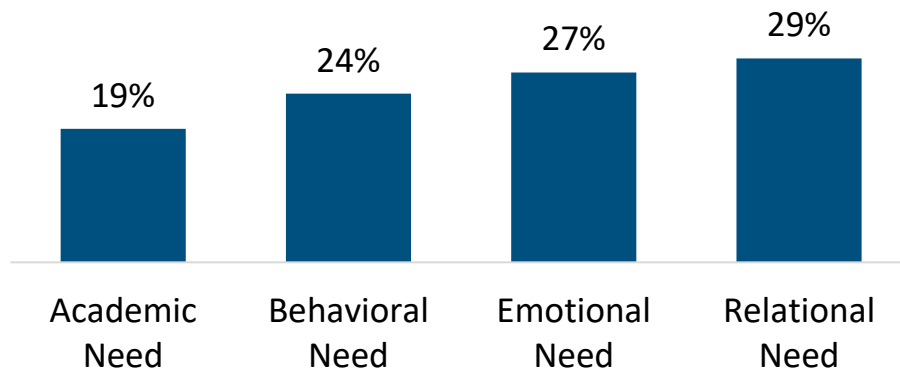
---

# FINDINGS

## Are youth coming to mentoring programs with significant needs?

A substantial proportion of youth who come to non-targeted mentoring programs have needs that put them at high risk for negative outcomes.

