

# **Youth mentoring: The development of the child-mentor relationship**

**Marta Prytys**

**D.Clin.Psy. Thesis (Volume 1)**

**2012**

**University College London**

## Table of Contents

<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Figure 1: Rhodes' Model of Mentoring Relationships .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Method</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Results</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Table 1: Summary of studies.....	<b>15</b>
Table 2: Relationship quality measures.....	<b>18</b>
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>PART 2: EMPIRICAL PAPER</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>Method</b> .....	<b>67</b>
Table 1: Participant characteristics.....	<b>70</b>
<b>Results</b> .....	<b>74</b>
Table 2: Domains, themes and sub themes.....	<b>75</b>
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>101</b>
<b>PART 3: CRITICAL APPRASIAL</b> .....	<b>102</b>
Introduction.....	<b>108</b>

Qualitative approach.....	108
Semi-structured interviews.....	109
Interviewing children.....	111
Transcription of the interviews.....	113
Data analysis.....	113
“Real world” research.....	115
Personal reflections.....	116
<b>References.....</b>	<b>119</b>

## **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix I: Joint Project Information.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Appendix II: Ethical Approval Letter.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Appendix III: Information sheet for participants.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Appendix IV: Consent forms for participants.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Appendix V: Interview Guides.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Appendix VI: Thematic Analysis Examples.....</b>	<b>144</b>

## Overview

This thesis examines mentor-child relationships in youth mentoring. The literature review (Part 1) summarises and critically evaluates studies of youth mentoring that include a measure of relationship quality, focusing on how quality was assessed and links to outcomes. The empirical paper (Part 2) is a qualitative study examining the development of mentor-child relationships during the first six months; in particular, what facilitates engagement and what is challenging. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven mentor-mentee pairs, and their respective caseworkers, from a single mentoring organisation and analysed using thematic analysis. Finally, the critical appraisal (Part 3) discusses a number of key areas of the research process; conducting semi-structured interviews; interviewing children; transcription of interview data; thematic analysis and conducting ‘real world’ research. In addition, some personal reflections are offered.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all those who took part in this study for their time and contributions. Thank you also to my supervisor Nancy Pistrang for invaluable encouragement, advice and guidance. I am also extremely grateful to my family and friends for supporting me along the way. Last but not least, a million thankyous to Paul and Zac.

**PART 1:**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Measurement of relationship quality in youth mentoring  
and associations with outcome**

## **Abstract**

**Objective.** Whilst youth mentoring has positive benefits for vulnerable young people, these tend to be modest and can vary substantially. Theoretical explanations of youth mentoring suggest that the mentor-mentee relationship is a key ingredient, and the relational processes at work in mentoring have begun to be addressed. This review examined studies of youth mentoring that measured the quality of the relationship, focusing on how relationship quality was measured and key findings linking relationship quality with outcomes.

**Method.** Studies that examined youth mentoring and contained a quantitative measure of relationship quality were included. Fifteen studies were identified; all but two were North American in origin and eight were studies of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America mentoring programmes.

**Results.** Across the 15 studies, relationship quality was assessed by 10 different scales, six devised specifically for mentoring relationships and four adapted from other measures. Most measures assessed one, or more aspects of relationship quality including empathy, trust, closeness and fun/enjoyment. Relationship quality was associated with better outcomes for youth in a range of domains; however, conclusions about the directions of causality are limited as the majority of studies assessed quality and outcome at a single time point.

**Conclusions.** The findings of this review provide evidence that the quality of mentor-mentee relationships is linked to outcomes. More research is needed to examine the interactions within mentoring relationships, particularly different stages of mentoring relationships and taking into account a range of perspectives. Future qualitative research to illuminate relational processes, and quantitative research employing longitudinal and experimental designs would helpfully address this.

## **Introduction**

Youth mentoring programmes pair at-risk young people with volunteers from the community with the aim of cultivating a relationship that will foster positive development and well-being (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011). In the UK, mentoring programmes have become a major part of government policy and are commonly employed as a way of helping young people thought to be socially excluded, at risk of criminal activity or not in employment, education or training (Meier, 2008). Mentoring is a component of the national Connexions Service, the New Deal and other government crime reduction strategies (Philip, Shucksmith & King, 2004) whilst voluntary small scale mentoring programmes have also proliferated (Phillip, 2003).

### **Definitions of mentoring**

There are different formats of mentoring relationships and definitions of what mentoring actually is are contested, particularly given its diverse underlying philosophies and purposes (Philip, 1999). However, youth mentoring has generally been conceptualised as a one-to-one relationship between an older more experienced adult and a younger mentee, traditionally with the purpose of enhancing the transition from adolescence to adulthood through providing ongoing support (Philip & Hendry, 1996). Whilst some of the aims and content may overlap, mentoring can be distinguished from other “helping” relationships offered to young people. For example, coaching aims to improve performance in a specific area, whilst counselling usually takes place in a formal setting, and employs the therapeutic relationship to provide emotional support and foster positive development. However, coaching and counselling may also be aspects of a mentors’ role, along with being a role model and advocate (Roberts, 2000).



## **Mentoring Outcomes Research**

In the United States where youth mentoring programmes originated, an estimated three million young people are in formal one-to-one mentoring relationships (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). A great deal of research has been conducted to examine mentoring and evaluate its effectiveness. Many studies have been based on the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America (BBBS) mentoring programme, the largest and longest running youth mentoring organisation in America. In particular, a large randomised trial of BBBS mentoring programmes (Grossman & Tierney, 1998) found that at 18 months follow-up, mentored youth were less likely to use drugs or alcohol, and had improved social and family relationships and academic outcomes. This study is seen to have influenced significant expansion in the popularity of youth mentoring and the expansion of such programmes in the UK (Meier, 2008).

