

# Peer Mentoring Group

## What is a peer mentor?

A mentor is typically an adult from an individual's (mentee) community who offers support and guidance in increasing skills, confidence, and esteem in the mentee's education and employment, social as well as and personal areas of life. A peer mentor, then, is an individual who provides this type of mentoring support to another person his or her own age. Ideally, the mentor has knowledge or experience in the specific areas that the mentee wishes to know more about or improve (e.g., gaining knowledge in self-advocacy, building skills in job preparation or improving life skills). A good mentor serves as a trusted support by listening actively to the mentee, advising when needed, and setting the stage for mentees to build confidence and skills that will contribute to a meaningful life.

There are many resources such as local and national mentoring groups that can assist you in the starting-up of your program (see "Resources" section for links to websites). The following is a step-by step description of how to design and implement a peer mentoring group. Throughout this description, we have provided an example of a peer mentoring program with the goal of promoting independent living skills to aid in conceptualization. The final portion of this best practice provides resources that you may access that will offer suggestions or assistance with establishing and running a peer mentoring program.

## How to Design a Peer Mentor Group

In setting up any group there are key elements to be aware of while you are developing the program. The following is an adaptation of *Peer Mentoring: Potential Benefits* (The Counseling Foundation, <http://www.counselling.net/peers/p2-1.html>).

The first step in planning the peer mentoring group is to assemble an advisory board or team that is in charge of determining what you wish the mentoring group to accomplish: setting goals and objectives, establishing the structure of the program, determining how long your program will last, and recruiting and selecting potential mentors and mentees. Invite partners who you feel will advance the vision and mission of the prospective group. These individuals might be CIL staff, youth representatives, parents, school personnel, former mentors, and other service providers and may best serve as joint decision-makers in programmatic and design issues.

### **Determine the purpose of your group.**

The next step in designing a peer mentoring group is to determine the purpose of the group. For example, some groups are established to support youth in increasing academic achievement, assist individuals from single parent families in participating in recreational activities, or to support transition-aged youth in increasing independent living skills. One way of identifying a focus or reason for the group is to ask transition-aged youth with disabilities in your community what they want and what they feel they need in order to be more independent. You can do this by conducting personal interviews, holding focus groups, or sending out questionnaires. Once you have determined the purpose of the group (e.g., increasing independent living skills), you should determine whether the purpose supports transition-aged youth with disabilities.

### **Establish the size of the peer mentoring group.**

According to the *National Mentoring Partnership* (2004), it might be prudent to pilot a peer mentoring program with as little as three mentors and three mentees if this is your first program. Beginning with a smaller program will enable you to address, manage, and evaluate all issues of your program design (e.g., supervision, structure, recruitment, training and CIL staffing) with greater flexibility and ease. If you decide to develop a larger program, you must consider the additional resources (financial, staff, management) and supports needed to maintain the program.

**Define program goals that are specific and clear.** The goals you choose should reflect the purpose of the mentoring group. For example, if the purpose of the peer mentoring group is to assist transition-aged youth in learning independent living skills, goals you might consider are: (1) support youth in increasing independent living skills, (2) provide a safe and consistent relationship to youth, or (3) learn problem solving skills to help break down barriers to living independently. The goals you choose should also be measurable so that you are able to evaluate individual and group progress. For goal number one, think about how you would measure “increasing independent living skills.” Is it living alone? Grocery shopping independently? Managing a budget? You might establish particular objectives that you feel best represent independent living, for example, “learning how to balance a checkbook.” Whatever goal you choose, you must make sure that you are able to measure whether or not the goal was accomplished. Having all goals and objectives clearly established is an important piece in selecting the type of mentors you want in the group. Doing so will help you ensure that the mentors have a clear understanding of the purpose of your group.