High Need Youth In Non-Targeted Programs

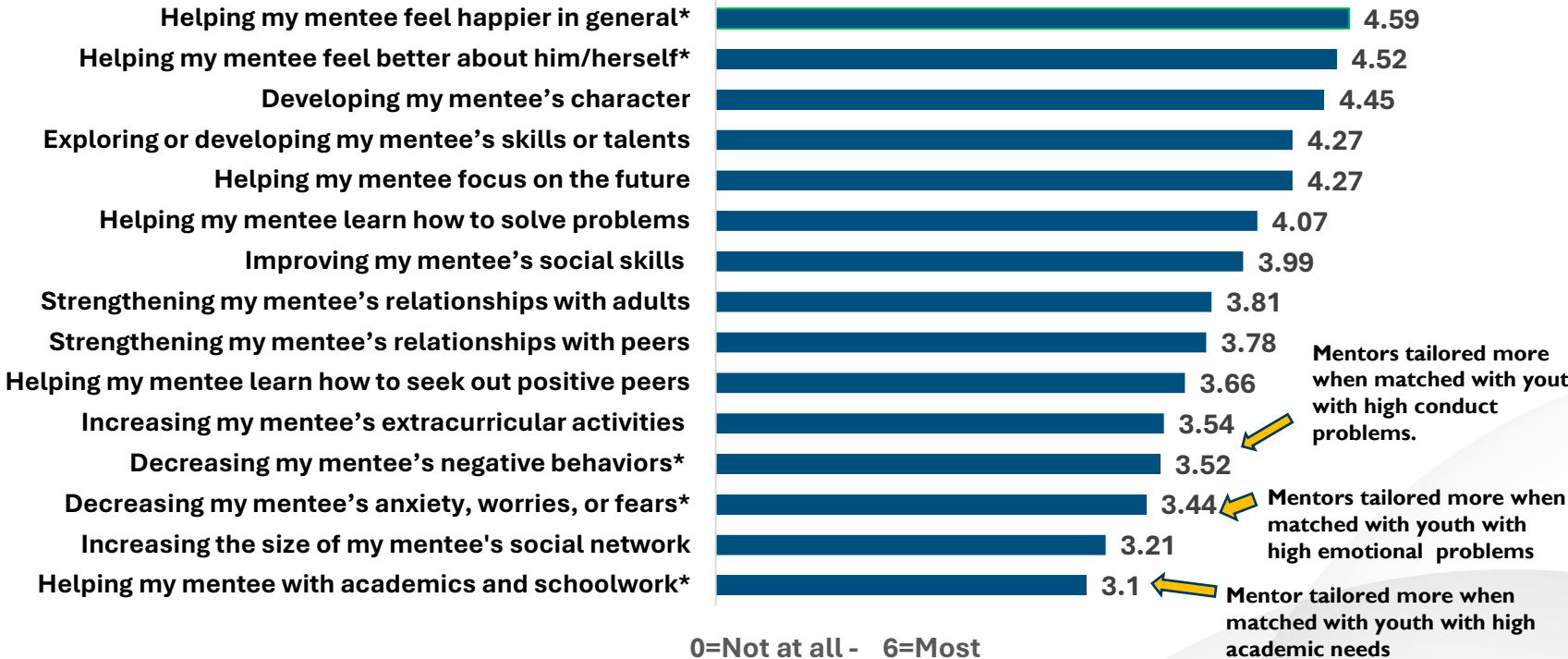


In general, 10% of the population meets the clinical cut point for behavioral, emotional, relational need.

# Are mentors tailoring their activities to address specific youth needs?

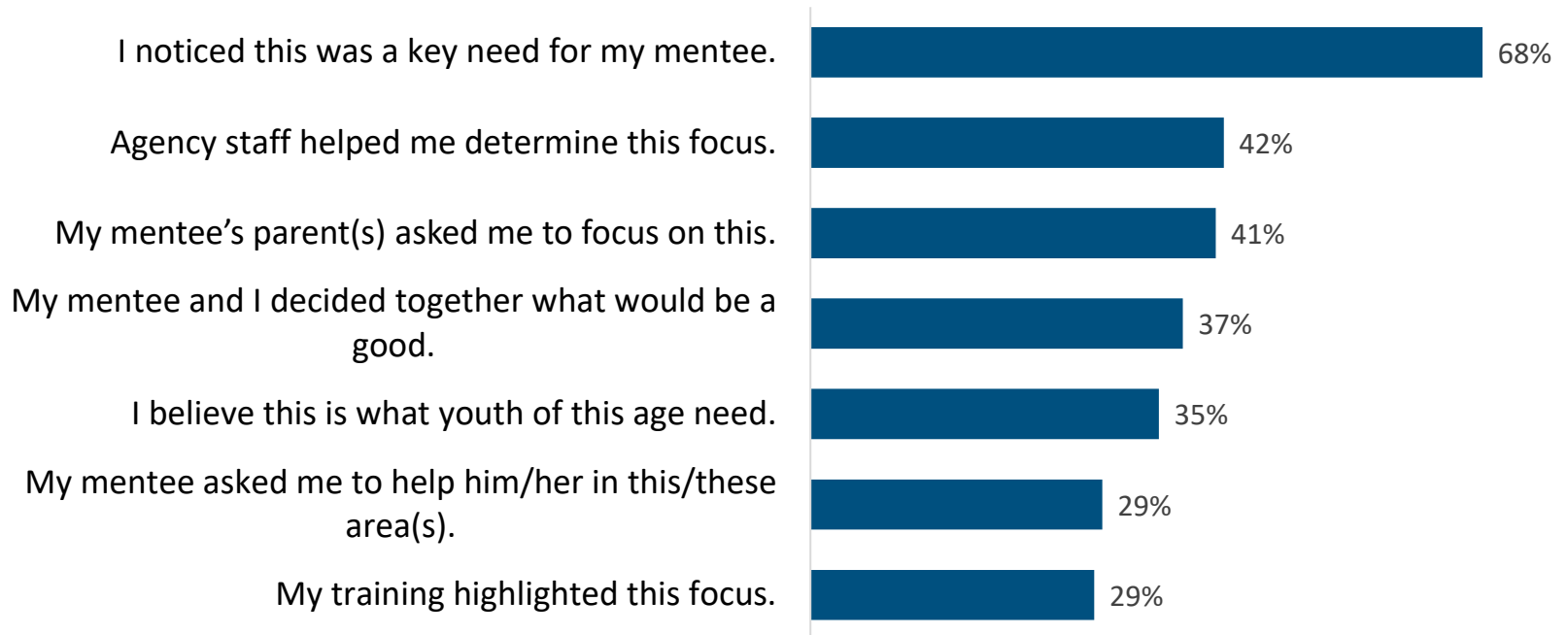
Most mentors focus on helping mentee feel happier and better about themselves. In general, they are more likely to focus on youth need when the youth's behavioral, emotional, or academic needs were high.