A meta-analysis of 55 evaluations of youth mentoring (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002) found that young people benefited from mentoring in five areas of outcomes: emotional, behavioural, social competence, academic and career. However, the average effect size across studies was small, and there was substantial variability in outcomes from study to study. Improved outcomes were associated with certain features of mentoring programmes such as ongoing training for mentors, inclusion of structured activities within the mentoring, expectations of frequent contact and the programme involving and supporting parents. An updated meta-analysis supports the previous conclusions of modest positive effects for mentoring programmes for youth (DuBois et al., 2011). In addition, benefits of mentoring were found at a range of developmental stages and for provision of mentoring by peer as well as adult volunteers, indicating the broad application and flexibility of youth mentoring interventions. Again there was considerable variability

in effectiveness across studies, which was in part explained by youth characteristics, procedures for selection of mentors, guidelines used by programmes for matching young people with mentors, and expectations and support within programmes. Positive outcomes were particularly associated with mentoring programmes which specifically targeted problem behaviour, had a greater proportion of males, where there was a good fit between mentors' and youths' interests or where mentors received support in performing advocacy or teaching roles. This suggests that the ways in which programmes encourage certain features of the mentoring relationship may be central to the effectiveness of programmes.

A meta-analytic review of outcomes across youth, academic and workplace mentoring programmes also demonstrated associations between mentoring and positive outcomes in a range of areas (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008). However, again the average effect size was small. Larger effect sizes were found for academic- and workplace-based mentoring than for youth mentoring, which may be related to the latter requiring mentors to fulfil a more complex role, where the aims of mentoring may be less specific and where there may be a greater emphasis on developing emotional bonds than in other mentoring contexts.

### **Theoretical understanding of mentoring**

Rhodes (2002; 2005) proposes a model for understanding how mentoring might affect young people (Figure 1, taken from Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Central to this is the need for a strong, meaningful connection between the mentor and young person, which should be characterised by mutuality, trust and empathy. Three interacting developmental processes are purported to contribute to positive effects of the mentoring relationship on youth outcomes. These are social-emotional, cognitive and identity-related. It is suggested that the development of a strong bond, and the

processes affecting outcome are moderated by a range of individual, family and contextual influences, such as the duration of the relationship, interpersonal skills and environmental adversities including family instability or social and behavioural problems.

Researchers in the field of mentoring have suggested that attachment theory may provide a useful means for understanding mentoring relationships (e.g., Rhodes, 2002). Attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1988) proposes that early relationships with primary caregivers form the basis for children's internal working models for interactions with others and for how they perceive and respond to the social environment. Attachment styles have been widely researched in childhood, and also show continuity into adulthood (Shorey & Snyder, 2006). Thus the attachment styles of young people in mentoring relationships are likely to influence how they relate to their mentors. Mentoring relationships may work by providing a form of corrective experience for young people with attachment issues or difficulties,

Figure 1: Rhodes Model of Mentoring Relationships (taken from Rhodes & DuBois, 2008)

Diagram removed for copyright reasons

offering the young person different ways of understanding relationships and interacting with others, and leading them to modify their relational behaviours as a result (Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, 2000). However, young people with problematic attachment styles may also find new relationships evoke earlier attachment representations, such as those of being abandoned or uncared for, and this can lead to challenges to mentoring relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

### **Studies of the mentor-mentee relationship**

Whilst studies suggest that youth mentoring has positive benefits for young people, these tend to be modest and can vary substantially between mentoring programmes and between individual matches. In addition, theoretical explanations of mentoring suggest the mentor-mentee relationship is the key ingredient in youth mentoring success. It is therefore imperative to gain an understanding of the relational processes underpinning positive mentoring relationships if youth mentoring is to realise its potential as an intervention, and to avoid possible harm (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). To this end, recent research has moved from examining whether mentoring works to examining how and under what conditions it works, which has placed an increased emphasis on examining the mentoring relationship itself (Nakkula & Harris, 2005).

DuBois et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis found that young people whose mentoring relationship had been rated as of greater intensity or quality had slightly better outcomes on average than other young people. Grossman and Bulle (2006) reviewed adult-youth relationships across one-to-one, small group and large group mentoring formats and found that quality was associated with improved attendance

and participation in mentoring programmes. Higher quality relationships were also associated with higher staff-youth ratios.

Qualitative approaches have also been used to examine the mentor-mentee relationship. Morrow and Styles (1995) found that perceived trust and support within mentoring relationships was crucial to better outcomes, as opposed to a focus on specific goals, finding that “developmental” (i.e., “youth centred”) matches lasted longer than “prescriptive” matches. Spencer (2006) found that authenticity and empathy were particularly important at the outset of relationships, whilst enjoyment of each other’s company appeared to deepen over time depending on the commitment and involvement of the mentor. In another qualitative study, Philip (2008) found that themes of reciprocity, challenge, continuity and providing respite from difficult situations or relationships were all components of successful relationships. Other qualitative studies have focused on specific dyads, such as male mentoring matches (Spencer, 2007) and Afro-Caribbean boys (Garraway & Pistrang, 2010), again highlighting emotional closeness, a sense of pleasure and connectedness and high levels of trust between mentoring pairs. Philip (2008) found that successful relationships were often undermined by difficulties over confidentiality and boundaries and judgemental approaches. Spencer’s (2007) study of mentoring relationships that terminated early linked these premature endings to differing expectations and preferences about mentoring between mentors and young people.

