



NATIONAL
MENTORING
RESOURCE CENTER
A Program of **OJJDP**

Involving Peers in Mentoring Activities and Services

Tim Cavell

Disclaimer

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We need to go back to go forward!

- The modern history of youth mentoring is essentially the history of BBBS.
- Started as a form of charity in 1904 by a judge working with delinquent youth.
- His aim: A positive adult role model for youth who lacked one,
 - Over time, post hoc theorizing was used to justify mentoring.
 - E.g., Emmy Werner's research on the children of Kauai.
 - Resilient youth had at least one supportive adult in their life.

BBBS 1995 “Impact Study”

- One of the first empirical studies of youth mentoring
- Positive findings from this randomized control trial were widely trumpeted!
 - Compared to controls, mentored youth were
 - 46% less likely to start using drugs,
 - 27% less likely to start using alcohol,
 - 33% less likely to hit someone.
 - Ignored was the fact that 44 effects were tested (uncorrected $p < .10$)
- These findings led to increased funding and rapid expansion of mentoring in the U.S.
 - 1999-2006, BBBS quadrupled its ***school-based*** mentoring programs

But More Science Brought More Questions

- Evaluation of US federally funded ***School Mentoring Program*** (Bernstein et al., 2009; N = 2,570)
 - Found no benefits for mentoring across 17 different outcomes.
 - Federal funding was cut by the Obama administration as a result.
- Evaluation of BBBS school-based mentoring program (N = 1,139)
 - Found similarly disappointing results (Herrera et al., 2011).
 - 31 outcomes tested, only 3 statistically significant
 - Average effect across outcomes was small ($\sim d = .05$)

50 Years of Modest Effects: Meta-analyses (1960 to 2011)

- Stein (1987):
 - 1960-1985, 19 studies, Mean effect sizes = .15 & .22
- DuBois et al. (2002):
 - 1970-1998, 55 studies, effect sizes, Mean effect sizes = .14 & .18
- Eby et al. (2007):
 - 1985 – 2006, 116 studies, Mean effect sizes = .03 to .14
- DuBois et al. (2011):
 - 1999 To 2010, 73 studies, Mean effect size = .21
- Tolan et al. (2013):
 - 1970 To 2011, 46 (mainly delinquency) studies, Mean effect size = .18

Today: Mentoring is at a Crossroads

- “Arguments seemingly could be made for or against continued investments in school-based mentoring as a strategy for promoting resilience among at-risk youth” (p. 6).

➤ Wheeler et al. (2010)
“*Review of Three Recent Randomized
Trials of School-Based Mentoring Making Sense of Mixed Findings*”
SRCD Social Policy Report

A Reckoning for The Field of Youth Mentoring

- Rhodes (2020, Older and Wiser):
 - "Overall, youth mentoring programs are not nearly as effective as most people assume, particularly when compared to other interventions with youth. Findings from large-scale randomized control trials, meta-analyses, and recent cost- benefit studies present a disappointing bottom line, with relatively weak effects that have not budged in decades." (p. 5)