To what extent have you focused on ...



# How do mentors determine whether and how to tailor their activities?

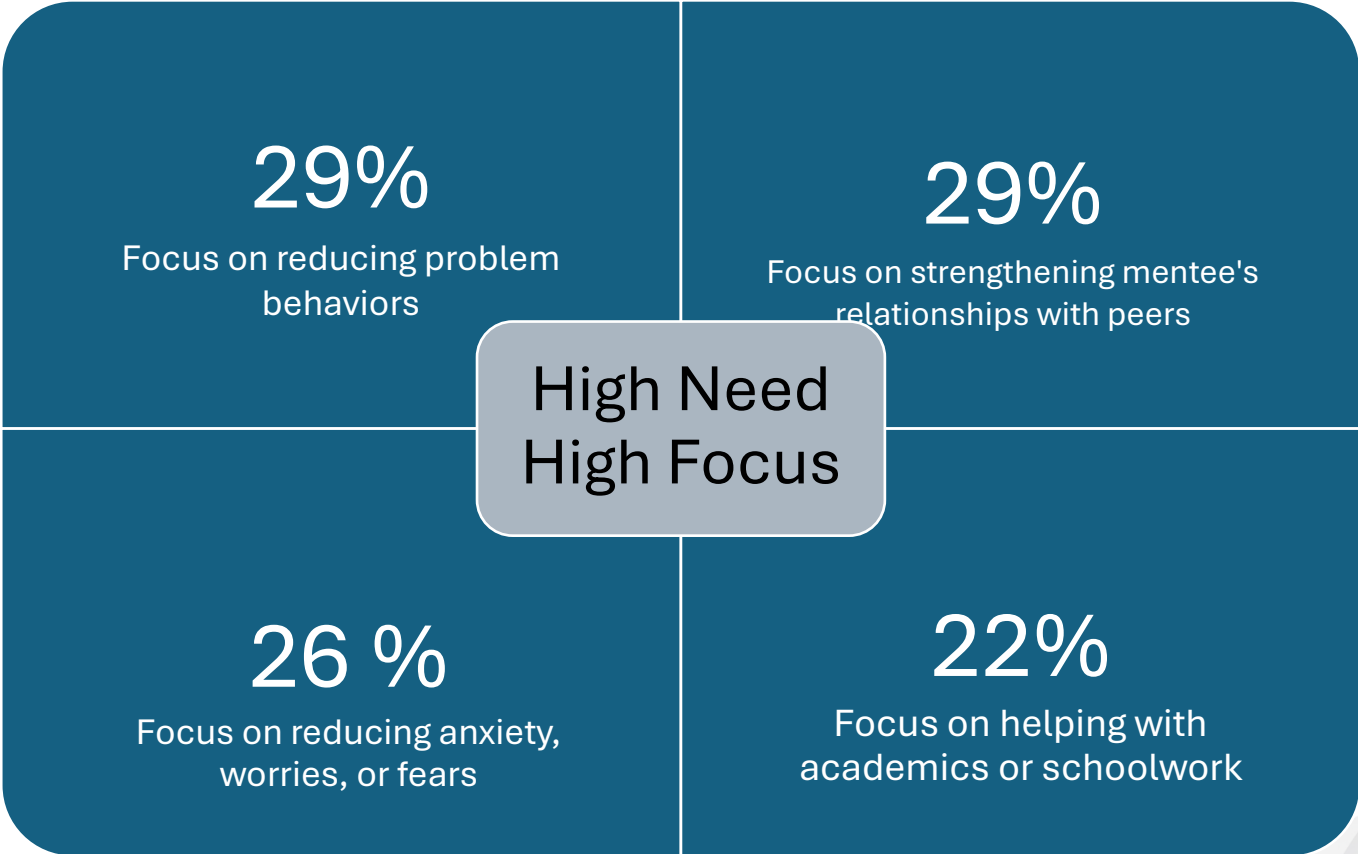
Mentors relied on multiple sources to determine their approach to addressing youth need. They most commonly relied on their own observations; agency staff and caregivers also influenced their focus.