### **Aims of the Present Review**

There has been considerable research into the effectiveness of youth mentoring and the mentor, mentee and programme factors which are associated with good outcomes. However, increasingly the nature of the relationship itself has become a focus of investigation. Both quantitative and qualitative studies have begun

to examine relationship factors and link these to outcomes. Previous reviews have briefly examined the relationship measures used to assess quality looking at a range of mentoring contexts (Grossman & Bulle, 2006) or have looked at both qualitative and quantitative studies of relationship quality without critiquing the measurement scales used (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Given the importance of the relationship in youth mentoring in particular, examining how quality has been operationalised and assessed in this context is crucial. Therefore, the current review focuses on studies of youth mentoring which have examined the quality of mentoring relationships using a quantitative measure. It addresses the following questions:

1. How has relationship quality been conceptualised and assessed?
2. To what extent is relationship quality linked to mentoring outcomes?

## **Method**

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Mentoring is a very broad term applied to a wide range of interventions. For the purposes of this review, only studies pertaining to youth mentoring programmes were included. Youth mentoring refers to an adult mentor meeting on a regular one-to-one basis with a young person (under 18) as part of a formal mentoring programme. For this review, youth mentoring was defined as voluntary, non-professional and community-based rather than based in the workplace, school, prison or other institutional settings. Studies which involved peer or developmental mentoring, or which were solely based in schools were also excluded (e.g.: Karcher, Nakkula & Harris, 2005). This was because the nature and intensity of the one-to-one relationship which develops, and the appropriateness therefore of relationship quality measures is likely be different in these settings. In some cases mentors were

reimbursed for their time, or received credits towards their studies for participating in mentoring schemes.

Studies were included if they employed a quantitative measure of the quality of the mentoring relationship. Only measures which assessed aspects of the emotional interactions between mentors and mentees (e.g., trust or closeness) were included. Measures of external, objective factors such as duration of relationship, or type of activity undertaken were outside of this definition of relationship quality for the purposes of this review.

### **Search Strategy**

Relevant studies were identified according to the above criteria through electronic database searches. Initial scoping searches of the literature were conducted in order to identify the relevant search terms to be used. Based on this information, the following combination of terms was searched: mentor\* AND you\* or adolesc\* or child\* AND relation\* or connect\* or bond or alliance. Searches in PsychINFO, Medline and Embase databases were conducted, with results were limited to English language and peer-reviewed journals. These yielded a total of 420, 524 and 380 papers respectively, with a significant overlap across databases. The titles and abstracts were carefully examined to determine whether studies met the inclusion criteria for the present review.

Reference lists of relevant meta-analyses, reviews (e.g., Eby et al., 2008; Tolan, Henry, Shoeny & Bass, 2005) and book chapters (e.g., Rhodes, 2002) were examined and cross-referenced to ensure that all relevant studies were captured. Studies which appeared relevant were then read through to determine whether they included a quantitative measure of relationship quality. Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English were included. Grey literature, book chapters and

dissertations were not included. To provide as broad a scope as possible, there was no date restriction on the inclusion of studies.

### **Excluded Studies**

A large number of the articles retrieved did not fit the criterion of examining community-based youth mentoring, for example they looked at workplace or natural mentoring, and were excluded on this basis. One study included a measure of relationship quality and looked at youth mentoring. However, the results were pooled from a number of sites where a variety of service formats, including one-to-one, groups, paid and volunteer staff, were employed (Sale, Bellamy, Springer & Wang, 2008). This study was excluded as it did not meet the criterion of examining solely one-to-one, volunteer-based mentoring and impacts of individual relationships would have been hard to disentangle. A longitudinal study of mentoring outcomes was excluded as the relationship measure comprised a single question about satisfaction with the friendship rather than relationship quality (Pederson, Woolum, Gagne & Coleman, 2009).

### **Results**

A total of 15 studies met the criteria for inclusion in this review. Eight of the studies used data from the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America mentoring programme. Apart from two of the studies, the mentoring programmes were all based in the United States. The two exceptions were a Hong Kong based mentoring programme (Chan & Ho, 2010) and another based in Israel (Goldner & Mayseless, 2009). The studies are reviewed in four sections: (1) studies where relationship quality was rated by the mentee only, using a self report measure; (2) studies where relationship quality was rated by the mentor only, using a self report measure; (3) studies where relationship quality was rated by both mentor and mentee using a self



report measure; and (4) a study where relationship quality was rated by third parties. Table 1 provides a summary of the studies in the review and Table 2 provides details of the relationship quality measures.

### **Relationship Quality Rated By Mentee**

Seven studies assessed relationship quality from the perspective of the mentee. Four of these (Langhout, Rhodes & Osbourne, 2004; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Grossman & Lee, 2002; Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman & Grossman, 2005) used data from a large, national, randomised controlled trial of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BB/BS) mentoring programme (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Two studies used the Mentor Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS) with mentees from the Project Youth Connect (PYC) mentoring programme (Zand et al., 2009; Thomson & Zand, 2010). One study examined mentoring relationships in a Hong Kong based mentoring programme via an internet questionnaire (Chan & Ho, 2010).