Back to the Future: Mentoring as Means and End in Promoting Child Mental Health

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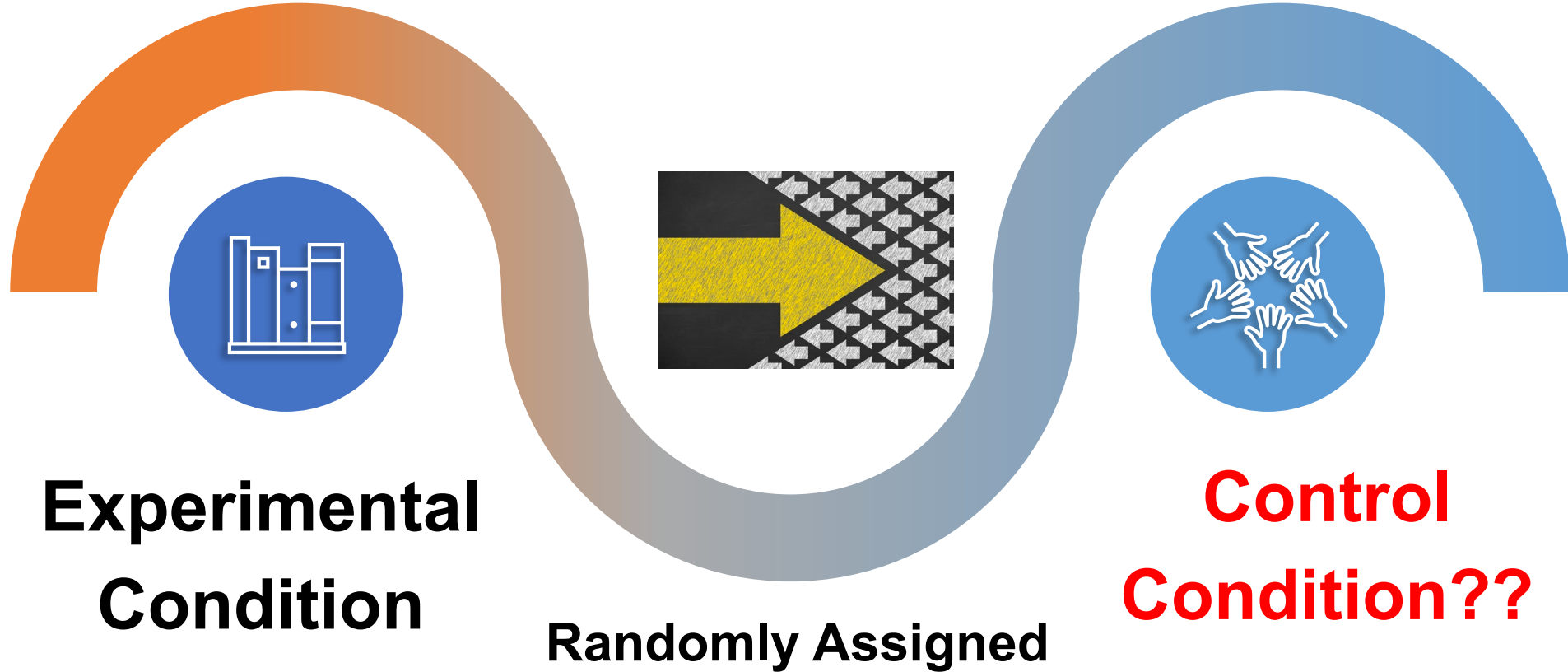
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... tool for prevention and intervention, but it has
... and adolescent psychologists. For decades, the
... paced its underlying science, and meta-analytic studies
... The field is now at an important crossroads: Continue
... widely used models of mentoring or shift to alternative models that are
... the tenets of prevention science. Presented here is a *bilateral* framework to
... science and practice of mentoring going forward. Our premise is that mentoring
... can serve as both means to a targeted end and as a valued end unto itself. We
... present a functional typology of current mentoring programs (supportive, problem-focused,
& transitional) and call for greater specification of both the process and expected outcomes
of mentoring. Finally, we argue that efforts to leverage mentoring relationships in service of
youth development and the promotion of child and adolescent mental health will likely
require disrupting the science, practice, and policy that surrounds youth mentoring.

- Offered a new way to frame the work of youth mentoring, encompassing both mentoring-as-relationship AND mentoring-as-context.
- A Bilateral Framework:
 - Mentoring as an end to itself
 - &
 - Mentoring as means to an end.

My “Fake” Mentoring Program



PrimeTime

Multi-component intervention

- 3 semesters of community-based mentoring with highly trained, closely supervised mentors
- 3 semesters of supportive consultation with teachers at school
- 3 semesters of supportive consultation with parent at home
- 2 semesters of social problem-solving skills training for children
- Case manager oversight

Two Conditions



Common to Both Conditions

- Both conditions spanned three academic semesters.
- Both relied on college student mentors enrolled in a service-learning course.
- Both used course credit and class grades as contingencies to ensure consistent visits and virtually eliminate the risk of early termination.

Lunch Buddy

Stand alone mentoring

- 3 semesters of school-based mentoring
- Minimally trained mentors
- All visits in the school cafeteria (lunchroom)
- Mentors sat at the lunch table with their mentee AND lunchmates
- Children matched with a new mentor each semester

Study Participants

- Nominated by 2nd & 3rd grade teachers (N = 152)
 - "A child who starts fights, picks on other children, teases, tells means lies about others, or excludes others from their group."
- Inclusion criteria:
 - $> 70T$ on the Aggressive Behavior subscale of the Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1991),
 - ≥ 2 SDs above the classroom mean on peer-nominated overt or relational aggression
- Tri-ethnic sample (White, Black, Hispanic)

Measures

- Teacher, parent, peer reports of aggression
- Teacher, parent, peer, mentor reports of relationship quality
- Assessment Pre-Treatment, Post-Treatment, and @ 1 Year Follow-up

Key Outcomes

- As expected, PT > LB for child-rated mentor support
- Post-mentoring: Both groups improved (PT = LB)
- At follow up, significant Time X Treatment effects: **All significant effects: LB > PT!!**
 - Better teacher-student relationships
 - Higher school engagement & school belonging
 - LB more effective than PT for children in *high* adversity schools



Evidence for Weakening the Mentor-Mentee Relationship (Pryce et al., 2015)

