Factsheet for Coordinators
Avoiding Early Match Termination

This factsheet provides coordinators with help to prevent matches terminating prematurely.

Avoiding Early Match Termination

Research demonstrates that the longer the mentoring relationship, the more positive outcomes for the mentee (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera, 2004; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, McMaken and Jucovy, 2007). However, if matches are ending in the first three months a greater potential for harm exists (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Karcher, 2005).

As program coordinators, it is imperative to plan, deliver and develop programs to provide the best outcomes for success; for matches to remain together for a reasonable amount of time; and in order to meet the vision for your program. More research needs to be undertaken in order to gain a better perspective on why matches prematurely end, however the information to date provides factors to consider and more importantly suggests approaches that will aid in the development of better program practices.

One qualitative study of early ending matches discussed **a range of other elements** that contribute to early termination. These included: abandonment or lack of interest by either party, unfulfilled expectations, deficiencies in mentors' relational skills: '(a) a lack of youth focus; (b) unrealistic, or developmentally inappropriate, expectations of the youth; and (c) low awareness of personal biases and how cultural differences shape relationships.' (Spencer, 2007)

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Factors Influencing an Early Ending

General research concerned with relationship quality and length has suggested that a number of factors may be associated with shorter matches and those ending prematurely. Factors to be aware of include:

- **Risk status**: youth having more complex issues (emotional, sexual or physical abuse) and those referred due to psychological or educational challenges are less likely to last as long (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002).
- **Gender**: some studies (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Samp, and Litchfield, 2007) suggest that female matches are more inclined to end earlier than males and that girls may be more sensitive to an early end.
- **Mentors**: one study suggests that adults with lower incomes and adults in their 20's and married were more likely to have shorter matches (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002).

- A low level of **consistency of contact** can have a negative impact on the period of a match (Karcher, 2005). Research has demonstrated that matches struggle during long breaks, due to the limited contact.
- **Prescriptive approach**: mentors that take a more goal orientated direction by preferencing goals for the young person, rather than building a connection and understanding the mentees goals (Morrow and Styles, 1995)) are more likely to experience an early ending. .
- **Change in circumstance**: sometimes life happens and the mentee or mentor's change of circumstance may ultimately end the relationship. Check out 'Closing the Match' fact sheet for information on how to manage this type of situation.

A mentors approach to the mentoring relationship will provide good detail in determining whether they are a good fit for your program. Research (Keller and Pryce, 2010) suggests that a combined approach using a developmental style to build rapport and a connection, along with a more goal orientated style; to provide support, guidance and structure to the relationship are better placed for developing a 'good' match. This combined approach is also collaborative and provides the mentee with ownership and responsibility about the goals the pair have developed. Other findings (Karcher and Nakkula, 2010) propose that more relational interactions are better suited to children and pre-adolescents, impacting positively on the quality of the match.

Increasing the Length and Strength of a Match

- **Matching** on the basis of shared interests in some instances (Herrera, Sipe and McClanahan, 2000) has shown to develop a closer relationship.
- **Developmental approach**: mentors that engage in activities, build rapport and take a more relational role in the match, tend to develop a closer relationship (Herrera et al., 2000). Goals that are set for the mentee are developmentally appropriate and driven by the mentee's interests and preferences (Morrow and Styles, 1995).
- **Consistent contact**: continued contact, especially during long breaks, increases the

quality and length of the match. Providing biweekly communication may improve outcomes for the match (Herrera et al., 2007).
- **Academic mentoring**: some recent findings (Larose, Cyrenne, Garceau, Brodeur, and Tarabulsy, 2010) suggest that mentoring focusing on activities, coupled with high emotional involvement reciprocated by the mentee, rather than an exclusive problem solving or open discussion format, were more likely to result in better academic adjustment and a stronger connection.

Program Specifics

As program coordinators we are able to put in place a range of elements to improve the sustainability of matches.