Table 1- Summary of studies

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Mentoring intervention</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Mentee Age Range (mean)</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Relationship quality measures</b>	<b>When relationship quality was assessed</b>
<i>Relationship quality rated by mentee only</i>						
Langhout et al., 2004	Big Brothers Big Sisters	959 youth	10-16 (M=12.25)	Establish a relationship typology.	Questionnaire in Grossman and Tierney's 1998 evaluation	Single time point-18 months follow up
Rhodes et al., 2005	Big Brothers Big Sisters	347 youth	9.39-16.67 (M=12.22)	Develop and validate a brief assessment tool. Examine links between relationship quality and match characteristics.	Questionnaire in Grossman and Tierney's 1998 evaluation	Single time point-18 months follow up
Grossman & Rhodes, 2002	Big Brothers Big Sisters	959 youth	10-16 (M=12.25)	Examine associations between length of relationship, relationship quality and outcome.	Langhout et al. scales	Single time point-18 months follow up
Rhodes et al., 2002	Big Brothers Big Sisters	476 BME youth	10-16 (M=12.25)	Examine differences in relationship quality and outcome between same- and cross-race matches.	Langhout et al. scales	Single time point-18 months follow up
Zand et al., 2009	Project Youth Connect	276 youth	9-19 (M=12.7)	Develop and pilot a measure of relationship quality. Examine associations between quality and youth competency	Mentor Youth Alliance Scale Adult Relationship Scale	Single time point –8 months post intake
Thomson & Zand, 2010	Project Youth Connect	205 youth	9-16 (M=12.07)	Examine associations between relationship quality and relationship-based outcomes.	Mentor Youth Alliance Scale	Single time point –8 months post intake
Chan & Ho, 2010	Intensive Community Mentoring (Hong Kong)	48 youth	11-17 (M=13.5)	Develop and validate relationship quality measure	Mentor Youth Alliance Scale	Single time point- 6 months post intake

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Mentoring intervention</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Mentee Age Range (mean)</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Relationship quality measures</b>	<b>When relationship quality was assessed</b>
<i>Relationship Quality by mentor only</i>						
DuBois & Neville, 1997	Big Brothers Big Sisters & Service Learning Course	27 mentors	14-19 (M=15.37)	Examine association between relationship characteristics and perceived benefits of mentoring	Single-item "Closeness" rating	BBBS: monthly ratings averaged at 6 months post intake SLC: single time point- 3 months post intake
Madia & Lutz, 2004	Big Brothers Big Sisters	95 mentors	6-19 (M=11.38)	Examine association between mentor views of relationship and intention to continue with the relationship. Examine relationship quality as a mediator.	Quality of Relationships Inventory	Single time point (between 1 and 11 months post intake)

Authors	Mentoring intervention	Participants	Mentee Age Range (mean)	Aim	Relationship quality measures	When relationship quality was assessed
<i>Relationship Quality rated by mentor and mentee</i>						
Cavell & Hughes, 2000	Prime Time Mentoring Standard Mentoring	60 dyads	M= 7.55 M=7.54	Examine differences in relationship quality and outcome between two mentoring interventions, Standard Mentoring and PrimeTime.	<i>Mentor:</i> Mentor Alliance Scale- (adapted version of Therapeutic Alliance Scale) & Network of Relationships Inventory <i>Mentee:</i> Mentor Alliance Scale (adapted version of Therapeutic Alliance Scale) & Network of Relationships Inventory	3 time points - at end of each academic semester (during & post match)
Cavell et al., 2009	Prime Time Mentoring Lunch Buddy Mentoring	145 dyads	M=8.19 M=8.12	Examine degree to which relationship quality predicts outcomes in two different mentoring interventions.	As above	3 time points - at end of each academic semester (during & post match)
Parra et al., 2002	Big Brothers Big Sisters	50 dyads	7-14 (M=10.09)	Examine links between mentor demographics and mentee outcomes and relationship quality as a mediating variable.	<i>Mentor:</i> "closeness" rating <i>Mentee:</i> "closeness" rating	BBBS: monthly ratings averaged over active period of relationship (up to one year)
Goldner & Maysseless, 2009	Perach Mentoring Project (Israel)	84 youth 78 mentors	8-13 (M=10.75)	Examine association between relationship quality and mentee outcomes.	<i>Mentor:</i> Student-Teacher Relationship Scale <i>Mentee:</i> Network of Relationships Inventory	Single time point- 8 months (end of match)
Nakkula & Harris, 2010	Big Brothers Big Sisters	513 mentees 579 mentors	M= 11.4 M= 11.1	Assess links between relationship structure and quality in two measures & links to theoretical framework	<i>Mentor:</i> Match Characteristics Questionnaire <i>Mentee:</i> Youth Mentoring Survey	Single time point (over 6 years)

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Mentoring intervention</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Mentee Age Range (mean)</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Relationship quality measures</b>	<b>When relationship quality was assessed</b>
<i>Relationship Quality rated by third party</i>						
Dicken et al., 1977	“Companionship Program”	43 Dyads	Not reported	Examine associations between mentor characteristics, relationship quality and outcome	Visit Reports Judges Rating of Relationship Semester Grade	weekly visit reports rated at end of intervention (one semester)