- Mentor: *“The largest obstacles that I had to overcome to get closer to [my mentee] were the other children. They were all very talkative, outgoing kids. They would all fight for my attention from the moment I walked in the door. It took a while for me to ask [my mentee] a question, and actually get an answer from her and not all of the other children.”*

But evidence also for unanticipated processes:

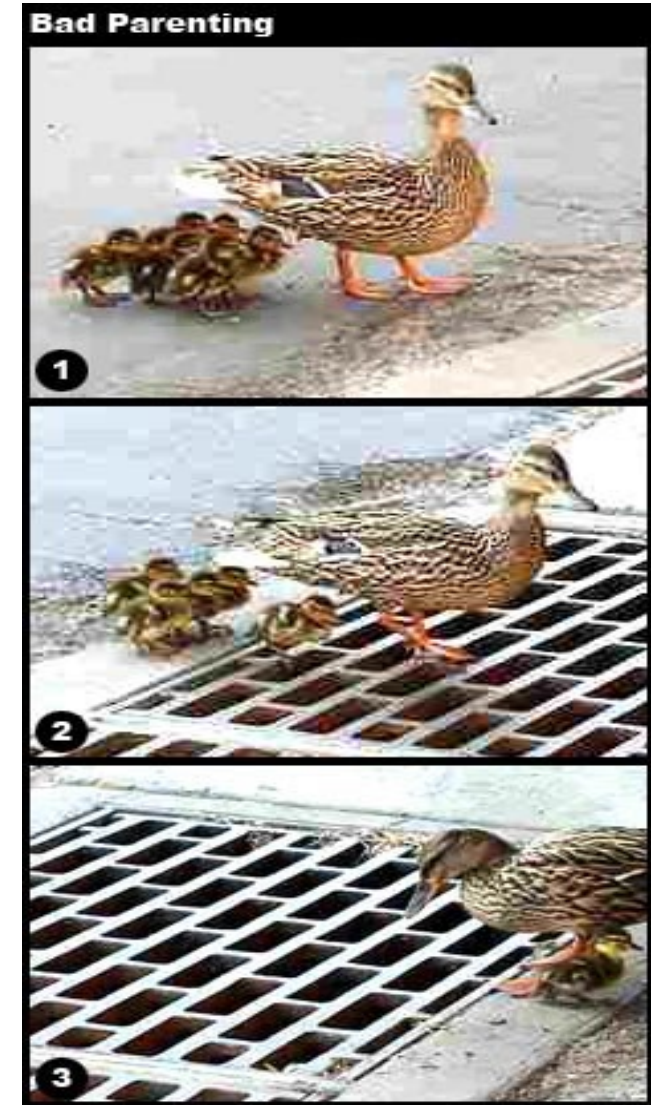
- Mentor: *“Some occasions there were kids who would ask me if I was his friend or parent. One time a student asked why did I want to sit with him. Each time I responded that he was my friend, and I thought it was pretty cool that I got to sit with him at lunch. The students who asked would look like they were shocked, then they began to sit next to us on every visit. It was amazing how their little attitudes or thoughts towards my mentee changed by me saying I was his friend, and I like sitting with him.”*

But evidence also for unanticipated processes (cont.):

- Mentor: *“I made sure that while a majority of my conversations were solely focused on my little girl, I included the other children in the conversations we were having. At first, I noticed each of the girls at the table tried to out-talk one another in attempts to get my attention. Slowly but surely, however, the girls and my mentee started taking turns to say what they needed to say. Although they still sometimes interrupted one another, they improved greatly.”*

Are mentors “agents of socialization”? (Elledge & Cavell, 2025)

- 2 ways to view “socialization.”
- For parents, teachers, & mentors
 - Socialization is the process of helping youth participate in prosocial contexts while limiting their involvement in contexts that promote problematic behavior.



Are mentors “agents of socialization”? (Elledge & Cavell, 2025)

- For youth,
 - Socialization is the process of finding and participating in contexts that offer greater and more reliable payoffs than other contexts.



