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Critical Elements of Mentoring

This resource is one of several topics addressed in the Shining Light on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding. The toolkit is designed to be a resource for multidisciplinary professionals, policy makers, volunteers, faith communities, and others involved in anti-trafficking work. While the information provided on each topic is in no way exhaustive, you will find additional resources to facilitate further study.

Each topic is addressed in three sections. First, the “what?”— what we know about the topic which includes a review of what we know from both research and the field. “So what?” addresses what this means – the reason this information is important to understand and how it will enhance our response to trafficking. “Now what?” considers the implications of this information in practice - how the information can be used to enhance our response to human trafficking. This includes specific implications for mentoring relationships, when applicable.

What?

Well-developed mentoring programs offer youth the chance to develop stable, positive relationships (Anastasia, Skinner & Mundhenk, 2012; Dang & Miller, 2013; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang & Noam, 2006; Spencer & Grossman, 2013; Swartz, Rhodes, Larson, 2006). Such relationships can be important in helping youth achieve their goals. A history of childhood abuse and neglect is common among victim/survivors of commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC) (Clarke R. J., Clarke E. A., Roe-Sepowitz & Fey 2012; Havlicek, Huston, Boughton, and Zhang, 2016) and many have never experienced safe, stable, and positive relationships with adults. Mentoring relationships can help repair some past damage while teaching victims/survivors about healthy relationships and boundaries (Dubois & Felner, 2016).

In order to be truly effective, mentoring programs must be thoughtfully designed. Research has shown that programs lacking clear guidelines, policies, and procedures can often cause more harm than good with vulnerable populations (Spencer, Collins, Ward & Smashnaya, 2010). Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring (Garringer, Kupersmidt, Rhodes, Stelter, & Tai, 2015) was developed through a collaboration of researchers and experienced practitioners to provide a roadmap for program that guides program design and implementation. First created in 1990 under the leadership of MENTOR and the United Way of America, EEPM is now in its fourth edition, and is widely used throughout the mentoring world to ensure that mentoring programs are safe and effective. Informed by a combination of research and practice-based knowledge, the EEPM identifies standards in each of six components of program design that agencies should include in all mentor programs: Recruitment, Screening, Training, Matching, Monitoring and Support, and Closure.

Understanding the essential elements of an effective mentoring program is critical in establishing successful programs that make an impact. Programs that lack the identified essential elements of mentoring could cause harm, and even hinder a youth’s willingness to engage in positive relationships. The essential elements of mentoring outlined in EEPM are:

• Recruitment

— Recruiting the right volunteers is fundamental to a successful mentoring program. Programs should have a solid recruitment plan that includes program requirements (time commitment, goals and activities, and criteria for mentor participation), and identifies multiple sources for mentors, including businesses, faith-based communities, colleges and universities, and social/community service organizations. Additional strategies may be needed if the program plans to recruit survivors as mentors. (See Mentor Readiness for more information)

— Programs must also consider where they will find their mentees. If the program will be serving youth who have experienced sexual exploitation, what will criteria be for participation? Part of implementing a successful mentoring program involves building strong connections with local stakeholders (e.g., schools and hospitals, as well as recreational, residential, and detention facilities, etc.) who share and will promote the mentoring program’s purpose and vision (Scannapieco & Painter, 2014). These partnerships can connect eligible mentees to the mentoring program.
• **Screening**

— For the development of positive mentoring relationships, it is critical for mentors to possess the knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage with youth and service providers. Mentoring programs should look for certain characteristics in potential mentors such as their willingness to commit to an ongoing relationship (Scannapieco & Painter, 2014).

— Proper screening is important in ensuring the safety of the program participants. The mentor screening process should include a thorough background check that includes criminal history, child abuse and neglect, and a search of the national sex offender registry. Programs should consider the specific criminal charges that would prevent someone from becoming a mentor, particularly if they are recruiting survivors for this role. Survivors of sexual exploitation often have charges on their record related to their previous circumstances.