Table 2 – Relationship Quality Measures

Measure	Number of items	Subscales	Constructs Assessed
Langhout et al. (2000; 2004) relationship scales	125	15 relationship scales including; unconditional support, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, social skills, no going out, doesn't try to "fix it"	Activity, Structure and Support
Lexical Scales (Chan & Ho, 2010)	10	Relationship asymmetry, Relationship mutuality	Mutuality, Sharing, Commitment
Match Characteristics Questionnaire (Harris & Nakkula, 2003)	58	7 Quality Subscales, 5 Structure Subscales	Satisfaction, Instrumental/ Relational, Fun, Sharing, Mentor Outlook, Activities, Focus, Connection, Compatibility, Empathy
Mentor Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS; Zand et al., 2009)	10	Caring, Acceptance	Authenticity, Empathy, Companionship
Network Of Relationship Inventory- adapted (Furman & Buhrmester, 1995)	30	Reliable Alliance, Companionship, Instrumental Aid, Intimacy, Affection, Nurturance, Admiration, Conflict, Antagonism, Relative Power	Closeness, Dependency, Unrealistic Expectations
Quality of Relationships Inventory- adapted (Pierce, Sarason & Sarason, 1991)	23	Depth, Conflict	Depth, Conflict
Student Teacher Relationship Scale- adapted (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992)	28	Closeness, Dependency, Conflict (not used)	Closeness, Dependency
Therapeutic Alliance Scale –adapted (Shirk & Saiz, 1992) mentor and mentee versions	12	Bond, Negativity	Affective orientation to relationship
Youth Mentor Relationship Questionnaire (Rhodes et al., 2005)	15	Not dissatisfied, Helped to cope, Not unhappy, Trust not broken	Trust, Enjoyment, Support

**Big Brothers Big Sisters studies.** Four of the studies used data from a large evaluation of the BB/BS programme (Grossman & Tierney, 1998), which has been described as a landmark study in the field of youth mentoring research (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011). In this study, applicants to eight mentoring programmes were randomly assigned to either a mentoring match or waiting list control group, and completed questionnaires at baseline and 18 months later. At 18 month follow-up, relationship quality was assessed by 125 questions, based on earlier qualitative work (Morrow & Styles, 1995). Questions addressed frequency and type of activity undertaken by youth and mentor, youth's feelings towards and impressions of their mentor; feeling supported, feeling satisfied with the relationship, and the presence of negative and positive affect and encouragement. The four studies that follow used this data in differing ways and are described below.

Langhout et al. (2004) analysed data from Grossman and Tierney (1988) and aimed to develop a typology of mentoring relationships. Using established data analysis procedures 15 mentoring relationship scales emerged which were summarised by four relationship types. Results suggested that activity, structure and support were the key dimensions of mentoring relationships. The four relationship types were labelled: "moderate" (moderate levels of structure and support and high levels of activities); "active" (low levels of structure but high levels of participation in activity); "low-key" (high levels of support, moderate structure and low levels of activity) and "unconditionally supportive" (high levels of unconditional support).

The four relationship type groups were compared with waiting list control at baseline and follow-up. MANCOVAs were conducted which controlled for baseline differences in social, academic and behavioural outcome variables, thus reducing the threat to internal validity of confounding variables. A number of differences were

found in various domains of outcome. For social functioning, the “active” mentoring matches reported increased peer support and intimacy. For parental relationships, “moderate” matches reported decreased parental alienation, whilst “unconditionally supportive” matches showed an increase. For psychological functioning, “moderate” matches reported improvements in self-worth. In terms of academic outcomes, there was no indication of relationship type having an effect on school value or grades although both the “active” and “moderate” matches improved in scholastic competence compared with control. Notably, there were no differences in behavioural functioning between the four relationship groups compared to control. Across all domains the “moderate” group demonstrated the greatest number of improvements of the four relationship types, when compared to control.

In the second study using data from Grossman and Tierney’s (1998) evaluation, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) tested a model where youth, mentor and match characteristics predicted relationship duration, with relationship quality conceptualised as a mediating variable. Relationship quality was assessed using the “youth-centred” and “disappointment” relationship scales (Langhout et al., 2004). Associations between relationship duration and outcome were also examined. Baseline levels of variables, and other relevant baseline characteristics were included in modelling in order to reduce the variance unrelated to the mentoring intervention.

Including relationship quality as a variable significantly increased the explanatory power of the model, providing evidence for its role as a mediating variable. Relationship quality also attenuated the negative effects of the baseline mentor characteristics of being married, aged 26-30 or of a lower income on the length of relationship. However, all of the other predicting factors remained significant after taking into account the influence of relationship quality.



In the third study using data from Grossman and Tierney's (1998) evaluation, Rhodes et al. (2002) looked at differences in mentee outcomes between "same-race" and "cross-race" mentoring matches. Data from a subsample of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) mentees were re-analysed, comparing variables including relationship quality between the two groups ("same race" and "cross race"). Responses to all 15 of Langhout et al.'s (2004) relationship scales were included to assess relationship quality. Baseline outcome variables and other relevant measures (previous mentoring, referral source or accessing counselling) were included in modelling to reduce potential variance unrelated to mentoring. Results showed that youth in cross-race relationships were more likely to talk to mentors when "something was bugging them" and perceived mentors as providing more unconditional support. The authors suggest that this may represent slightly different styles of mentoring provided by mentors of either white or BME backgrounds, or that cross-race matches provided more 'novel' experiences. Overall, few differences were found between same and cross-race matches.

Finally, Rhodes et al. (2005) used the same data with the aim of developing a brief screening measure assessing relationship quality. Relationship quality was assessed using the 74-item Youth Mentor Relationship Questionnaire. It is not clearly stated by the authors how these items map onto the 125 items from the same data set used in the previous studies. However, this measure has two subscales, emotional quality and psychological proximity seeking, and adapts items from the Relatedness Questionnaire (Lynch & Wellborn, 1987). Factor analysis revealed four factors comprising 15 items, of which 12 were negatively worded. The four factors were labelled - "not dissatisfied", "helped to cope", "not unhappy" and "trust not broken", reflecting the negative skew of the items that emerged. Despite a bias

towards negative features of the relationship, the items were appropriate for assessing relationships within the one-to-one, informal context of community mentoring.