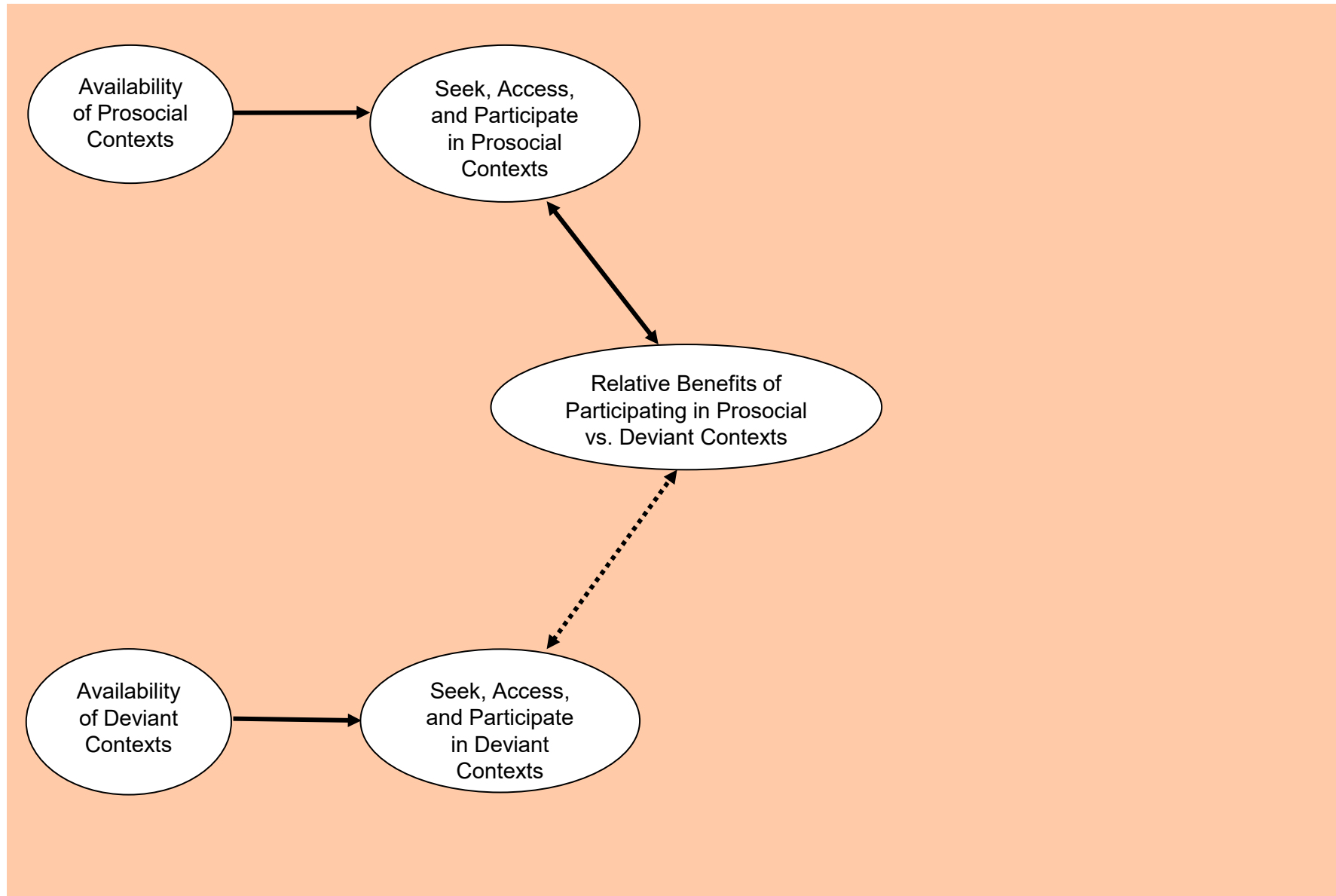
What are the implications of these 2 views?

- Youth are active players in their own development
- Socialization is not a simple, top-down (adult → youth) process
- Youth will invest in contexts that offer reliable payoffs and a sense of belonging
- Prosocial contexts (e.g., home, school, mentoring) compete with other contexts (e.g., delinquency-prone peers) for youth's time and attention

Prosocial Contexts Are Neither Randomly Distributed nor Equally Accessible

- Some youth cannot readily access prosocial contexts (e.g., sports, choir) but can access problematic contexts (gangs)
- Some youth have limited success in prosocial contexts (e.g., school) but find “success” in problematic contexts (e.g., hanging out with peers who smoke or drink)
- Thus, some youth will prefer to spend time in delinquency-promoting contexts