<sup>1</sup>Mentors were asked to select all that apply.

# How Much Do Mentors Focus on Youth Needs?

When youth need (behavioral/emotional/relational/academic) is high and mentors say they focus a lot or most on that need



---

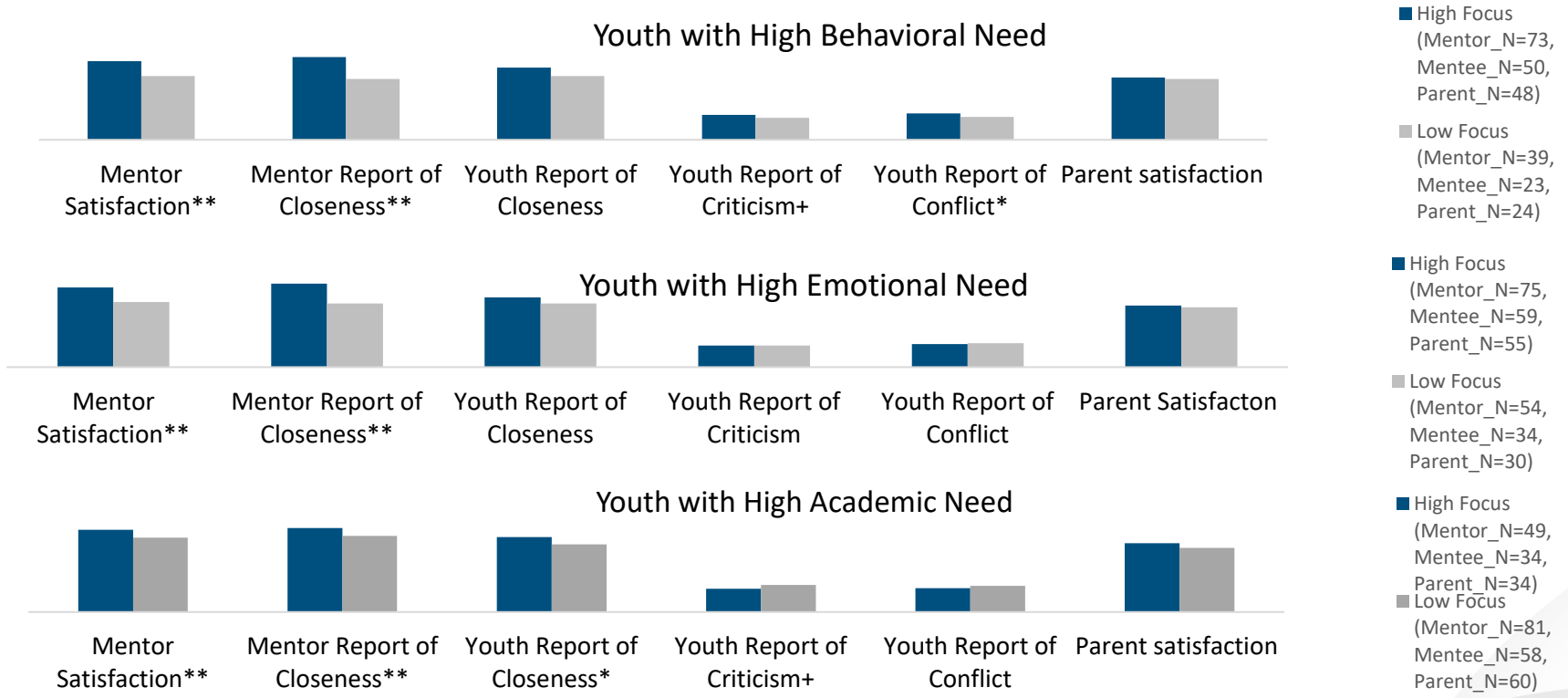
# POLLING QUESTION:



**How are you working with your mentors to help them tailor mentoring around their mentee's needs?**

# Is tailored mentoring associated with relationship quality?

Mentors who focused on the needs of their mentees felt closer to their mentee than those who were less focused. Youth with high levels of behavioral need experienced more conflict when mentor focus was high.