**Develop a plan for managing and maintaining the group.** Think about the support staff roles needed to keep the group successfully up and running such as a program coordinator or program volunteers. Consider the following questions: Are you legally required to have supervision for all of the on-site group activities or activities that take place off of your site? Who will the mentors go to with questions, concerns and feedback? Who will the mentees go to with questions, concerns or feedback? Think about having a program coordinator who is in charge of issues such as managing (taking care of the day to day duties of the program), recruiting (finding potential mentors and mentees), and matching mentors with mentees. In the case of supervising group activities, you might consider adult volunteers who are interested in the mentoring program but do not wish to have a one-to-one relationship with young individuals. However you choose to manage the day to day activities of the group, the process should ensure that meeting locations are safe, that there is an ongoing training process for mentors, and mentors are meeting with each other on a routine basis. If you are unsure of any legal requirements regarding supervision, contact your insurance

company directly or contact a mentoring organization within your state for clarification (see “Resources” section for links to state organizations).

**Define both the mentors and mentees goals specifically and clearly.** Keep in mind that each set of goals will be distinct because both the mentor and mentee have separate roles in the group. An example of the mentor’s goal might be, “The mentor will increase his or her knowledge of teaching independent living skills information.” An example of a mentee’s goal might be, “The mentee will increase his or her independent living skills.” Again, setting clear and distinct goals is one way to define mentor and mentee roles in the program. Once you have definite goals established, both individuals will have a sound idea of what they are working toward.

**Establish a meeting location.** The mentor and mentee will ultimately decide upon many of the activities and activity locations but you should have a space designated for any regularly scheduled meeting or activities. For example, more than one mentee/mentor pair may want to meet. Similarly, there may be times when mentee or mentor groups would meet. A meeting room can be located in your CIL, school, or public library. Meeting locations should be comfortable, accessible, and safe so that both the mentor and mentee feel comfortable and are encouraged to talk to each other. If they are meeting as a larger group, the space should be large enough for the size of the group. The type of activities will also influence spatial needs. For example, will you need a projector, stage, desks or writing surfaces in your meeting location?

**Establish a structure for the meetings.** The peer mentor and mentee choose the activities in which they will be participating so that there is a natural progression to how their relationship develops; however, you might want to establish some specific activities or a calendar of regularly scheduled events that your CIL will sponsor. If you are sponsoring specific activities, space them accordingly throughout the duration of your program. For example, if you plan to run your program for a year, you might have one or two regularly scheduled activities a month. You should consider having one or two CIL staff to assist in the structured group activities. Keep in mind that the mentors you choose should also have the capacity to teach or instruct activities on their own. For

example, if you have a structured activity (e.g., learning to read the job want ads), you will want CIL staff available to assist mentors and mentees if the need arises.

Some examples of specific activities include:

1. Taking a trip to the library
2. Going to a bank and opening up a savings account
3. Going grocery shopping
4. Going to movie
5. Looking for apartments in the classifieds
6. Guest speakers from other service providing programs
7. Participating in community projects
8. Enlisting in a civic club

Examples of regularly scheduled events include:

1. Attending concerts in the park
2. Attending community meetings
3. Attending school athletic events
4. Meetings with mentor, mentee, and parents
5. Guest speakers from the community

Once you have established the type of activities you want to sponsor, you should prepare activity plans ahead of time. For example, if one activity requires that mentors assist mentees with reading the classifieds, you will want a general plan of the activity and how the activity will proceed. An activity plan is similar to a lesson plan in that it provides a step-by step description of how the activity will progress. An example is provided below.

Example activity plan:

## Activity Plan Format

Facilitator/Instructor \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 01/15/04

**Peer Mentoring Activity:** *Understanding job opportunities in the classified section (want ads).*

**Rationale:** Reviewing job opportunities in the newspaper is a valuable part of the job search process but it is one that individuals must learn how to perform. Understanding the terms, abbreviations, and features as well as locating the contact information can be difficult. In order for individuals to pursue a job lead out of the classifieds, they must recognize and be comfortable with these terms, abbreviations, and "classified" lingo.

