

Annotated Bibliography

**MENTOR-YOUTH
RELATIONSHIPS**

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About Pathways to Education Canada

Pathways to Education is a national, charitable organization breaking the cycle of poverty through education. Its award-winning program is creating positive social change by supporting youth living in low-income communities to overcome barriers to education, graduate from high school, and build the foundation for a successful future. Through the collective power of partnerships, Pathways to Education's innovative program is preparing youth for tomorrow.

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Mentor-Youth Relationships

This annotated bibliography presents a plain language overview of seminal studies on mentor-youth relationships (both formal and natural), with a particular emphasis on studies that help to understand how to foster strong mentor-youth relationships.

The aim of this annotated bibliography is not to offer an exhaustive and comprehensive collection of all relevant studies. Instead, we present a modest introduction, designed for those seeking an overview of this complex topic, a refresher, or a resource upon which to build more detailed and nuanced knowledge.

This document was developed for professionals who contribute to the well-being and development of youth. This includes those who work directly with youth, such as mentors, educators, child and youth workers, social workers, and front-line staff in school-based and out-of-school youth programs. This resource will also be of interest to those who work indirectly with or for youth: youth mentoring program managers, school administrators, or youth researchers.

This bibliography emerged from our own internal research on youth mentoring, conducted in the context of program measurement, improvement, and impact assessment efforts. It has helped Pathways to Education Canada better understand this complex field and translate our knowledge into effective programming for youth furthest from opportunities. We share it here in the hopes that it will have similar impact in other youth-serving programs.

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Ahrens, K. R., DuBois, D. L., Garrison, M., Spencer, R., Richardson, L. P., & Lozano, P. (2011). Qualitative exploration of relationships with important non-parental adults in the lives of youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(6), 1012-1023.

This study explores the developmental relationships of former foster youth with supportive non-parental adults. Youth identified adults from various contexts as their supportive non-parental adult. These supportive adults included family members (eg. older sibling, former foster parent), adults involved professionally with the youth (eg. ex-teacher, work supervisor), and adults involved informally with the youth (eg. church member, friend's parent). Of the 23 participants, only two identified an adult that they had been connected with through a formal mentoring program. Based on qualitative interviews, the study presents numerous factors that both facilitate and impede the development of such relationships, in terms of the initial connection and the ongoing relationship. It also explores themes related to the developmental impacts of the relationship, supports provided by the adult, and unmet needs. Furthermore, this study proposes various intervention strategies.

Futch Ehrlich, V. A., Deutsch, N. L., Fox, C. V., Johnson, H. E., & Varga, S. M. (2016). Leveraging relational assets for adolescent development: A qualitative investigation of youth-adult "connection" in positive youth development. *Qualitative Psychology, 3*(1), 59-78.

This study examines the individual and environmental attributes that contribute to a young person's sense of connection with non-parental adults, such as teachers, coaches, and mentors. The study compared youth with high, medium, and low levels of connection. Three approaches were used: thematic analysis, mixed-methods analysis, and case analysis. Various themes were identified as supporting or hindering connection (adult personality characteristics, shared interests, and length of time spent together). However, these themes worked differently for different youth. Role expectations were also an important dimension of youth's experiences. Practical tips for connecting with youth are not included.

Simon, L., Julien, S., Dewit, D. J., Lipman, E. L., & Dubois, D. L. (2015). The role of relational, recreational, and tutoring activities in the perceptions of received support and quality of mentoring relationship during a community-based mentoring relationship. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 43(5), 527-544.

This study examines the activities that mentors and youth engage in together. It evaluates whether relational activities (i.e. recreational activities) and skill-based activities (i.e. tutoring) moderate the association between mentees' perceptions of support and relationship quality. Recreational activities were associated with strengthening this association, whereas tutoring activities weakened it. However, the more often mentors and youth met, the more the mentee perceived the relationship to be supportive and of higher quality, regardless of the type of activity.

Smith, C. A., Newman-Thomas, C., & Stormont, M. (2015). Long-term mentors' perceptions of building mentoring relationships with at-risk youth. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*. doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2015.1073566

This study explores mentor perspectives on the critical elements for establishing strong mentor-youth relationships to help youth living in contexts of disadvantage with their academic and social development. Twelve participants with 10 to 40 years of mentoring experience participated in one of two focus groups. The data analysis revealed the importance of supportive acceptance and consistency in order to help mentees improve their social literacy and future visioning skills. There was also a theme of mentors strongly believing in young people's resilience.

Spencer, R. (2006). Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults. *Youth and Society*, 37(3). doi.org/10.1177/0743558405278263YOUTH

This study examines successful mentoring relationships between adolescents and adults that had lasted at least a year. Comprehensive interviews were done with 24 mentor-youth pairs. Mentors and youth were first interviewed separately, then together. Four relational processes were revealed as central features of these relationships: authenticity (engaging with a relational partner in a genuine way; considered by several youth to be essential in the development of trust), empathy (particularly the mentors' efforts

to understand their mentees' experiences within their contexts, i.e. believing that the young people's difficulties are understandable considering the challenges they face), collaboration (this typically involved action on the part of the mentor, i.e. offering to study together, or calling the mentee's teacher), and companionship (the mentees reported feeling that they mattered to their mentor, which was particularly meaningful as they felt deeply known by their mentor, and this had a psychologically nurturing and sustaining effect).

Spencer, R. (2007). "It's not what I expected": A qualitative study of youth mentoring relationship failures. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22(4), 331-354.

Many mentor-youth relationships in formal mentoring programs end early, which can be detrimental for the mentored youth. The authors of this study interviewed 20 adults and 11 youth about their relationships, which ended prior to the minimum 1-year time commitment of the program. Six factors were found to contribute to the end of the relationship: (a) Mentor or protégé abandonment; (b) Perceived lack of protégé motivation; (c) Unfulfilled expectations; (d) Deficiencies in mentor relational skills, including the inability to bridge cultural divides; (e) Family interference; (f) Inadequate agency support. This study is notable because most of the research on building quality mentor-youth relationships focuses on what fosters relationship-building, rather than what impedes it.

Thomson, N., & Zand, D. (2010). Mentees' perceptions of their interpersonal relationships: The role of the mentor-youth bond. *Youth & Society*, 41(3), 434-445.

This study reports that the quality of the mentor-youth relationship predicts other relationship-based outcomes (such as friendship with and self-disclosure to adults) 8 and 16 months later. To assess the quality of the mentor-youth relationship, the Mentor-Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS) is used. The MYAS is a 10-item questionnaire. It asks youth about aspects of the relationship that impact how close they feel to their mentor. The MYAS was developed based on a thorough literature review on the nature and content of mentor-youth relationships as well as relationships between mental health professionals and their clients.

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