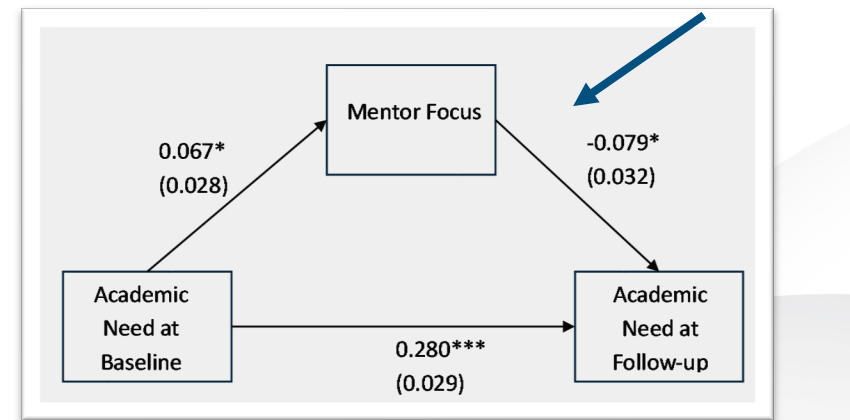
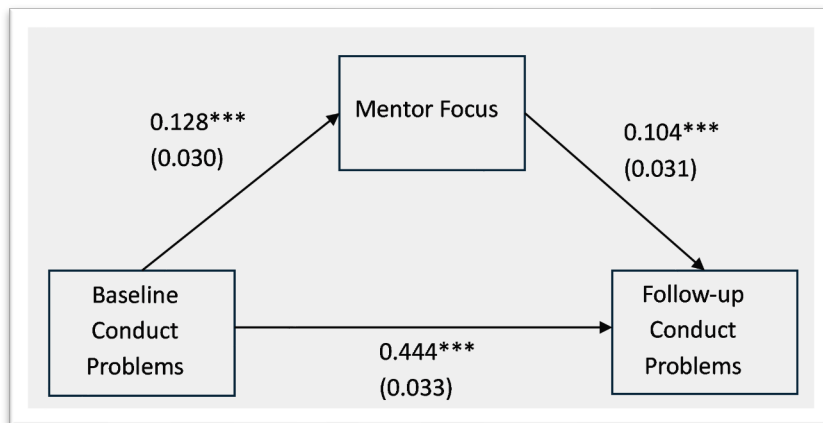


Groups are statistically different \*\* p<.001, \*p<.05, + p<.10

# Is tailored mentoring linked with more positive outcomes?

Tailored mentoring was linked with improvements in mentees' academic needs but not their behavioral or emotional needs.