Prosocial and Deviant Contexts



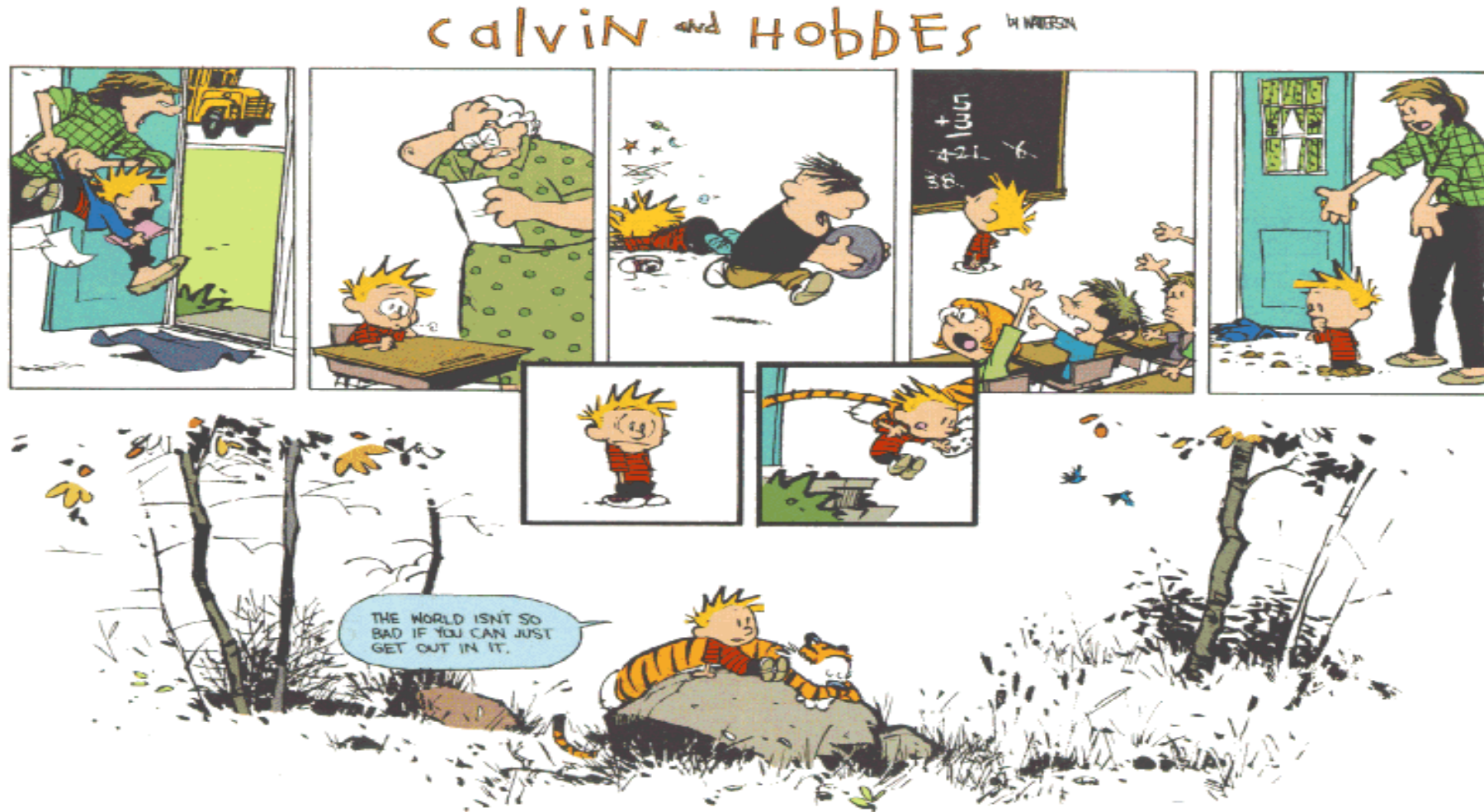
Poor Self-Regulation Can Impede Socialization



