

How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence

October 21, 2011

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Be it a parent, teacher, coach, or family friend, there's no question that an adult can serve as a powerful role model for a youth in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Mentoring programs across the United States have tried to harness the power of such positive role models in the hopes that relationships with adult mentors will support kids' socioemotional and cognitive development. But are mentoring programs really effective? And do all programs have equally positive effects?

This new report takes a close look at the research that has accumulated over the last decade and identifies the aspects of mentoring programs that seem to help – or hinder – kids' development across many domains.

In their meta-analysis, the authors review over 70 existing evaluations of mentoring programs and confirm that mentoring programs do confer many benefits. In general, mentoring programs seem to improve kids' outcomes across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic domains, and they can help improve outcomes in several of these areas at the same time. And research suggests that it's never too late to establish an effective mentoring relationship, as mentoring programs seem to make a difference for youth of all ages.

Yet despite the overall benefits of mentoring programs, improvements in youth outcomes tend to be modest, and it is not clear how well such gains hold up over time. Furthermore, while mentoring does seem to help boost kids' academic test scores, there's little rigorous research on whether it contributes to other policy-relevant outcomes, such as overall educational attainment, juvenile offending, substance

use, or obesity prevention.

The authors urge that in order to achieve the biggest return on investment in mentoring programs, policymakers should support the use of evidence-based practices, such as mentor screening and training. Mentoring practices that are grounded in scientific evidence will help to create and sustain high-quality mentoring programs for youth.

[About the Authors](#)

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By **Joseph A. Durlak**

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