**Goals:** To learn how to identify want ad abbreviations and terms for the job search process.

**Objectives:** Recognize and demonstrate understanding of three abbreviated job terms.

### **Materials:**

- Classified section of newspaper (one for each person)
- Pens and pencils
- Paper for participants
- Chalkboard or flipchart

**Modifications:** You may make any necessary modifications to this activity. Some examples are: (1) keep responses strictly verbal (rather than writing responses) (2) decrease the number of terms that individuals must learn, (3) utilize technology, and (4) combine various modes of instruction to assist in learning.

### **Procedure:**

1. Introduce the concept of the want ads section in the classified section and discuss its value in the job search process. Stress the importance of being able to identify terms, abbreviations and features of the ads in order to efficiently read through them and select jobs of their interest.
2. Ask individuals to give examples of an abbreviation to make sure they understand the definition.
3. Hand out paper, pencils, and classified sections to individuals.
4. Ask the individuals to fold the paper in half width wise.

5. Have individuals choose one job, identify three abbreviated terms from the want ad, and either commit the abbreviations to memory or write them on the top half of the paper. Next to the abbreviations they have chosen, ask them to either verbalize or write what they think each abbreviation means.

6. Have each individual indicate to you one of their abbreviations (asking them not to duplicate words) for you to either repeat out loud or write on the board or flipchart.

7. Ask the group what the abbreviation means and either repeat out loud or write a few of the responses on the board. Identify the correct answer.

8. Discuss with individuals the word associated with the abbreviation, what it means, and why it is important.

Evaluation: Ideally you would want to practice learning abbreviations in more than one activity. However, you can have individuals participate in the same activity to demonstrate knowledge .

**Establish how long your program will run.** The duration of your program can influence the type of relationship that your mentors and mentees develop. For example, if both the mentor and mentee know that they will only be with each other for six weeks, they might be less likely to invest in the relationship than they would for a program lasting six or twelve months. The duration of your program should be based upon mentee needs, program goals, and your CIL's resources.

**Establish a minimum of how often the mentors and mentees will have contact.** You will need to determine the minimum number of meetings or contact hours according to the needs of the mentees and the goals you have set for your program. Essentially, the mentor and mentee will decide upon how often they will meet but a suggestion is at least once a week for one hour at a minimum. Consider what might affect the meeting times for both mentors and mentees such as work hours, participation in after school activities, hours of local transportation, and distance to the location. Also, if any meetings are scheduled for the evening hours, consider safety issues such as travelling alone at night.

**Establish criteria for how the mentors will be selected.** The relationship between the mentor and mentee is critical to the success of the program. Because every organization has differing philosophies and the goals of peer mentoring groups vary, you should establish your own guidelines for what you want in a mentor. Think of the selection in terms of the individual you want providing guidance to the mentees. Some suggestions for mentor characteristics to look for are: (1) strong leadership skills (a mentor who can direct and guide); (2) strong verbal or communication skills (a mentor who can express ideas clearly and succinctly); (3) good listening skills (a mentor who can engage in active listening and demonstrate empathy); (4) appropriate age relationships (a mentor who has the ability to work with younger or same-age individuals); (5) ample enthusiasm for the activity (a mentor who is motivated to helping others); and (6) a reliable individual (a mentor who shows perseverance in implementing tasks) (*adapted from Peer Mentoring: Potential Benefits*. <http://www.counseling.net/peers/p4-1.html>).

Consider an application process for potential mentors that include some type of background check (see example). This might include a fingerprint check, work history check, and a reference check (see “Resources” section for links to websites).

### **Example background check:**

**According to the *Non-profit Safety Guide*, you should establish clear guidelines as to how you will incorporate background checks into your screening process. For example,**

**Which offenses are relevant to various positions?**

**What offenses will disqualify an applicant?**

**What other factors will be considered in the process?**

**How will the rights of the applicant be preserved?**

Most states require criminal background checks for anyone over 18 years who will be working with youth under 18 years of age. It is best to check with your state department if you have youth mentors less than 18 years of age, as legal policies for obtaining their information may differ from state to state. An interview is particularly important. You might provide each potential mentor with an opportunity to meet with you (or a program

coordinator) so that he or she can discuss needs, interests, and expectations. In addition, you could develop a self-assessment for the mentors to take as part of the selection process. The self-assessment is a way for potential mentors to think about some of the responsibilities they will have if they commit to the program and may be used as a screening tool for mentor selection. The example below is adapted from the *National Mentoring Partnership*:

### **Example of self-assessment questions:**

1. **Are you patient?**
2. **Can you accept ideas and points of view that are different from your own?**
3. **Can you be supportive and respectful of others?**
4. **Do you respect a young person's right to make his or her own choices?**
5. **Can you provide feedback that supports rather than criticizes?**
6. **Are you comfortable encouraging young people to make decisions for themselves?**
7. **Are you willing to commit to and stick with a mentoring relationship for at least one year (or whatever timeframe your program requires)?**
8. **What characteristics do you possess that would make you a good mentor?**
9. **Are you flexible and open?**
10. **Are you a good listener?**

Successfully matching mentors and mentees is critical to the value that they will place on their relationship. In recruiting mentees, you want to use the same level and degree of careful consideration that you use in recruiting mentors.

**Establish criteria for mentee selection.** Once you have established the criteria for mentor selection, establish the criteria for how the mentees will be selected. You will want to recruit and select mentees who are motivated to learn and willing to enter into this relationship as well. Selection criteria should reflect the overall goals of your program. That is, if your goal is to increase mentee independence, you should select mentees who are seeking that skill. Create an application for mentees just as you created one for the mentors.

### **Example mentee application questions:**

- 1. Am I prepared to discuss my needs and desires with another person?**
- 2. Am I ready and willing to seek help when I need it?**
- 3. Am I ready to hear feedback even if I don't like it?**
- 4. Am I ready to gain the knowledge, skills and awareness necessary to become more independent?**
- 5. Am I prepared to focus on and take responsibility for my goals?**
- 6. Am I willing to change direction if I need to?**
- 7. Am I ready to be objective in order to reach my goals?**

In addition to the application and self-assessment questions, provide potential mentees an interview to discuss their needs, interests, and expectations of the type of relationship they want with the potential mentor.

**Develop a plan to recruit your program mentors and mentees.** Once all screening, evaluation, and selection criteria have been developed for both mentors and mentees, you can begin recruiting mentors and mentees. Because mentors are volunteers, you can recruit them as you would any other volunteer in your organization. Recruitment strategies might include the use of brochures, pamphlets and flyers. You could place an ad in the local paper, make public service announcements on the radio, post a listing with a local or state volunteer agency, place flyers at the local school, ask for recommendations from current staff, or rely on word of mouth. In recruitment materials or communication, emphasize the potential benefits of becoming a mentor, such as making a new friend, becoming a “teacher,” giving something back to the community, or supporting someone in need. You may use the same types of strategies in recruiting mentees but target the message and materials to their interests and needs. For example, you might want to emphasize to the potential mentees that some of the benefits of having a mentor are making a new friend, being part of a group, and having support in learning how to manage daily needs. Place materials in locations where transition-aged youth frequent such as schools, stores, or local restaurants. Contact the local schools and other youth agencies with which you have links and enlist them in the recruitment effort.

**Facilitate a match between the mentor and mentee.** Matching the mentors and mentees is an important part of a successful program. There are a number of ways to match mentors to mentees. For example, you can match on personal preferences (mentors and mentees requesting a particular characteristic on which to match), self-selection (either the mentor or mentee selects his or her partner), or you can match on similar life experiences. Whatever the match, you want to take into account information that both the potential mentor and mentee gave in the application and personal interview because the information in both will assist you in judging compatibility. Some suggestions for matching are: (1) common interests or hobbies (e.g., sewing, horseback riding, reading); (2) life experiences (e.g., similar cultural identity, racial identity, economic background, educational backgrounds); (3) disability, (4) career or academic interests; (5) personality style (e.g., informal, outgoing, humorous). The criteria you select to match individuals should be based on your program's vision as well as goals. Keep in mind that not all matches work for the individuals involved so if there is a problem with a match, be prepared to make the appropriate changes. It is important to demonstrate as much flexibility as possible in matching pairs, but keep in mind that not all pairs work out well. For example, a mentor and mentee might not be matched based on the mentee's preference or a mentor and mentee might not seem to connect in the relationship. If for any reason it is important to call a meeting between the two to try and work out the obstacle, emphasize that although it is important to share common interests it is equally important to establish a good relationship and to share productive meetings. If the relationship does not work out, be prepared to match the mentee with another mentor. It is simply more important that the match is a positive experience for both the mentor and mentee.