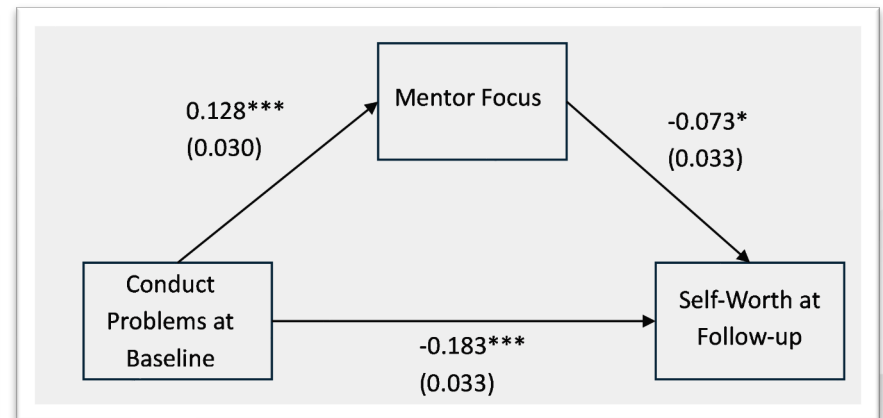
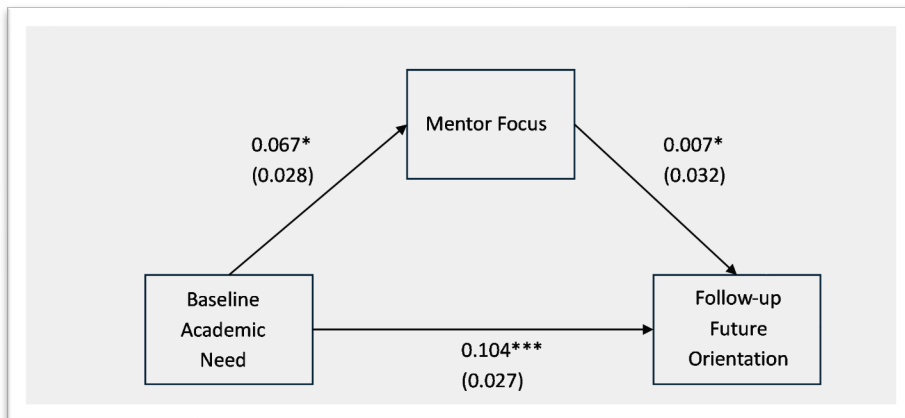
- Mentor focus on behavioral needs was associated with increased *behavioral need* at follow-up.
- Mentor focus on mentee's *academic needs* was linked with improvements in their self-reported GPA at follow-up. High-focus mentors boosted youth's grades more when youth rated their relationship as closer.



# Is tailored mentoring linked with more positive outcomes?

Tailored mentoring was linked with youth assets in two domains.

- Mentoring tailored to youth *academic needs* was associated with increases in youth's future orientation.
- Mentoring tailored to youth *conduct problems* was associated with reduced self-worth.



## IN SUMMARY...

---

- A considerable portion of the youth in non-targeted mentoring programs have substantial needs that may need targeted supports.
- Most mentors do not tailor their interactions to focus on the specific needs we assessed. However, they are more likely to do so when the youth's behavioral, emotional, or academic needs were high.
- Mentors relied on multiple sources to determine their approach to addressing youth need. They most commonly relied on their own observations; agency staff and caregivers also influenced their focus.
- Mentors who focused on the needs of their mentees felt closer to their mentee than those who were less focused. Youth with high levels of behavioral need experienced more conflict when mentor focus was high.
- Mentoring tailored to academic needs was linked with improvements in future orientation and improved GPA. Mentoring tailored to behavioral needs had negative associations with self-worth and youth conduct problems at follow-up.

## KEEP IN MIND!

---

- Our study included non-targeted programs; Findings are for *mentor-determined* tailoring within non-targeted programs.
- In this study, we defined “tailored mentoring” as focusing “a lot” or “most” on specific youth needs during mentoring interactions. Effective tailoring may differ depending on the youth’s needs.
- Both youth outcomes and tailored mentoring were measured at the same point in time (12 months after match started). We cannot determine whether the use of tailored mentoring caused—or was caused by—changes in youth needs over time.
- It is possible that behavioral and emotional needs are more difficult to address within the 12-month window that we focused on in this study, as they are often interrelated with many other experiences and may take more time to show improvement.

**What are the key takeaways for you?**

**What questions do these findings raise for you?**



- What do the findings mean for mentoring programs--recruitment, matching, training, support efforts?
- How much do you honor youth voice in determining what mentors should focus on?
- What kind of tools do you share with your mentors to help them avoid the “fixing reflex”?
- What are your experiences related to our findings on academic versus behavioral need?