— A completed application provides detailed information about the mentor and is the first step in the mentor’s commitment to the opportunity. An in-person interview provides additional information about mentor readiness and attitude toward mentoring. In addition to mentor screening, youth should also be screened to determine their level of interest, and ability to participate in the program.

— Screening mentors prior to training and matching allows the program to ensure that the individual is a good fit. This is particularly important for mentors that will be working with survivors of sexual exploitation due to the past trauma and challenging circumstances that mentees have experienced. It is important to understand mentors’ motivations and expectations for the mentoring relationship, as well as how their own past experiences might impact the relationship.

• **Training**

— Pre-match training has been identified as a key practice for effective mentoring programs (Anastasia, 2012; Dubois, et al., 2002; & Higley, et al., 2014). In addition to providing foundational information about mentoring and agency policies, pre-match training provides another opportunity for assessing mentor readiness and appropriateness. Many programs also include a pre-match training opportunity for youth in order to clarify expectations, address any concerns, and enhance their understanding of program policies.

— Mentoring programs also have an obligation to provide training in cultural competence and gender sensitivity so as to raise each mentor’s awareness of their own biases and blind spots (Liang & Grossman, 2007; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Although training mentors prior to engaging with youth is helpful, it should not stop there. Continuous training for mentors on topics that enhance, support, and guide a youth’s capacity for growth can significantly affect mentoring outcomes (Dubois, et al., 2002; Larsen, 2006; Scannapieco & Painter, 2014).

"The Stages of Change is an important model to consider with regards to Critical Elements of Mentoring."

*(Boddy, Agillias, & Gray, 2012)*
• **Training (cont.)**

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— In addition to traditional training, mentors who will be matched with victim/survivors of sexual exploitation should receive considerable training in the realities of commercial sex activity, the needs of their mentees, strategies for establishing trust, and how to handle the ups and downs of these youths’ often unstable and transitory lives. Research suggests that training mentors to be “genuine, non-judgmental, caring, and collaborative in their approach” is also essential.

— Given the importance that practical concerns such as education and employment are likely to facilitate positive developmental trajectories for this population, training might also prove to be valuable to foster the development of mentors’ skills for advocacy and resource brokering (Garringer, Kupersmidt, Rhodes, Stelter, & Tai, 2015).

• **Matching and Initiating**

— Research suggests that collaborative mentoring relationships are more likely to persevere. Collaborative mentoring relationships are established when mentors and mentees are matched by having similar interests, gender, and ethnic or racial backgrounds, or when mentees are included in selecting their mentors (Farruggia, et al., 2011; Schwartz, et al., 2013; Scannapieco & Painter, 2014).

— Available research also makes it clear that victim/survivors and professionals dedicated to serving this population tend to see great value in care providers having personal “lived experience” with commercial sex activity themselves (Barnitz, 2001; Brubns, 2014; Williams & Frederick, 2009).

— Research shows that mentoring relationships that consist of frequent contact, social and emotional support, and guidance are associated with a youth’s positive outcomes in academics, behavior, social relationships, and self-concept (Dubois, et al., 2002; Schwartz, et al., 2013; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

— Initiating a match occurs through an introduction meeting that would include the parent/caregiver (when appropriate), youth, parent/caregiver (when appropriate) mentor, and a program staff member. This meeting includes a conversation regarding expectations for the relationship, and about activities that may be of interest to the mentor and mentee.

• **Monitoring and Support**

— It is essential for programs to monitor match activities and provide ongoing support to both the mentor and the mentee. Program staff should check in with mentors and mentees at least once per month to ensure that the match is progressing well and no issues have come up that might impact safety or hinder the relationship.
• **Monitoring and Support (cont.)**

— Monitoring can also provide a support system for mentors, who should be encouraged to practice self-care to avoid burnout. Mentoring youth who have experienced sexual exploitation can be stressful, particularly when victim/survivors are still working to obtain physical, mental, and emotional stability. Program staff can provide suggestions to enhance the match relationship, as well as to recognize milestones and accomplishments.