**Train the peer mentors.** The topics you choose for training peer mentors should be based on your specific programmatic goals and on the information and skill areas you feel are most important for potential mentors to learn. According to the *National Mentoring Center* (2001), training for mentors should give them an understanding of: (1) the scope and limits of their roles as mentors, (2) the skills and attitudes required in their role, (3) the concept of positive youth development, (4) strengths and

vulnerabilities of the children and youth who are in the program, and (5) program requirements and supports. Training should also be designed to answer questions and build the confidence of mentors.

An example of training activities includes: (1) orientation to your organization and to the mentoring program, (2) reviewing code of conduct or guidelines for mentors (see mentor guideline example below), (3) facilitating meetings with the mentee, (4) providing positive reinforcement, (5) providing constructive feedback, (6) examining cultural sensitivity, (7) handling reports of abuse or neglect, (8) encouraging self-directing learning, (9) supporting decision and choice-making skills, (10) managing professional boundaries of the relationship, (11) managing barriers or problems, (12) managing crises, (13) confidentiality issues with the mentee, and (14) additional resources and materials (Northwest Regional Education Library,

[http://www.mentoring.org/run\\_a\\_program/main/common/training\\_2.adp?Community=4](http://www.mentoring.org/run_a_program/main/common/training_2.adp?Community=4)).

There is no predetermined number of hours for training mentors. Training for new mentors can be anywhere from four hours to fifteen hours long. It can take place in one day, over the course of three days, or over a weekend. However you determine your training time for your mentors, allow time during this period for question and answers, particularly over more sensitive issues such as confidentiality, reporting abuse and neglect, or managing crises. The following example of mentor guidelines from the *Texas Governor's Mentoring Initiative* (2004), could be used as a topic in mentor training. The guidelines serve as rules or principles that mentors should follow.

#### **Example mentor guidelines:**

**Preparedness** — Mentors are prepared to be a friend to a young person and demonstrate consistent, dependable, trustworthy, accepting, honest and respectful behaviors.

**Integrity** — Mentors consistently act in ways that are ethical, earning the respect and trust of their mentees and supporting community partners.

**Commitment** — Mentors are steadfast in their commitment to the policies and procedures of the guiding organization.

**Knowledge Builder** — Mentors actively seek out shared opportunities that enhance the knowledge, skills and abilities of their mentees.

**Inclusive Attitude** — Mentors value the diverse racial, economic, cultural and religious trait of their mentees.

**Maintain Confidentiality** — Mentors act in the best interest of the mentoring organization and ensure confidentiality, taking care to protect against inadvertent disclosure.

**Accountability** — Mentors make regular contact with the mentoring organization to ensure effective mentoring practices.

**Appropriate** — Mentors refrain from profanity, criticism of school faculty or staff, inappropriate physical contact, violations of law or school codes of conduct.

**Eligibility Screening** — Mentors authorize the completion of required background checks to cover criminal history, driving records, personal interviews and other forms of screening as deemed appropriate.

**Service to Community** — Mentors maintain a steady presence in the lives of youth and in community efforts that strive to encourage others toward participation in volunteer efforts

([http://www.txserve.org/txcvcs/mentoring/mentor\\_guidelines.html](http://www.txserve.org/txcvcs/mentoring/mentor_guidelines.html)).