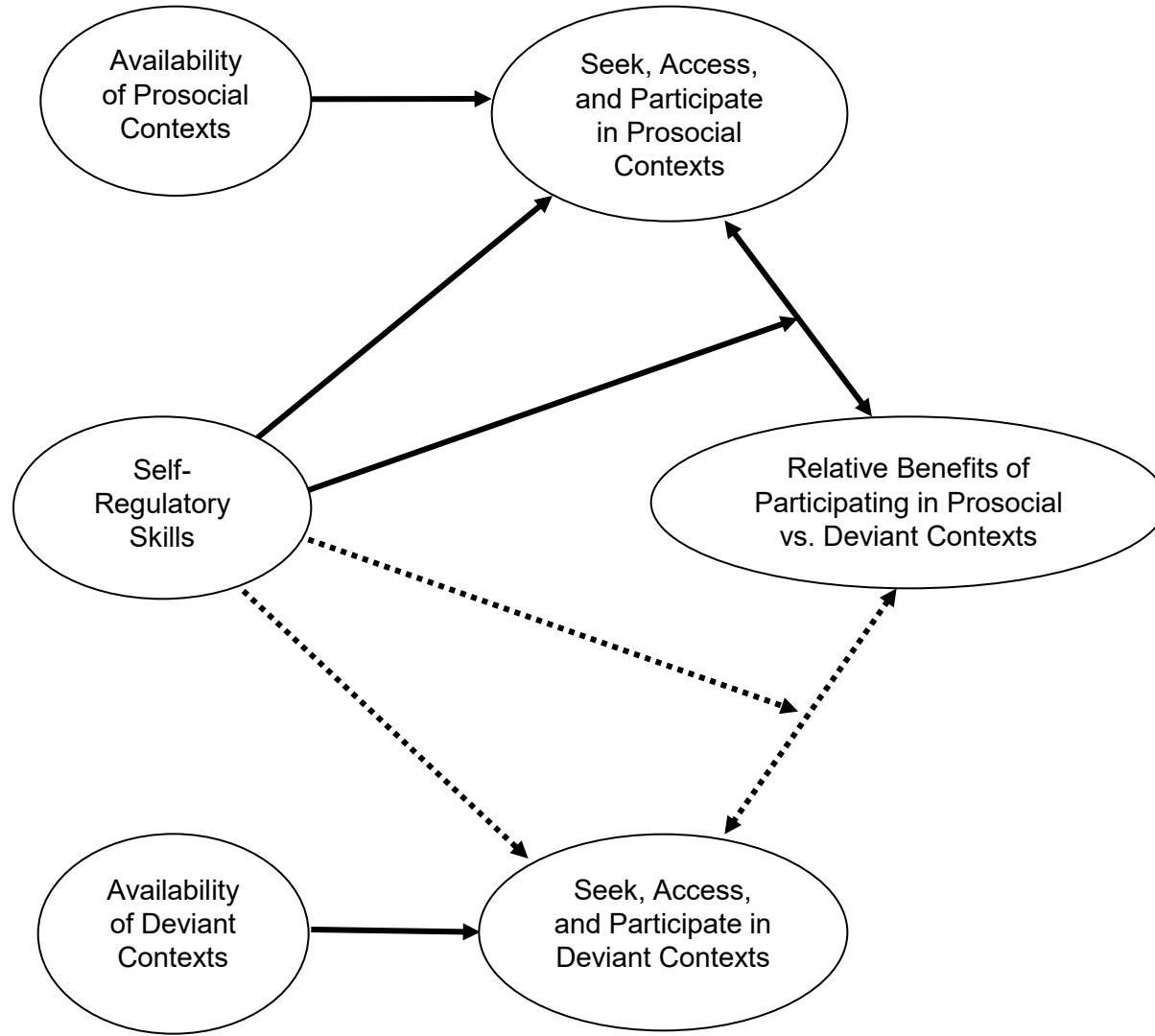
Youth with Poor Self-Regulation

- Less success in prosocial contexts
- Relatively greater success in contexts that promote delinquency
- Less access to future prosocial contexts
- Less time spent in future prosocial contexts

Prosocial Contexts Often Require Self-Regulatory Skills



The Role of Self-Regulation



Risk for Delinquency Varies by Age

- Mild to Moderate Risk:
 - Difficult toddlers or defiant preschoolers
- Highest Risk:
 - Coercive, School Age youth (**Early Starters**)
- Mild to Moderate Risk:
 - Adolescent-onset delinquents (**Late Starters**)

Focused on “EARLY STARTERS”

Likelihood of moving on to delinquency for “early starters”
(Patterson et al., 1989)