— Gathering input from mentored youth will ensure that mentoring is addressing their needs and is effective at improving the areas in the youths’ lives that put them at risk for delinquency, victimization, drug use, and other negative influences (Scannapieco & Painter, 2014). Checking in with both the mentee and the mentor provides an added layer of accountability for the match, as one can verify the other’s report.

— When appropriate, the parent/caregiver/caring adult should also be contacted for their input and observations about how their child seems to be experiencing the mentoring relationship. Often their support is critical to the longevity of the match relationship.

— Information gathered from contacts can be considered for trends that inform program planning around training and structured activities.

— Documenting the information gathered during these contacts allows consistency over time and assists when staff transitions occur. It also provides a record of the program’s due diligence in ensuring youth safety.

• **Closure**

— Formal mentoring relationships do have an end, whether it is planned in the case of a time-limited program, or due to changing circumstances of either the mentor or mentee. Creating a process for match closure can turn the ending of the relationship into an opportunity for a “positive, if painful, learning experience” (Keller, 2005, p. 95). It can also help celebrate accomplishments of the mentee over the course of the program, and set the stage for any future informal friendship the pair might want to maintain.

• **Recruitment**

— Connecting with community stakeholders and organizations that have similar values is essential for finding mentors and mentees, particularly in working with victim/survivors of CSEC. It is important to ensure that potential mentors have an understanding of the realities that victims/survivors might have experienced, offer an attitude of caring and respect, and enter the relationship to support growth and healing. By partnering with like-minded agencies, mentoring programs gain access to professionals and volunteers who are already familiar with the work and the youth served.

— Victims/survivors of CSEC are often involved in various service systems; therefore, collaborative partnerships are critical to the success of the program. Established partnerships enable service providers to work together more efficiently, sharing referrals, and assisting youth with access to services.

• **Screening**

— Screening ensures that both mentors and mentees are ready for a mentoring relationship. Some victim/survivors of CSEC may need time to gain a sense of safety and stability prior to connecting with a mentor.
• **Screening** (cont.)

  — Mentoring relationships that end prematurely can have negative effects on youth. Screening can prevent mentors and mentees from entering into a mentoring relationship before they are ready (Scannapieco & Painter, 2014).

  — Checking criminal background, DMV records, and references are all part of ensuring that mentors can be safe and positive role models. Screening is an important part of risk management for a program, and should be guided by clear and thorough policies and procedures. This includes considering what criminal charges may disqualify someone from being a mentor. This is particularly true if the organization is recruiting survivors as mentors, as they may have criminal background related to their experiences of sexual exploitation.

• **Training**

  — Pre-match and ongoing training act as support systems for mentors (Dubois, et al., 2002; Larsen, 2006; Scannapieco & Painter, 2014). Training gives both mentors and mentees the tools to succeed. Without training, mentors could run into unnecessary obstacles, be unsure of how to approach situations, and ultimately be unclear about their role. Likewise, without training, a mentee may be unsure of what to expect in a mentoring relationship and how to properly engage. Training provides a solid foundation for both mentors and mentees.

  — Mentors who received pre-match training prior to working with victim/survivors of CSEC met more frequently with their mentee and were more likely to have a match that lasted at least 12 months. In addition, youth paired with these mentors rated their mentoring relationship as being of higher quality (DuBois, D., Felner, J., 2016)

• **Matching/Initiating**

  — Shared interests and shared identities (i.e. gender, race, and ethnicity) within the mentor/mentee pair often results in a more successful relationship (Farruggia, et al., 2011; Scannapieco & Painter, 2014; Schwartz, et al., 2013). With this in mind, providers should have a diverse pool of mentors that reflect its mentee population. However, there is no guarantee that a mentee will connect with someone solely based on an observed similarity. When possible, mentees should be invited into the matching process.

