

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that brings a young person together with a caring individual who offers guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee. A mentoring relationship is most often one-to-one, but some group mentoring relationships exist which entail one mentor with no more than four mentees. Group mentoring of this nature allows for one-on-one relationships to be developed within a group setting.

What is a mentor?

A mentor is a trusted and faithful friend who listens, supports, and guides a young person on a consistent basis over a specified period of time. To children, mentoring means having a trusted friend who cares about them and listens to them; a role model they can look up to; someone who will help them achieve their dreams. The mentor is the one who initiates the flow of the relationship and invites the mentee to share and explore through open communication. A mentor helps the mentee find out where they want to go and helps them find positive and effective ways to get there, while also helping them to grow and develop along the way.

A mentor is. . .	A mentor is not. . .
A guide	A parent substitute
A companion	A recreation director
A friend	A Santa Claus without a suit
A listener	A counselor or therapist
A coach and cheerleader	A credit card or free ticket
A positive role model	A babysitter
An instructor	An employer
A limit setter	A chauffer
A resource	A lawyer, judge, or jury
An advisor	A consultant for the mentee's family

What characteristics does a good mentor have?

- Good, active listener
- Encourages and demonstrates confidence in mentee
- Shows a genuine interest in others
- Believes in others' capabilities
- Exhibits patience and kindness
- Ability to accept different points of view
- Recognizes mentee as an individual

- Interested in sharing knowledge and experience, including successes and failures
- Willing to admit they don't know everything
- Creates a positive environment
- Has a sense of humor
- Willing to motivate mentee to learn and grow
- Loyal, honest, trustworthy

What's in it for me and my mentee?

Americans lead the world in both volunteering and philanthropy, and our nation's commitment to the public good continues to expand. Many people entering into a mentoring relationship think about what it will cost them particularly in terms of time. At the beginning, most fail to realize the wonderful benefits that come from being a mentor. According to research sponsored by AOL Time Warner Foundation and conducted by Pathfinder Research & MarketFacts, 99 percent of the individuals who mentor through formal mentoring programs recommend it to others. What better recommendation is there? A mentor once said, "I didn't know in advance how rewarding it was going to be, so I was worried about the responsibility of giving my time consistently. The irony is that once I started doing it, I didn't want to miss a session."

As a mentor, you will be in the enviable position of assisting someone to reach their goals and achieve their dreams. While this may sound very "warm and fuzzy" there are often very tangible outcomes as well. Research has shown that young people who were mentored:

- Improved their grades, school attendance, and attitude toward school
- Prevented drug and alcohol initiation
- Better chance of going on to higher education
- Significantly more positive attitude toward the future
- Committed fewer misdemeanors and felonies
- Felt they had better emotional support from their friends

What type of mentoring do I want to do?

In small towns and urban cities throughout Michigan, young people are waiting to be matched with mentors, while mentoring organizations work tirelessly to expand mentoring and recruit responsible adult volunteers with whom to pair young people. Before you get started, you will want to think about how you want to work with a young person. This will help determine the kind of program that will best meet your needs and expectations. Consider:

- The types of activities that interest you
- The age and number of youth you want to work with
- The gender of youth you want to work with
- The amount of time you have to spend - mentors can choose a program with short-term (six months) or long-term (multiple years) mentoring opportunities

It is important to be realistic about the responsibilities involved with mentoring a young person. If you are not sure about mentoring a young person for at least six months, consider trying a shorter-term volunteer opportunity. Think about an organization in your community that might have or know about mentoring opportunities. Mentoring can take place in a school, in the workplace, in a community setting, in a faith-based organization, in a juvenile justice agency, etc.

There are also different types of mentoring:

- One on one (the most common, traditional type of mentoring)

- Group mentoring (one mentor to four mentees)
- Peer mentoring (youth mentoring other youth, e.g. high school students mentoring middle school students)
- E-mentoring (the newest type of mentoring that involves secure on-line mentoring relationships)

There is a mentoring opportunity available in almost every community and for most areas of interest.

What should I look for in a mentoring organization?

So you're ready to be a mentor. Visit www.mentormichigan.org and click on the "Directory of Mentoring Programs" button. There are a variety of mentoring programs in most areas, urban and rural, throughout Michigan. Call at least three organizations. Ask to speak with the Volunteer Coordinator. Discuss what you are looking for in a volunteer opportunity and what the organization has to offer. Be persistent and patient. It may take a while to be matched with a child. If a program does not meet your expectations, ask if they can refer you to another program.

An effective mentoring program should:

- Meet your needs as well as those of the mentees
- Follow the Elements of Effective Mentoring, as established by the National Mentoring partnership and adopted by Mentor Michigan
- Do a thorough screening of mentors
- Have a process to match mentors and mentees based on interest, temperament, etc.
- Have a friendly, welcoming staff
- Provide support throughout the mentoring relationship
- Provide recognition and appreciation for your efforts