
MENTORING TRANSFORMS LIVES

THE QUIET ADVOCATE BEHIND THRIVING YOUTH

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All youth need supportive adult relationships beyond their parents—mentors who believe in them and their potential. When young people engage with such adults, they learn to believe in themselves. Quite simply, that self-belief is one of the most important determinants of a young person’s positive development and life success.

Not surprisingly, most young people who feel this positive sense of self can easily describe how non-parent mentors—teachers, coaches, counselors, ministers, business leaders, youth program staff, and other caring adults—helped them during their high school years (Price-Mitchell, 2010).

Melinda, age 18, said that having mentors “gives you a kind of strength in a way that your parents really can’t give you.”

Danielle, age 21, spoke of an older cousin who mentored her as a teen: “He wouldn’t tell me what to do. Instead, he was thoughtful and quiet. Then he would remind me who I was.”

Many mentoring programs are designed to support teenagers, and for good reason. Adolescence is a time when youth search for a sense of identity; including the belief they can accomplish their chosen goals. That self-belief touches every aspect of young people’s lives and determines whether they emerge as

motivated, productive, and optimistic young adults (Pajares & Urdan, 2006).

What core abilities help young people gain this self-belief, a sense that they can navigate their own lives? What role do mentors play in this developmental process?

QUALITY MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Even though our understanding of positive youth development has grown considerably over the past decade, the effectiveness of many mentoring programs remains in question (DuBois *et al.*, 2011). Why? One reason lies in the quality of adult-youth relationships and how adults view their mentoring roles.

In recent years, youth mentoring has begun to evolve from a process focused on correcting youth problems to developing young people’s internal strengths. The latter is a practice that helps youth recognize and understand their abilities in ways that enable them to make a difference for themselves and their communities (Liang *et al.*, 2013). This shift occurs when mentors stop seeing themselves merely as teachers, advisors, and role models, and start seeing themselves as listeners, encouragers, supporters, and co-learners.

This more “thoughtful and quiet” relationship, like the one Danielle described, elevates learning for mentors and their mentoring partners. It is respectful and compassionate,

Quiet Advocates...(continued)

helping youth gain a deeper belief in self, and chart meaningful pathways through school and life. Most successful youth claim these quiet advocates were transformative to their personal growth and career development (Price-Mitchell, 2010b).

THE COMPASS ADVANTAGE™

The Compass Advantage™ is a research-based framework that helps families, schools, and communities understand the interconnected ways adults support positive youth development. How do effective mentors influence the compass abilities? Let's break them down, one by one.



CURIOSITY is the ability to seek and acquire new knowledge, skills, and ways of understanding the world. It is at the heart of what motivates young people to learn and what keeps them learning throughout their lives. Mentors nurture curiosity when they encourage youth to identify and seek answers to questions that pique their interests. When they help youth recognize failure as an opportunity for exploration, mentors encourage experimentation and new discovery. Supportive adults help youth understand the tenets of engaged learning when they recognize the different ways youth explore—by touching, feeling, tasting, climbing, smelling, etc.—and praise them for their perseverance to find answers. When mentors show young people how parts connect and influence the whole of society, youth discover that curiosity improves relationships, fuels innovation, and drives social change.

SOCIABILITY is the joyful, cooperative ability to engage with others. It is derived from a collection of social-emotional skills that help youth understand and express feelings and behaviors in ways that facilitate positive relationships. These behaviors include active listening, self-regulation, and effective

communication. Mentors improve young people's sociability when they help youth understand that the words they choose make a difference to the relationships they create. When mentors help youth see that every social interaction is tied to an emotional reaction, young people learn to avoid impulsive behavior and think through difficult situations before acting.

RESILIENCE is the ability to meet and overcome challenges in ways that maintain or promote well-being. It incorporates attributes like grit, persistence, initiative, and determination. Mentors build resilience when they gently push young people to the edges of their intellectual, emotional, social, and physical comfort zones. When mentors support and encourage youth as they take risks, face obstacles, and grow from failure, young people learn how to bounce back from life's ups and downs.

SELF-AWARENESS is the ability to examine and understand who we are relative to the world around us. It is developed through skills like self-reflection, meaning-making, and the process of honing core values and beliefs. Self-awareness impacts young people's capacity to

“Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best they can possibly be.”

~ Rita F. Pierson (1951-2013) ~
American educator
[Seven-Minute TEDTalk](#)



see themselves as uniquely different from other people. Mentors stimulate self-awareness when they engage youth in reflective conversations about values, beliefs, attitudes, and moral dilemmas. When mentors encourage youth to understand and attend to their intellectual, emotional, social, and physical selves, they help young people understand the value of their full human potential.

INTEGRITY is the ability to act in ways that are consistent with the values, beliefs, and moral principles we claim to hold. It's about doing the right thing, even when no one is watching; and about courage, honesty, and respect in one's daily interactions. Mentors help shape integrity by treating young people with respect and dignity, and listening to their feelings and concerns without judgment. When mentors praise youth for demonstrating their values, beliefs, and principles through actions, young people are reminded of their value as ethical human beings, beyond external achievements like grades or test scores.

RESOURCEFULNESS is the ability to find and use available resources to achieve goals, problem solve, and shape the future. It draws on skills like planning, goal setting, strategic thinking, and organizing. Mentors help young

people become resourceful by challenging them to set high expectations for themselves, and then supporting youth as they seek to accomplish their goals. When mentors encourage young people to be flexible and strategic, youth become adaptable problem-solvers and learn to live without rigid rules or preconceived ideas.

CREATIVITY is the ability to generate and communicate original ideas and appreciate the nature of beauty. It fosters imagination, innovation, and a sense of aesthetics. Mentors inspire creativity when they encourage young people to express themselves through writing, poetry, acting, photography, art, digital media, unstructured play, etc. When mentors notice and praise youth for thinking outside the box and taking risks, the imaginations of young people blossom.

EMPATHY is the ability to recognize, feel, and respond to the needs and suffering of others. It facilitates the expression of caring, compassion, and kindness. Empathy helps youth see the outward impact of their actions in developing a just and sustainable world for everyone. Mentors influence young people's abilities to care for others beyond themselves by creating meaningful relationships with them

“We all have a divine mission on earth. Let that mission be to inspire love and embrace the light within. Let that mission be to have peace in our hearts as we create heaven on earth. Let that mission be to seek empowerment through transformation. If we allow these things to be our mission the golden light of the sun will shine on our souls and change our world forever.”

~ Michael Teal ~
Poet, psychic, and healer
[Biography](#)

– by ensuring youth are seen, felt, and understood. When mentors expose young people to different worldviews and encourage them to do meaningful community service, youth develop higher levels of empathy and compassion.

Through The Compass Advantage™ framework, positive youth development is viewed as an integrated, systemic process nurtured through the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, mentors, and out-of-school programs. When supportive adults quietly attend to the development of these core abilities, the results are transformative for young people. Adolescents emerge as young adults ready to chart their own paths through life.

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