Hierarchical regression analyses examined the contributions of the four relationship quality factors to academic outcomes and psychological adjustment. “Trust not broken” predicted scholastic competence and “not unhappy” predicted school value. None of the relationship quality factors significantly predicted school grades. “Trust not broken” and “not dissatisfied” factors predicted increases in self-esteem, whilst “helped to cope” predicted decreases in self-esteem. Overall, relationship quality accounted for a quarter of the variance in self-esteem.

These four studies all benefited from large sample sizes taken from different mentoring programme sites and the use of multiple measures to assess demographics, characteristics of matches and outcome. The relationship quality measures were detailed and assessed both negative and positive features of the relationship, focusing on the nature of the interaction, structure, support and feelings of closeness. Three of the studies used 125 questions and the resulting scales developed by Langhout et al. (2004), whilst Rhodes et al. (2005) used the Youth Mentor Relationship Questionnaire, also from the original evaluation study. Unfortunately, it is not clear how this 74-item measure maps on to the original 125 questions. A key limitation of all four studies is that relationship quality was assessed at 18 month follow-up only. As relationship quality and outcome were compared at the same time point this limits conclusions that can be drawn about whether quality predicts outcome, making causal relationships difficult to disentangle. In addition, measurement at a single time point means that changes in relationship quality over time are not assessed. Finally, biases in responses may have been introduced due to a reliance on recall after the

relationship was over for a number of the participants. All but one of the studies (Rhodes et al., 2005) controlled for baseline levels of outcome variables and other potential confounding variables such as major life events, socioeconomic status of parent and previous counselling. This reduces the likelihood that any differences between groups were due to other factors and thus increases the internal validity of the studies.

**Other studies.** Zand et al. (2009) developed and piloted a measure of mentoring relationship quality, the Mentor Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS). The procedure for developing the MYAS was thorough and rigorous. An initial set of 31 questions was compiled based on the research literature pertaining to mentor-youth relationships and related concepts (e.g., healing relationships between healthcare professionals and clients). Ten items were identified through factor analysis, and comparisons with the Adult Relationship Scale (ARS, Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration) yielded good concurrent validity. Internal consistency was also high.

The 10-item MYAS was administered to mentees in the Project Youth Connect (PYC) mentoring programme at eight months post-intake. Other variables were assessed at baseline and eight months. These included demographics, relationship measures, school functioning and life skills. Hierarchical regression analyses found that quality of relationship was associated with better ability to form relationships with adults, and with a primary caregiver. It also correlated with improved school functioning and life skills. All analyses controlled for the effects of gender, age and baseline variable scores.

In contrast to the 15-item scale used by Rhodes et al. (2005), the MYAS focuses on positive aspects of the relationship. The measure builds on qualitative

work which found that key features of mentoring relationships were authenticity, empathy and companionship (Spencer, 2006). However, as with the previous four studies, relationship quality and outcome were compared at a single time point, limiting any conclusions that can be drawn about causality. Although demographic and baseline variables were controlled for in the study, it is likely that other variables contributed to the association between quality and outcome. Again, the design also means that changes in quality over time are not addressed. Additionally, the relationships examined were short-term and may have not yet had a chance to develop and grow.

Thomson and Zand (2010) investigated whether relationship quality uniquely predicted relationship-based outcomes. This examines the theoretical proposition from Rhodes' (2005) model of mentoring, that a primary pathway of mentoring influence on positive outcomes for youth is by changing their perceptions of their interpersonal relationships. Relationship quality was assessed by the MYAS at eight months, whilst relationship outcome measures, examining self disclosure to adults, friendship with adults and parental attachment were completed at baseline, eight months and 16 months later. Results of hierarchical regression analyses found that relationship quality at eight months predicted all relationship outcomes at eight months, after controlling for age, baseline scores and gender. This was also the case for 16 month measures with the exception of parental attachment. These findings lend support to the theoretical view that youth seeing their mentor as empathic, authentic and as providing a companion has an important impact on other relationships in their lives.

This longitudinal study enables inferences regarding the impact of relationship quality over time. For example, it is interesting to note that parental

attachment was no longer significantly predicted by mentoring relationship quality at 16 months. This may be because parent-child relationships are long-term, ingrained interactions, and thus the impact of a mentoring intervention on them is less likely to be sustained. Again, relationship quality was measured at a single time point, limiting conclusions that can be drawn about changes in quality over time, and will have in some cases relied on participants' retrospective views. Additionally, the average length of mentoring relationships in this study was six months, which is quite brief and thus relationships may not have had a chance to develop sufficiently. Mentees who had been matched with more than one mentor were excluded from the study, which may mean the views of those young people with more complex backgrounds or difficulties in forming relationships are not represented. Finally, although demographics and baseline variables were controlled for, the non-randomised design means that other confounding variables could account for the results reported and this limits the conclusions that can be drawn about causality.

Chan and Ho (2010) examined relationship quality from the perspective of mentees within the Intensive Community Mentoring (ICM) programme, based in Hong Kong. More than 80% of the volunteer mentors in the programme were police officers. Mentoring matches began simultaneously and mentees were invited to complete a web-based questionnaire, which included a measure of relationship quality, at a single time point approximately six months into the mentoring relationship. Relationship quality was measured using a lexical approach (Man and Bond, 2005). Mentees rated 24 Chinese characters commonly used to describe mentoring relationships. This approach was employed as within Chinese culture proverbs denote important meanings and specific symbols signify important social concepts. Factor analysis was applied to the results, and the mentoring programme

committee also made a number of retrospective changes to the measure. The final measure was made up of 10 items with two factors representing positive aspects of the relationship (intimacy) and negative aspects (asymmetry).