**Establish an evaluation process to measure your program's success.** Program evaluation should be an ongoing process so that you can identify successful elements of your program as well as detect and alter weaker areas before they become unmanageable. Ideally, you want to create an evaluation system that will allow you to modify problems as you go along. Base part of your evaluation process on the goals of the program as well as the goals of both mentors and mentees to determine if those goals were achieved. For example, if one of the goals is to improve decision-making skills as a part of increasing independent living skills, you might use the *ARC's Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), an assessment that reports the measure of student (or adult) self-determination. The assessment specifically measures autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-awareness. In this case and in the case of many other assessments, you would employ the assessment at pre- and post test intervals so you can compare scores before and after your program. In our example, you would have to administer the assessment after the mentees were selected, but before they began meeting with their mentors and then once again after the completion of the program. You should pay close attention to these types of assessments because they can provide pieces of valuable information if used correctly.

**Establish a plan for program assessment.** Another element of the evaluative effort is the ongoing process of monitoring the program. The monitoring process is a record-keeping system that allows you to track how well the program is running. According to the *National Mentoring Partnership*, you should develop a number of documents to manage your program. They are: (1) an intake form that elicits relevant demographic information; either one you have developed yourself or the application itself; (2) the self-assessments completed by mentors and mentees, (3) mentor and mentee participation agreements; this form spells out the purpose of the program, the expectations for both the mentor and mentee, the duration of the commitment, and anything else you feel is relevant to the agreement; (4) an interaction log that tracks the hours and types of interactions among program participants; (5) attendance records for larger group meetings; and a (6) weekly journal topics for mentees to keep throughout the duration of the program.

Example mentor/mentee participation agreement:

### **Agreement Form**

**The purpose of this mentoring program is to enhance and improve the independent living skills of the transition-aged participants. Participation in the group is strictly voluntary and the duration of the mentoring partnership is for a period of \_\_\_ months. Both the mentor and mentee agree to read and fill out the form together. Both signatures of the mentor and mentee at the bottom of this agreement signify your acceptance of the terms and conditions of participation in the program.**

#### **Mentee objectives-**

**My goal is to: \_\_\_\_\_**

**I will achieve this goal by doing \_\_\_\_\_**

#### **Mentor objectives-**

**My goal is to: \_\_\_\_\_**

**I will achieve this goal by doing \_\_\_\_\_**

#### **Meetings:**

We agree to meet on \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ hour(s) \_\_\_\_\_ a month.  
(day of week) # #

If we can not make these scheduled meetings, we will call our partner and let him/her know. We agree to adjust our schedules when necessary.

We plan to keep our mentoring relationship for \_\_\_\_\_ months and we will actively participate in the program for this duration.

**Confidentiality:**

We agree to hold any sensitive issues we share with each other in confidence and we will not share such information outside of our group. Issues that we will not discuss in our mentoring relationship are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Communication:**

We agree to be open and honest with each other. We will remain open to constructive feedback. We will attempt to resolve any conflicts in our relationship. We will identify and work on better coping strategies as needed. If we find that we can not resolve our differences, we will request a meeting with the program coordinator. If resolution does not occur at this time, we will promptly request another partner.

Mentee signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Example interaction log:

**Interaction Log**

Mentor name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your partner's (mentee) name \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours this week did you meet with your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

What activities did you do together? \_\_\_\_\_

How did your partner do? \_\_\_\_\_

What topics did you talk about? \_\_\_\_\_

How was your activity related to your partner's goal? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have additional comments? \_\_\_\_\_

Example journal form:

## Journal Sheet

Mentee's name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Use the space below to write about what you did with your mentoring partner this week. For example, how the activity made you feel, what you learned, what you were good at doing, what you need to work on, if you accomplished what you wanted.

Consider gathering qualitative information from both mentors and mentees. This may be accomplished by conducting brief interviews or short questionnaires that have participants update what they have done, what they have learned, and what they still hope to accomplish.

Example interview or questionnaire questions:

1. Why did you choose to become a part of the peer mentoring group?
2. What were your goals when you first arrived?
3. Did you accomplish your goals?
4. If you were unable to accomplish your goals, what do you think happened?
5. In the beginning, what was your relationship with your mentor like?
6. By the end of the program, what was your relationship with your mentor like?
7. What were some of your favorite activities with your mentor?
8. What type of things did you learn from your mentor?
9. If you could change anything about the program, what would it be?

