

Dropout Prevention and Youth with Disabilities: The Role of Mentors

Children with disabilities are statistically more likely to drop out of school. According to research, mentorship and mentoring programs help to keep students with disabilities from dropping out of high school. Statistics show that when students feel they are part of a community, and receive guidance and support for their future dreams, they are more likely to stay in school.

“My two years with the mentoring program showed me the great possibilities that exist beyond the classroom in the real world. It introduced me to the different career paths.... Mentoring showed me the path to success in my future as a leader.” (Mentoring.org)

What is a mentor?

Mentors are positive role models and trusted advisors. They are usually adults, but older students can also be mentors.

What does a mentor do?

Mentors show a personal interest in an individual student that develops into a caring, dependable relationship. They provide guidance for a student, teach students how thinking impacts choices, and share life skills. Typically mentors are asked to commit at least one year to a student. Some mentoring relationships turn into lifelong connections for students, mentors, and families.

How could a mentor help my child?

Mentoring offers high school students the chance to develop a relationship with one or more positive adults. Through these relationships, students learn new ways to overcome difficult life circumstances and build stronger connections to their families, schools, and communities. Mentors can provide a student more hope for the future.

Mentoring programs:

Formal mentoring programs in schools and communities usually focus on academics, career exploration, or role modeling positive behaviors. Mentoring programs vary from community to community.

How do I find a mentor for my child?

Parents can find a mentor for their child in formal or informal ways. Formal mentors are assigned to students through a process that often includes applications, background checks, and matching of interests. An informal mentorship example would be the parent simply asking an educator or person in the community to work with the student in a mentorship role.

Whether formal or informal, consider choosing a mentor who is able to help your student's academic skills, social skills, or career interests. Mentors should also understand what information and skills your student will need to pursue his or her future goals.

Find a **formal mentor** by working with others through established organizations or institutions. You might talk to:

- Child's teacher
- School counselor
- School administrator
- School social worker
- Members of community organizations
- Members of volunteer organizations
- Members of online and e-mentoring sites

Informal Mentors: Find an informal mentor by exploring your community networks and asking an individual to

mentor your child. Talk to people at schools, businesses, or in areas of your student's career interest or hobby. Parents and students can also find informal mentors by talking to:

- Family members
- Family friends
- Older students or college students
- Members of your faith community
- Neighbors

Tips for Ensuring Your Youth's Safety

When choosing a mentor, there are a few safety tips for parents. Make sure you choose a program that has a system of evaluating its volunteer mentors. Typically, mentor evaluation involves an application to the program, a mentor training program that emphasizes how to work with youth, understanding the goals and objectives of the program (i.e., improving grades, high school graduation, an exploration of a potential area of study or employment), and methods for reporting any concerns (an identified staff member and contact information). Sometimes there are formal background checks and specific rules and policies for acceptance as a mentor, and a list or description of what is an approved activity under the mentoring program. Most importantly, talk to your youth about staying safe and discuss with him or her how to express any concerns to you.

There are many possible ways to find a mentor in your community who will be a role model for your child. When youth with disabilities have a relationship with an appropriate mentor, they can benefit from the extra guidance and support needed to keep them motivated and in school.

Resources

Information for Parents on Youth Mentoring Programs

Adapted from: The Guide to Mentoring For Parents and Guardians

vamentoring.org/images/uploads/wysiwyg/VMP_Parent_Guide_to_Mentoring_Programs.pdf

Mentor/National Mentoring Partnership

mentoring.org

Ace Mentor Program

acementor.org

Be a mentor/Find a mentor

nationalmentoringmonth.org