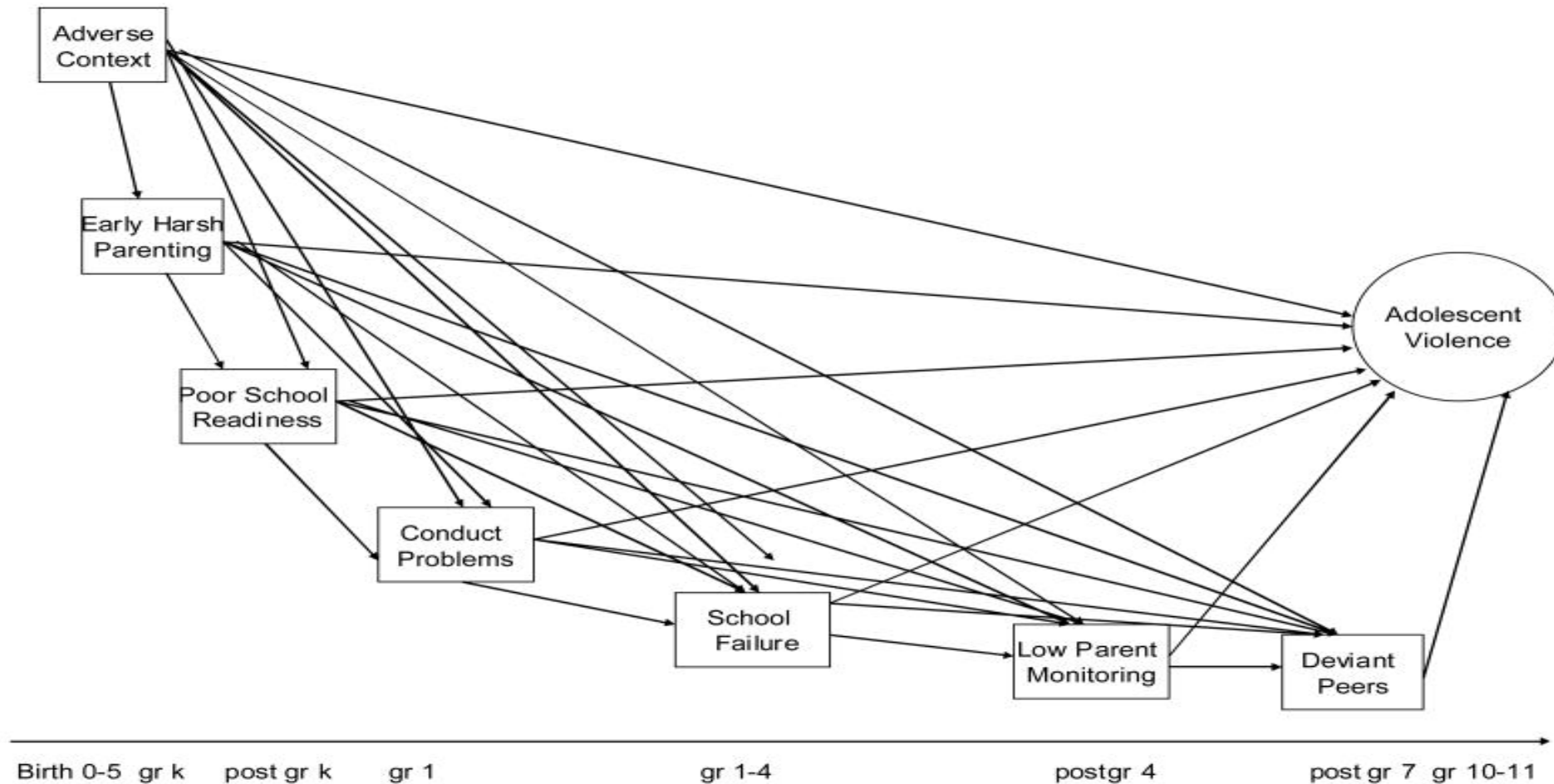
The Risk Trajectory of Early Starters

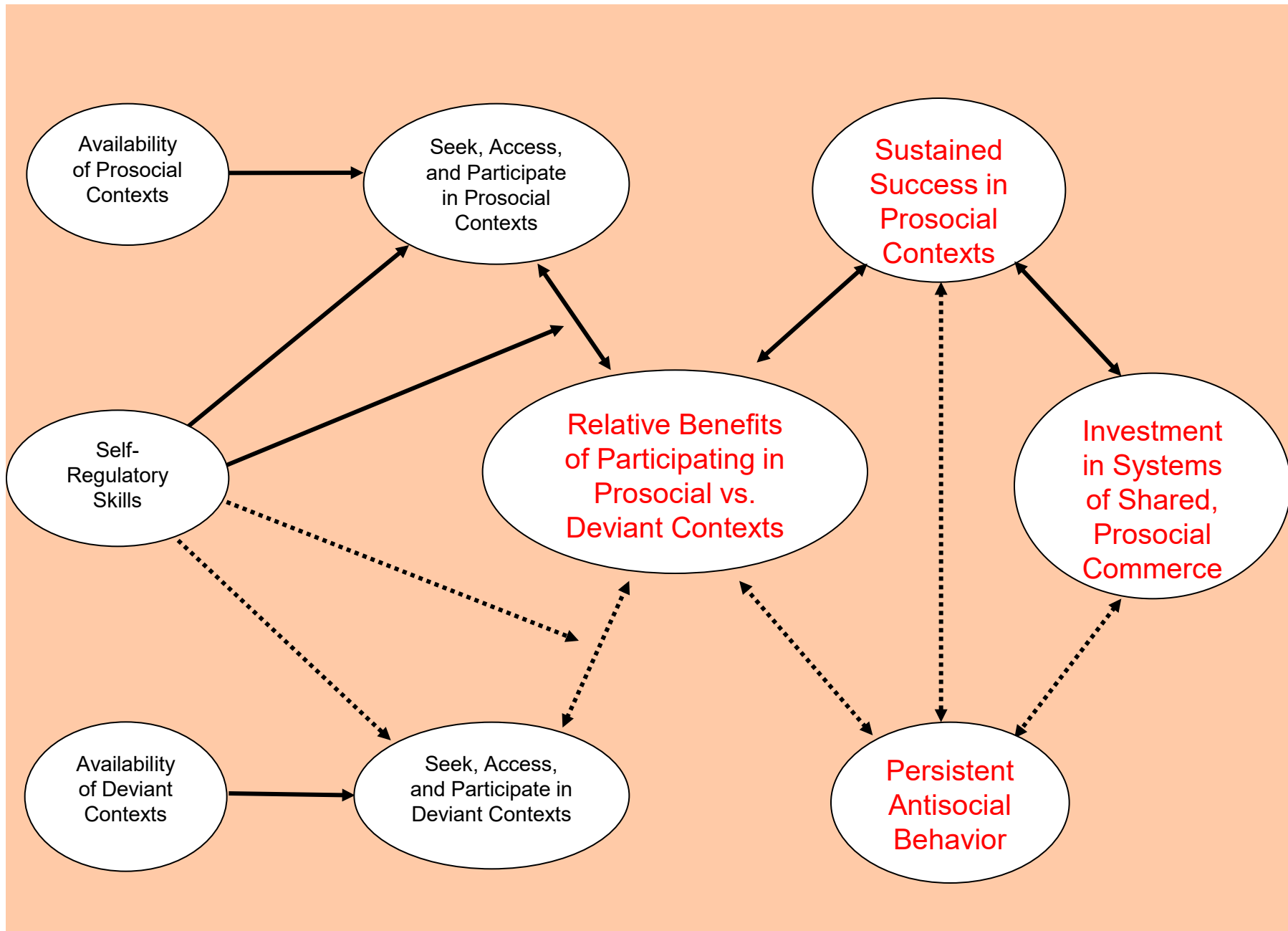
- Difficult to discipline & monitor
- Disliked by peers
- Disliked by teachers
- Divest from prosocial contexts
- Associate with delinquency-prone peers
- Engage in delinquent acts with peers

