

Quick Tips: Developing Youth Apprentices through Mentorship

Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) provide unique opportunities for youth populations to earn income while learning job skills in classroom and on-the-job settings. Through apprenticeship, youth workers also gain connections to skilled workers within their field of interest and operate in an environment ideal for mentorship. Both informal and formal mentorship can enrich the experiences and skills development of employers and youth workers. Some employers and staff may have experience with mentoring youth in the workplace, while others may have little or no experience. **This tip sheet outlines promising strategies for mentors to employ when mentoring youth apprentices.**

It is important to understand the various forms of mentorship and which type may be the most appropriate for the youth apprentices employed by your organization (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Mentorship Models

One-to-One Mentorship	Group Mentorship
An experienced employee (mentor) is paired with one youth apprentice (mentee) for regular interactions. This form of mentorship typically can equip mentees with strong, trusting relationships and intensive practical/professional skills development.	An experienced employee (mentor) consistently interacts with more than one youth apprentice (mentee) at the same time. In addition to access to expertise from a mentor, group mentorship fosters knowledge sharing and relationship building among the peers of a youth apprentice. Mentorship in a group setting allows for youth apprentices to build upon the advice of mentors from the perspective of a colleague, sharing tips and questions to enrich the experience of other apprentices.

An essential component of apprenticeship programs are the relationships cultivated with industry professionals. Creating a welcoming environment through effective mentorship is necessary to ensure access to these relationships and maximize opportunities for on-the-job learning. As a mentor, reviewing these tips will help to create a working environment that accelerates the skill development of youth apprentices, contributes to their longevity in the program, and prepares them for a successful career.

Why are mentorships especially important for youth?

All employees have unique lived experiences based on their previous jobs, upbringing and family life, education credentials, and access to resources. Some youth apprentices may not have previous employment experience and may not have access to other caring adults in their lives. Mentors can model the practical and professional skills required to obtain and sustain employment.

Promising Strategies for Mentors to use with Youth Apprentices

- **Take interest in building relationships with apprentices intentionally.** Like the beginning of any relationship with a colleague, it's important to express interest in youth apprentices as individuals beyond their contribution to the workplace. While connections can be built over time, to build the foundations of a mentor/mentee relationship, be intentional in getting to know youth apprentices through casual conversation topics. For example, ask about their favorite activities and hobbies. Be willing to share similar information about yourself to make the youth apprentice



feel comfortable. During this process, if the mentee identifies important aspects of their identity that may align with the identity or experiences of another experienced staff member, consider connecting the mentee with this colleague in place of or in addition to your mentorship to help grow their network. An experienced colleague with a similar background can provide encouragement and advice as it relates to navigating the mentee's personal identity in the workplace.

- **Establish expectations and structure for the mentorship.** In addition to the expectations of their apprenticeship, it is important for youth to understand what to expect regarding their professional relationship with their mentor and colleagues. Be explicit in how you expect to provide direction, instruction, and constructive feedback to the mentee. Additionally, mentees should be comfortable providing feedback to you as a mentor; ensure that you intentionally provide them with suggestions on how to give feedback to others and make time to solicit mentee feedback often.
- **Know when and how to seek outside assistance for mentees.** As a mentor, you will help develop many hard and soft skills in a mentee and assist them with challenges they may encounter on the job. However, there may be instances when a mentee requires assistance beyond your skillset or comfort level. Whether personal or professional, a mentee may seek you out as a trusted mentor to discuss the issue. If the matter can be resolved more effectively by another party, facilitate a connection to another resource or colleague. As a mentor, be sure to express your support throughout the process.
- **Develop mentee skills through demonstration and explanation.** In addition to learning technical skills in classroom instruction, apprenticeships offer opportunities for youth to develop skills in communication, working in a team, and problem solving that are useful for employment and life outside of work. Instructors can explain technical and professional skills in a classroom environment effectively, however youth apprentices can greatly benefit from observing these skills in action through their mentors and coworkers. As you recognize “teachable moments” in your daily operations, model practices for your mentee, especially those that may not be present or easily taught in a classroom setting.
- **Provide constructive criticism at the correct times.** Mistakes are normal and likely to happen to everyone, especially in an apprenticeship environment where skills are expected to be actively gained through learning and on the job experiences. As a mentor to youth workers, consider viewing “mistakes” as opportunities for the mentee to learn how to respond, adapt, and overcome professional challenges. To do this, mentors should use constructive criticism following an apprentice's mistake, framing the mistake as a tool to continue their skill development, rather than discouraging them.
- **Recognize the perspective of a mentee and offer encouragement.** Youth apprentices may be intimidated or overwhelmed by the wealth of information provided during their apprenticeship experience and the constant exposure to established professionals in their area of interest. Recognizing the inherent power dynamic of any mentorship, but especially of those with a youth mentee, it is important for mentors to consistently offer encouragement and support. Whether it be learning a new skill or completing a task, celebrate these successes with youth apprentices so they feel valued, recognized, and empowered in their role.

References and Additional Resources

Hamilton, S., Boren, Z., Arabandi, B., & Jacoby, T. (2021). *Mentor guide for youth registered apprenticeship programs*. Urban Institute.
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/mentor-guide-youth-registered-apprenticeship-programs>

Kupersmidt, J., Stelter, R., Garringer, M., & Mayhew, J. (2019). *Workplace mentoring: Elements of effective practice for mentoring*. MENTOR.
<https://www.mentoring.org/resource/workplace-mentoring/>

MENTOR: National Mentoring Partnership. (2015). *Mentoring: A critical support strategy for youth career engagement and workforce development*.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=source%3A%22MENTOR%3A+National+Mentoring+Partnership%22&ff1=subAfrican+Americans&id=ED573522>

YouthBuild USA. (2019). *YouthBuild mentoring made easier: A quick reference guide*.
https://youthbuild.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/08/02/16/43/YouthBuild_Mentoring_Made_Easier-_A_Quick_Reference_Guidehttps://www.mentoring.org/resource/elements-of-effective-practice-for-mentoring/

