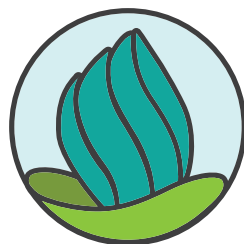


Supporting Deaf Youth Through Mentoring



NDC
National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes



Overview

Mentoring programs improve personal development and academic outcomes for youth.¹ The relationship between the mentor and mentee is at the heart of what makes mentoring programs successful.

“Mentoring relationships provide valuable support to young people, especially those with disabilities, by offering not only academic and career guidance, but also effective role models for leadership, interpersonal and problem-solving skills.”²

Students with disabilities often lack access to academic and social role models.^{3,4} Deaf youth are an underserved population that could benefit from improving skills such as self-determination and independent living through mentoring programs. This document summarizes the importance of mentoring programs for deaf youth.

Benefits of Youth Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs enable youth to interact with, learn from, and form connections to role models or individuals who can offer guidance and support. Mentoring can contribute to positive outcomes for youth in the following ways:

- Role models can help build important connections to community resources.⁵
- Culturally sensitive mentoring programs can improve students’ participation in education and expectations for their future educational path.⁶
- Mentoring and role modeling programs can improve academic outcomes (e.g., grade-point average, standardized test scores).^{7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13}
- Mentoring programs can increase students’ self-confidence, self-determination, persistence, personal development, and social development.^{10, 11, 12, 13, 14}
- Mentoring programs can help improve knowledge of and planning for employment and education after high school.¹⁴

Importance of Mentoring for Deaf Youth

Mentoring is important for deaf students for several reasons. Many deaf students attend mainstream schools where all of their peers are hearing, making academic and social settings difficult. Deaf youth often lack access to deaf role models who can provide focused attention, support, and guidance. Deaf mentors are able to share what they have learned from their shared experience of navigating the world as a deaf person. Mentoring relationships in which the mentee and mentor have a similar culture and background are particularly impactful.^{15,16} Mentoring programs are beneficial for deaf youth, but also for their family members. Mentoring deaf family members can take many forms, such as hearing parents of deaf youth supporting other hearing parents of deaf youth and deaf adults supporting hearing parents of deaf youth.

DEAF MENTORS + DEAF YOUTH

- Deaf youth who participate in mentorship programs develop greater confidence, self-worth, and deaf identity,^{15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21} which can in turn build self-esteem.²²
- Deaf youth who work with deaf mentors develop better social relationships.^{19, 23, 24} These relationships can increase participation in the community and access to resources that are important for the success of deaf youth.²⁵
- Deaf youth who participate in mentoring programs build stronger independent living and coping skills,¹⁵ which can be used in unfamiliar social and professional situations.²⁵
- Deaf youth can improve their language skills through mentoring by a deaf adult.²⁶ Expressive and receptive language skills are often critical to learning in a school setting.²⁷

DEAF MENTORS + PARENTS



- After working with deaf mentors, parents are more optimistic about their deaf children's futures.^{20, 26, 28} Optimism is important because parent expectations can positively affect deaf youth employment, pursuit of postsecondary education, and independent living.²⁹
- The language skills of deaf children improve when their parents work with deaf mentors to create more accessible language environments at home.²⁶ Better access to robust language models improves learning outcomes.³⁰

Building Effective Mentoring Programs for Deaf Youth

Mentoring programs are structured in a variety of ways (e.g., school-based, employment-based, community-based). There is no one-size-fits-all formula for developing an effective mentoring program. However, when developing a program or strengthening an existing program, it is important to consider the following with regard to recruitment, training, program structure, and evaluation.

RECRUITMENT

- Plan to spend sufficient time and energy recruiting mentors, deaf youth, and their families.
- Recruit mentors with diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Recruit mentors who have connections to social or professional networks that would benefit deaf youth.
- Recruit mentors who are willing and able to emotionally connect with deaf youth and share their life experiences.³¹
- Clearly describe the mentoring program structure, time commitment, and goals when recruiting mentors, youth, and families.³²
- Screen prospective mentors, mentees, and families for safety issues and personal qualities.³²

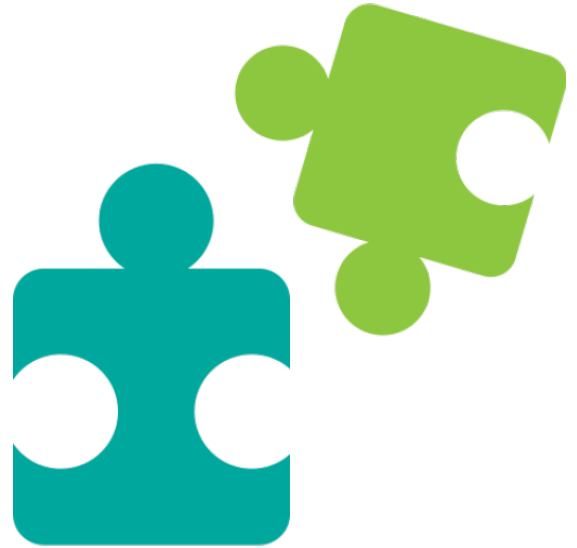


TRAINING

- Train mentors, deaf youth, and their parents (or legal guardians or responsible adults) in the basic knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to build an effective and safe mentoring relationship using culturally appropriate language and tools.³²
- Focus mentor training on key skills, such as emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and active listening.³³
- Provide mentors with training and access to support services beyond the scope of their expertise or programs focus.³⁴ For example, support from a social worker is beneficial in cases of abuse or trauma.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

- Seek input from deaf youth in the design phase of the program.³⁵
- Plan for the mentoring program to last for at least 6 months with structured and regular contact between mentors and mentees.¹⁴
- Thoughtfully match mentors and mentees and use initial strategies to increase the odds that the mentoring relationships will be lasting and impactful.³²
- Create a flexible program structure that mentors and youth can adapt to best meet their needs.³⁵
- Include networking opportunities in the program structure to give youth the opportunity to make connections beyond their mentor.³⁵
- Provide ongoing advice, problem-solving, training, and access to resources for the duration of each mentoring relationship.^{32, 35}
- Plan for closure of the mentor-youth relationship in a way that affirms the contributions of the mentor and mentee and offers them the opportunity to prepare for the closure and assess the experience.³²



EVALUATION

- It is important to monitor mentoring relationships to assess youth safety.³²
- Create a channel for ongoing participant feedback to improve the program and evaluate its effectiveness.^{32, 35}
- Identify what you are measuring by examining program goals (e.g., outcomes, behaviors, relationships).
- Decide how to collect data (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups). Consider data-collection approaches that are most accessible for a range of deaf youth and take a reasonable amount of time.

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