I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL! I HATE SCHOOL! I'D RATHER DO ANYTHING THAN GO TO SCHOOL!



Dynamic Cascade Model of the Development of Serious Violence in Adolescence (Dodge et al, 2008)





“Shopping” for Friends (Dishion & Patterson, 2015)

- “[Critical in the antisocial developmental process] is the role of deviance in forming the glue of friendships.
- When deviance is functional for keeping a relationship together, it remains a primary ‘shopping’ strategy.
- The practice of aversive pain control [coercion] in the family undermines relationships and entrains response patterns that facilitate the emergence of antisocial behavior in other settings, such as schools (with teachers and peers).
- Eventually...children develop peer groups that encourage problem behavior and even plan and collude to commit antisocial acts.”



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Can Mentoring Alter the Process of Shopping for “Deviant” Friends?: Key Questions

1. Is Mentoring a Prosocial Context?

- A context is prosocial to the extent
 - Delinquent behavior is neither encouraged nor condoned
 - Prosocial behavior is sufficiently rewarded
 - Delinquent behavior is reliably restricted
- Presumably, screening & training ensure that mentoring is a prosocial context.

2. Is Mentoring a Compelling Context?

- Mentoring is compelling or competitive if youth willingly and repeatedly invest time and energy into mentor visits
- Mentoring is likely not competitive or compelling
 - If mentors struggle to schedule visits
 - If mentees are often reluctant to meet
 - If mentees withdraw from the program
 - If mentors lose interest in mentoring

3. Can Mentors Compete with Other Contexts?

- Mentors compete when visits are fun and engaging.
- Mentors compete when not overly focused on achieving goals, teaching lessons, or correcting misbehavior.
- Mentors compete when visits involve enjoyable activities with prosocial peers.
- Peer engagement runs counter to mentoring that is cast strictly & narrowly as a one-on-one relationship.

4. What Does Peer-Engaged Mentoring Look Like?

- For youth with prosocial friends:
 - Mentoring activities that routinely involve 1 or more friends
 - Mentoring activities that successfully engage the interest of these youth
 - Mentors being curious about peer norms, beliefs, behaviors
 - Mentors modeling prosocial behavior and beliefs
- For youth who lack prosocial friends:
 - Actively seeking to connect mentees with prosocial peers and positive youth activities

5. Options for Safely Accommodating Peer Engagement?

- For youth with prosocial friends:
 - Group mentoring that deliberately recruits & enrolls youth who are currently friends
 - Traditional mentoring that co-enrolls an invited friend
 - Train & support mentors in peer engagement

- For youth who lack prosocial friends:
 - Group mentoring that emphasizes the formation of prosocial friendships among mentees
 - Traditional mentoring in which mentors “shepherd” youth into and through positive youth activities.
 - Train & support mentors in peer engagement

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