  — Shared life experiences, particularly with mentees who have experienced CSEC, may be beneficial in the mentor/mentee relationship. Survivors can speak to the experience of exploitation as no one else can and instill hope in the survivors they work with (Countryman-Roswurm, 2015; K.P., personal communication, November 28, 2016).

  — Frequent contact between mentee and mentor is necessary to develop and maintain a successful relationship. During the match introduction meeting, include discussion of preferences for coordinating activities and for general communication.

• **Monitoring/Support**

  — Mentoring is a difficult job, and the trauma victim/survivors of CSEC have experienced may cause additional challenges in the mentoring relationship. There will be times when mentors need extra support. Providers/program staff should not only prepare mentors to navigate the mentoring relationship itself, but also offer help and resources that will prevent burnout.

  — Programs are designed for the youth, so input from them is critical to understand how the mentoring relationship is working (Scannapieco & Painter, 2014).
• Monitoring/Support (cont.)

— Monitoring provides the opportunity to offer information about other resources and services that could assist the youth and the family.

• Closure

— A mentoring relationship may end prematurely due to various reasons, or it may flourish and endure until the intended closing time. In both cases, there is potential for a positive learning experience for the mentee, mentor, and service provider (Keller, 2005).

— An intentional process for match closures provides important information to mentoring program staff. A formal closure process can provide feedback as to what works and what does not work, providing a forum for discussing areas for improvement. Formal closure also helps evaluate the program’s preparation, support, and training of the participants in order to increase future success.

— Victim/survivors may have had many adults exit their lives abruptly, break promises, or otherwise let them down. Proper closure is critical to ensure that this pattern is not repeated for victim/survivors when the mentoring relationship ends.

Now what?

General Practice Implications

Individual

• Mentor programs should develop clear policies and processes that guide recruitment, screening, training, monitoring and support, and closure processes. These should be tailored to the specific community to attract mentors that are the best fit (for more information, see Mentor Readiness and Mentee Readiness).

Service Provider

• Recruitment

— Consider recruiting survivors of sexual exploitation as mentors. Youth victim/survivors may be more likely to develop trusting relationships with mentors who can relate to their life experiences.

• Matching and Initiating

— Invite mentees to be part of the match process. Develop processes that provide the mentee a voice in the selection of their mentor.

— Organize pre-match opportunities for potential mentors and mentees to meet one another and identify potential matches organically.

— Establish guidelines, times, and even places for the mentors/mentees to meet regularly and monitor their progress, especially in the beginning of the match.

• Monitoring and Support

— Develop evaluation strategies to monitor the quality of the mentoring relationship and gather feedback from mentees and mentors.

— Appoint clear staff roles to respond to a mentor’s requests for support and help during the mentoring relationship.
Monitoring and Support (cont.)

— Establish guidelines to monitor mentoring relationships and ensure quality. For example, mentors and mentees can log interactions. These logs can be evaluated, provide feedback, and guide future training. This informs the current mentor/mentee relationship and service provider intervention, as well as future relationships.

Closure

— Develop clear policies for planned and unplanned closures.
— Discuss and prepare for formal closure in pre-match training and throughout the mentoring relationship.
— Ensure there is a closing activity that allows for reflection. This could be a formal event, such as a graduation ceremony, celebration, or simple meeting that includes an exit interview.

Community

— Identify and connect to organizations and services that serve youth with similar backgrounds and circumstances in order to: 1) build partnerships, 2) find potential mentors and mentees, and 3) gain referrals to the program.

References

— MENTOR: Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™
— National Mentoring Resource Center: Resources for Mentoring Programs
— Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual
— U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center: Ongoing Training for Mentors
— National Mentoring Resource Center: Mentoring for Youth with Backgrounds of Involvement in Commercial Sexual Activity