Qualitative interviews were carried out with a random sample of the initial respondents to the web questionnaire. On the basis of interview data, mentees were split into “effective” and “non-effective” mentoring groups, based on whether they reported improvement in three or more of six outcome dimensions. Relationship quality was compared between the two groups, and the “effective” group was found to have significantly higher scores for intimacy and lower scores for asymmetry than the “non-effective” group. Further analysis found that those mentoring matches with more contact scored significantly higher on relationship intimacy and lower on asymmetry.

A strength of this study is that the relationship quality measure was culturally sensitive and examined areas appropriate to community-based mentoring such as mutuality, sharing and commitment. However, the data reduction method employed was subjective rather than a standardised statistical procedure. Additionally, although the measure is relevant to mentoring within Chinese communities, its specificity may limit opportunities to cross validate it. However, the question of how mentoring relationships can be measured within different cultures requires further consideration, particularly as the majority of research in the area is of North American origin. Further limitations of this study are the relatively short length of the mentoring relationships, the cross-sectional design and the limited two week period that was allowed for original questionnaires to be returned which may have introduced a sampling bias.

**Summary.** These seven studies conceptualised and operationalised relationship quality in quite different ways. Various aspects of relationships are assessed, such as support, trust, mutuality and empathy, although only two of the studies (Rhodes et al., 2005; Chan & Ho, 2010) assessed negative aspects of mentoring relationships. The results of these studies indicate that relationship quality may be an important variable to consider when examining mentoring outcome. However, the conclusions that can be drawn from the studies are limited by some important issues in their design. All but one of the studies (Thomson & Zand, 2010) measured relationship quality and outcome at the same time point, making it difficult to tease apart causal relationships. Additionally, relationship quality is measured at a single time point in all of the studies, so they do not illuminate changes in mentoring relationships over time. The studies are also limited by their reliance on the perspective of the mentee, and would benefit from other perspectives on the quality of the relationship.

Where outcomes were examined, relationship quality was associated with improvements in a number of domains. Higher ratings of quality were associated with improvements in academic performance and school bonding (Rhodes et al., 2005; Zand et al., 2009) and relationships with adults (Thomson & Zand, 2010; Zand et al., 2009). Additionally, higher quality relationships were positively associated with improvements in measures of life skills in one study (Zand et al., 2009).

### **Relationship Quality Rated by Mentor**

Two studies assessed relationship quality from the perspective of the mentor (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Madia & Lutz, 2004). Both samples were taken from BB/BS programmes, although DuBois and Neville (1997) also looked at a

university-based programme where students served as mentors, known as a service learning course (SLC).

DuBois and Neville (1997) assessed relationship quality with a single-item rating of “emotional closeness” by the mentor, averaged from monthly ratings over a six-month period for the BB/BS programme, and one rating at three months after being matched for SLC. Mentors provided ratings of perceived benefits for their mentee. For both BB/BS and SLC mentors, greater levels of closeness and contact were positively associated with greater perceived benefits of mentoring for the mentee.

Quality was assessed with a single question regarding emotional closeness which means different aspects of the emotional interactions within mentoring are not elaborated upon in this study. As with previous studies, quality and outcome were assessed at the same time limiting what can be gleaned regarding the causal links between the two. Although age and gender of mentors and mentees were controlled for in statistical analyses, it is likely that other variables contribute to the association between relationship quality as rated by mentor and perceived benefits, also rated by mentor. A final point is that assessment was at relatively early time points in the relationships, and it is likely that given time, perceptions of emotional closeness would have developed and changed. These methodological issues therefore limit the conclusions that can be drawn regarding relationship quality and outcome.

Madia and Lutz (2004) examined whether perceived similarity and expectation-reality discrepancies were related to mentors’ intention to remain in the mentoring relationship. They tested a model in which the association between the above factors was mediated by relationship quality. Participants were mentors from three BB/BS programmes who had been in their mentoring match for between one



and 11 months. Relationship quality was assessed at a single time point, with mentors completing postal questionnaires including the “Depth” and “Conflict” subscales of the Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason & Sarason, 1991). The QRI was designed to assess close relationships between adults and their family and friends, and measured the extent to which a relationship is a source of conflicting feelings or felt to be positive, important and secure. It has good reliability, validity and test–retest stability and has been found to be a good predictor of behaviour (Verhofstadt, Buysse, Rosseel & Peene, 2006). Mood and social desirability were included as control variables.

In initial analyses, intention to stay in the mentoring relationship was significantly related to relationship conflict, relationship depth and interpersonal attraction. Multiple regression analysis found that relationship depth and interpersonal attraction, but not relationship conflict, contributed to the prediction of intention to stay, after controlling for mood. Additionally, controlling for the effects of these positive relationship qualities meant that the association between perceived similarity in extraversion and expectation-reality discrepancies and intention to stay was no longer significant. Thus the authors inferred that positive relationship qualities mediated the association between perceived similarity in extraversion and expectation-reality discrepancies and intention to stay in the mentoring relationship.

A number of items in the QRI (e.g., the degree of control or influence the mentee has in the mentor’s life or how angry the mentee makes the mentor) do not appear to have face validity for assessing mentors’ views of their relationships with their mentees. Whilst adult relationships generally presuppose equality and mutual support, there may be different expectations for a mentoring relationship between a young person and adult mentor. In terms of study design, the correlational design

limits conclusions that can be drawn about the causal links between variables. Measurement of quality at a single time point means conclusions about the impact of relationship quality over time cannot be made. Mentors' intention to stay in the relationship was used as a proxy for relationship duration; however longitudinal research would be required to examine whether intentions do translate into long-term relationships. A further limitation is that the study does not include any measures of mentee outcome (such as academic achievement or interpersonal relationships), so associations between the quality of the relationship and outcomes were not investigated.

