

Meet-n-Greet:**A mentor-mentee matching approach for increasing the prevalence of naturally self-selected mentoring partners in program-based matches**

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We believe that the most satisfied mentors and mentees are those who have some say or choice in with whom they are matched, as this type of pairing most approximates natural mentoring. But staff also need to have some input so that the kids who are expected to be challenging to work with are not paired with the least mature or committed mentors. By setting up a series of activities that allow all mentors and mentees to meet, interact, and to make known their preferences, staff can make matches that are suitable to both mentor and mentee and that may be more likely to last and be productive. Please note that this process depends on a bit of *interpersonal magic*—that “something that clicks” between individuals—to serve as the primary glue for the matches. Neither this glue nor this magic have been put to empirical test. Rather, the instructions described here are based solely on the author’s experiences.

After a group of mentees has been identified and a group of mentors has been recruited, the mentees and mentors can be paired with one another using the following method. A “meet and greet” or Program Orientation event should be scheduled. This may be an all-day, half-day, or one-hour event. Mentees and mentors will participate in a number of interactive activities and games involving groups of eight to ten people (i.e., 4 to 5 mentees). For each activity, the groups will consist of both mentees and mentors (for example, a group of ten would have five mentees and five mentors). At the end of each activity, the mentees and mentors are reassembled into new groups to meet other mentors and mentees. Activities like icebreakers and "New Games" provide a lot of opportunities for contact and informal interactions between mentors and mentees. By the end of the

Orientation, each mentee should have been able to interact for a few (5-10) minutes, one-on-one, with each mentor.

The focus of the interactions between mentors and mentees should deliberately not be on pairing. Rather, this is a time to “meet and greet” others in the program. *Planning this as a fun interaction and sharing this purpose for these activities is important to the success of this procedure.* Mentors should be instructed beforehand (i.e., at the start of the Orientation) to make note of with which children they meet and seem to feel a natural connection. Mentees will only be told to try to remember the names of the adults they meet. Program staff will make notes throughout the Orientation about the interactions and natural pairings that occur as well; but the program staff will pay most attention to those children who do least well because of being overly shy or active, aggressive, or demanding—as these are the least likely to be selected by mentors.

Although the “magic” of a natural connection is viewed as the primary matching tool, this should nevertheless be secondary to findings from research on mentoring which suggests (a) that mentors with prior experience in the helping professions (or with mentoring) are most effective, and (b) youth with troubled backgrounds (e.g., have abuse histories or are defiant) are hardest to serve. Given this, it is very useful and most ethical to identify both types of people, and try to orient them to each other in the meet and greet. It may be especially useful to talk with the more experienced adults before the Orientation and request that they pay particularly close attention to these youth with troubled backgrounds to see if the adults think they could develop a connection with such youth.

The Interest Matching List

After the Orientation, the mentees should be asked to provide the names of 2 to 3 of the adults (mentors) that they remembered and liked interacting with with. (If the meet-and-greet occurs in larger groups of say 8 or more youth, it may be useful to ask youth to try to recall the name of one or two of the adults they enjoyed interacting with during the first half of the orientation. This avoids the recalled names being more a function of recency than “magic.”) By asking who the mentees remember, it is assumed they will indicate who they liked and with whom they felt a connection—although this has not been empirically tested. They should not be asked to identify their #1 choice. By

not asking them to "rank" the adults (which would be to assign a preference), it should increase the likelihood that they are satisfied with the mentor they are matched even if that person was not their #1 choice but is just whom they did remember spending time with. Mentors will also be asked to recall the names of the kids with whom they felt a connection during the Orientation. Mentors can be asked to name the two or three youth with whom they would most like to work (to ensure the names they recalled reflect their actual preference) but should also to indicate any they feel they could NOT work with.

NOTE: Do not ask mentees to rank or number their choices, only to recall the names of the mentors or adults with whom they enjoyed spending time and liked.