Surveys are another useful means of gathering specific information you have regarding program issues. Surveys are ideal because you can create them for more than one audience such as the mentors, mentees, parents, and program staff.

### Implementing the Peer Mentoring Program

Many mentoring programs assign matches (mentor and mentee) before the program begins so that the individuals have time to get to know each other over the phone or in person. An alternative is to schedule and structure the first few meetings so that all of the mentors and mentees are together for the first time and participating in activities as a group. The following steps are intended to give you suggestions for implementing the first

few meetings in both cases. The initial meetings for the mentor and mentee will be important to bridging the connections between the two individuals. Organize the first few meetings so that both the mentor and mentee have a way of getting to know each other and so that the group can get to know each other as well. This is a good time to get everybody on the same page when discussing the program and its requirements. Again, if there is difficulty due to the partnership you assign, meet with the partners, determine the problem, and emphasize that it is important to give each other some time to establish a good relationship. If they are both unwilling to continue the relationship, be prepared to make another match that is more positive for both the mentee and mentor.

Use the first meeting as an introductory and orientation session. Ask each individual to give a brief introduction. You might suggest that each person give their name and tell everyone their favorite pastime or recreational activity. After introductions, conduct an “ice breaker” activity. Ice breaker activities are short, guided activities that allow people to more comfortably meet each other and become comfortable talking within the group. Depending on the total number of people you have in your group, introductions and icebreaker activities should take about 35-45 min. You want the activity long enough so that people can learn a little bit about each other but short enough that people do not lose interest in the assignment. An example of an ice breaker activity is:

### **New Skills**

Give all mentors and mentees an index card or small piece of paper and a pencil. Have all of them independently answer the statement: "If I could wake up tomorrow with a new skill it would be....." Next, have the participants share their answers with the entire group. The different responses help the mentors and mentees talk to each other about something a little more personal. In particular, the responses will give the mentors an idea of things that are important to mentees. This information can be used to encourage mentees to set goals later. The new skills activity can be especially helpful if the group is relatively new and group members know little about one another. You can use this “fill in the blank” activity to encourage participant discussion around a variety of topics such as work, hobbies, and family life.

After introductions and the ice breaker activities are complete, move into the orientation section of the meeting. The orientation should be targeted to both mentors and mentees so that each has an idea of the other person’s roles and responsibilities. The orientation

should be used to review the program goals and objectives, roles and responsibilities, forms and paperwork, guidelines and expectations, a brief discussion of meeting content and structure, and a calendar of events for the duration of the program (National Mentoring Partnership, 2004).

For the second meeting, you might have a welcoming party (e.g., with food, drink, a movie, and recreational games) that both mentors and mentees can enjoy as a group. Perhaps you can have a guest speaker from another agency come in to talk about services that are available in his or her program. Or perhaps you can have another transition-aged youth (one who has been in your program or used your services) speak as a “success story” as a young person living independently. Whatever you choose for this meeting should be inspiring, exciting, and uplifting so that both the mentors and mentees can begin to invest themselves in the program.

Now is the time to allow mentors and mentees to develop their own relationship and on their own terms. By having structured a few meetings as a peer mentoring group, you have an established a base and another place for the group to feel welcome.

## Resources

These links will lead you directly to the websites.

### State Mentoring Partnerships

National Mentoring Partnership, (2004). State mentoring partnerships. Retrieved February 10, 2004 from:

[http://www.mentoring.org/state\\_partnerships/state\\_local\\_profiles.ad](http://www.mentoring.org/state_partnerships/state_local_profiles.ad)

National Mentoring Partnership, (2004). Elements of effective practice. Retrieved February 10, 2004 from:

[http://www.mentoring.org/common/effective\\_mentoring\\_practices/effective\\_mentoring\\_practices.adp?Menu=nav\\_left\\_resources.adp&Preload=resources](http://www.mentoring.org/common/effective_mentoring_practices/effective_mentoring_practices.adp?Menu=nav_left_resources.adp&Preload=resources)

### Training Materials

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