Recruiting
- Target your recruitment; use your mentor characteristics and eligibility criteria as an indication of your ideal mentor.
- Provide clear details regarding the type of mentor you are looking for: characteristics, eligibility, and any other specifics that will aid in self screening.
- Ensure potential mentors are aware of the selection process: application, interview, screening, orientation, etc.
- Use all recruitment activities (information sessions, phone calls, attendance at community events) as an opportunity to find out more about potential mentors.

- **Screening**
- Have a well planned process: include open ended questions on application and at interviews, ask similar questions in order to gain a better understanding of an individual's reason for applying, expectations of their mentoring role and relationship and any other specifics regarding your mentee cohort.
- Determine your mentor characteristics and eligibility criteria and screen with these as a priority.
- Take into consideration a potential mentors circumstances and how likely they are to change, their expectations of a mentoring relationship and the role that they envisage to play.
- Dr. Spencer (2007) recommends the use of typical match scenarios used as a tool to screen, train and develop mentors. Scenarios are presented to the potential mentor and questions are asked to gain a better understanding of expectations, cultural sensitivity, preferences and any other relevant issues.

Matching
The specifics for matching a mentee with an appropriate mentor will vary depending on your program, however a number of factors need to be considered: type of mentoring undertaken; needs of the mentee; issues regarding gender, race, culture, location, language spoken; and interests and hobbies.

Likewise, same cultural matches may provide the opportunity to build an initial connection more quickly. Lastly, if an appropriate mentor is not found for one of your mentees then do not match them. Hold off until the right mentor is available and ready to develop a relationship with your mentee.

Training
- By providing your mentors with pre-match orientation and training you will ensure they are prepared for the initial match meeting - ready to build rapport with their mentee.
- Program working with youth having higher risk status provide mentors with comprehensive training pre-match and on an ongoing basis. Training should also include information and management strategies regarding challenges mentees are experiencing.
- Training should include information about: early termination; reasons why they happen; what to do if they happen; familiarise them with your closing policy; and then detail the elements of long lasting matches.
- Provide ongoing training and staff support to develop mentor skills, especially in problem areas that arise during the program cycle; challenging behaviours, the problem solving process, etc.
- Develop your mentors and mentees ability to share news, feelings and challenges of everyday events (Nakkula and Harris, 2010), this has a positive impact on the quality of the relationship.
- Training tool: use match descriptions or scenarios of typical matches to your program (Spencer, 2007) in order to gauge mentors reaction, expectations and discuss possible strategies to cope or manage the situation.

Monitor and support
As part of your practice, built in mechanisms to undertake mentor and match monitoring will aid in identifying issues and challenges as they occur. Managing these difficulties will limit the risk of termination. Regular reviews, informal check-ins and ongoing contact with mentors and mentees, in addition to training, activities and communication with other parties involved with the match will provide a good picture of the health of the relationship.

For matches that may be higher risk (refer to factors influencing an early end) provide more constant and practical support. If certain challenges develop for the mentee or within the match, support the mentor through the process; this may be through training, referral, informal catch ups, providing feedback or be a reassuring presence. Keep detailed records of monitoring activities.

Tips for Success

- If you have a pair/s that have come to an early end, take the time to gather as much information as possible as to why the match was not successful. Develop solutions to problems that you can minimise as program coordinator and put in place.
- Not all premature endings are preventable, circumstances change without prior notice. Good management of these situations is imperative, especially for the mentee. Check out 'Closing the Match' fact sheet for details.
- Support your mentors throughout the program and develop their skills and knowledge with training, reviews and provision of feedback. This investment will provide you with effective mentors that will ideally be involved in future program cycles.
- Document all communication with participants. Include date, place, details of communications, outcome, issues, strategies, referrals made, further action required, follow up date, list other parties involved.
- Provide mentees with training and include group activities within your program cycle, these can be used as a chance to have fun, build connections and develop other skills.
- During program breaks put in place a plan for interaction; this may include online communication, phone calls, email or meetings. Constant and continual contact will help the match last through the break. Check out 'How to keep the relationship going during holidays, exams and other lengthy breaks' fact sheet for details.

References & Further Information

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