A key component of this matching process is to keep the attention on the interactions and the games, and not on selecting a partner. If the youth think they are being evaluated by mentors or that they need to select their mentor, the process will be less successful. It will stultify the interactions and set the youth up for failure when they do not receive the mentor they most wanted. The matching process should be conveyed as primarily one of similarity of interests. Using the interests sheets attached—having both mentor and mentee complete the first one—provides additional information for making the match but also suggests to both that compatibility of interests is a primary matching criteria. In fact, interests will be secondary to recalled names (assumed preferences). When to administer the interest list (as but one possible interest list that could be used)--whether prior to or after the Orientation or on another day altogether should be determined by which will make the meet-and-greet most natural and lively.

Program staff will make the final decisions about pairing/matching by trying to either provide the mentee their first or second choice or match individuals who nominated one another (mutually nominated). Then mentors named further down the youth's list should be assigned. When a mentee cannot be given a mentor they named (e.g., all of the adults they nominated were mutually nominated with other youth) the youth who were listed by a mentor should be matched with the nominating mentor. In this situation, the mentee should be told they shared some interests with the mentor and that the mentor really wanted to work with them. This keeps the focus on the positive qualities of the youth (despite their not being assigned someone they were initially drawn to).

Remaining mentees and mentors should be matched based on expressed interests and preferences. Matching decisions might also be based on mentors' requests regarding specific types of children, and staff observations of mentee and mentor interactions during the Orientation programming. Both mentees and mentors should be informed that they should tell staff if they are dissatisfied with their match at any time during the program, and that changes can be made when alternatives are available.

Even if one wants to explicitly have mentors and mentees select one another, this process may help minimize frustration and disappointment by minimizing the likelihood that either individual makes a choice that cannot be honored. Although it is surprising how often mutual nominations occur, most youth will not get their "first choice". If they never make a choice consciously, then they are less likely to reject anyone other than their "#1 choice." By downplaying the meet-and-greet as a selection event and playing up its role as a program event for everyone to get to know each other, more satisfying and lengthy matches may result. When youth (and mentors) can be given partners they ranked highly, it is useful to play up the fact that "you got someone high on your list who also chose you." But where mutual nominations don't occur, the matching can be described as a result of similarity of interests and enthusiasm on the mentor's part for working with that particular youth. Regardless of who is selected as the mentor, it may be best to discuss one-on-one the matching with the mentee, explain to her why this match is likely to be a good one ("she really wanted you" or "you noted her as someone you really liked" or "you shared the same interests, so you should have a lot of fun together"), make sure she is okay with the match, and ensure she understands how her or the mentors' preferences or interests led the matching. In summary, in comparison to matches made by interests or schedules alone, the meet-and-greet process should increase the likelihood that one or more of the matches will be assembled using at least some of that "magic glue" that holds together natural mentoring relationships.

TELL US ABOUT YOU....

The following information will be used to help us match mentors with mentees. Please let us know what you enjoying doing so we can identify shared interests!

1. If you were given a choice between the following activities, what would be your top three choices (please label 1, 2, and 3):

- Going to a college or professional sports game
- Going to an amusement park
- Spending an afternoon at the mall
- Going out to eat and to a movie
- Going to a concert (type: _____)
- Rollerblading/Biking
- Bowling
- Camping

2. If you were given a choice between spending a day at the following places, what would be your top three choices (please label 1, 2, and 3)

- Zoo
- Children's Museum
- Theater (to see a play)
- Art Museum in the city
- College sports game at the University
- Park for a picnic and to play games

3. What are your hobbies or special interests?

4. Are there any activities you don't like? If yes, what are they?

5. Do you enjoy participating in sports? What is your favorite?

6. What new things would you like to try or learn?

7. Do you like to read? If so, what types of books or magazines?

8. What is your favorite subject in school?

9. What is your least favorite subject in school?

10. What type of music do you like best?

11. If you could do anything in the world, what would it be?

12. What would you do if you won \$10,000 in a contest?

Tell us anything unique about you. It can be about your unique interests, family, or other experiences or talents you have.