**Summary.** The measurement of relationship quality in the two studies differed in complexity and methodological rigour. One of the studies (Madia & Lutz, 2004) drew on an existing measure of adult relationships which is beneficial in terms of psychometric properties. However, the measure employed was not wholly appropriate to mentoring relationships, thus potentially missed key aspects of these relationships or assessed irrelevant areas. Both studies measured quality of the relationships and outcome variables at a single time point which means inferences about causality cannot be made. The single time point measurement of relationship quality means the studies do not address changes in relationship quality over time, and as the studies only included mentors' views, they are necessarily limited in what they tell us about relationship quality, providing only one perspective amongst many.

Madia and Lutz (2004) examined links between relationship quality and mentors' intention to stay in the relationship, whilst DuBois and Neville (1997) looked at relationship quality and the perceived benefits of mentoring. As neither study included an objective measure of mentee outcomes links between relationship quality and outcomes are not elucidated.

## **Relationship Quality Rated by Mentor and Mentee**

Five studies assessed relationship quality by measuring both the mentors' and mentees' views of the relationship. Two of these examined mentoring relationship quality and outcomes for school-based and community-based mentoring interventions targeting aggressive children (Cavell & Hughes, 2000; Cavell, Elledge, Malcolm, Faith & Hughes, 2009). In other studies, Parra, DuBois, Neville and Pugh-Lilly (2002) examined links between mentor demographics and mentee outcomes, and the proposed mediating role of process relationship factors within a BB/BS programme. Goldner and Maysless (2009) examined the association between relationship qualities and mentee functioning, in a prospective design study. Finally, Nakkula and Harris (2010) re-analysed data from a BB/BS programme to examine links between match structure and quality, and to determine the utility of a proposed theoretical framework of mentoring relationships (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

**Studies by Cavell and colleagues.** A number of studies have examined community mentoring alongside school-based interventions to reduce aggression in children (Cavell & Hughes, 2000; Hughes, Cavell & Meehan, 2001; Cavell et al., 2009; Hughes, Cavell, Meehan, Zhang & Collie, 2005). Two of these studies included measures of mentoring relationship quality (Cavell & Hughes, 2000; Cavell et al., 2009). Cavell and Hughes (2000) randomly assigned teacher-identified "aggressive" children to one of two treatment groups. The active treatment condition was community-based "PrimeTime" mentoring which comprised extensively trained and supervised mentors. Alongside this children received problem-solving skills training and parents and teachers were provided with supportive consultation. The comparison "standard" mentoring group was a stand-alone mentoring programme with minimally trained and monitored mentors. Both interventions took place over

three semesters with college students as mentors meeting mentees regularly on a one-to-one basis outside school hours.

Relationship quality was measured at the end of each semester, so at three time points during and post-intervention. A modified version of the Therapeutic Alliance Scale (TAS; Shirk & Saiz, 1992) and the NRI - mentor scale measuring support and acceptance (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) were completed by mentees to assess relationship quality. The TAS was originally designed to assess children's views of their relationship with a therapist and includes 12 items assessing affective orientation to the relationship which appear adequate and appropriate to measuring community mentoring relationships. Scores from the two measures were combined and standardised to provide a single score. Mentors completed a mentor adapted version of the therapist scale of the TAS (Shirk & Saiz, 1992).

Key findings were that children in the PrimeTime condition rated relationship quality higher than in the standard mentoring condition; however mentors' reports did not differ significantly for the two conditions. The perception of the relationship by the children in the PrimeTime condition predicted parent-rated aggression at post-treatment. Mentors' ratings of the relationship predicted teacher-rated aggression at follow-up. The authors concluded that the absence of general effects suggested that children were differentially impacted by the experience of mentoring relationships. They also found that ratings of relationship quality were only weakly correlated between mentor and mentee. Ratings of relationship quality were suggested to hold different meanings for children and mentors, with mentors' ratings reflecting more enduring difficulties in the child whilst children's ratings may reflect a more temporary shift in views. As this study had a longitudinal design, inferences about changes in relationship quality over time can be made. Additionally, the

randomisation of participants into the two mentoring conditions minimises threats to internal validity, so inferences of causality can be made. However, as the equivocal results suggest, the two conditions may not have differed sufficiently in terms of the mentoring relationship that developed for systematic differences to have emerged between the groups.

In response to the results from Cavell and Hughes (2000), Cavell et al. (2009) examined relationship quality and its role in predicting outcome for aggressive children with a control group designed to allow fewer opportunities to develop close relationships. Children were randomised into either the PrimeTime condition (as before) or the Lunch Buddy condition. In the Lunch Buddy condition, children were paired with different mentors each semester and activities included brief meetings in the school canteen often with peers present. In addition to the measures used in the previous study (Hughes & Cavell, 2000) the conflict subscale of the NRI was completed by mentors and mentees to achieve a conflict rating.

A number of differing outcomes between the two conditions emerged. Relationship quality predicted parent-rated outcomes, but only for the PrimeTime conditions. PrimeTime mentors and mentees had fairly concordant views of their relationship and children were more likely to report feeling supported even when there was conflict present. However in the Lunch Buddy Programme views were less concordant and children were less likely to report feeling supported if conflict was evident. Again the authors hypothesised that this was related to the higher level of intensity of the PrimeTime intervention. Lunch Buddy mentees rated their relationships as less supportive than those in the PrimeTime condition. Mentee and mentor ratings of relationship quality were modestly correlated. Scores for conflict were generally low and did not differ across conditions for children, whilst for

mentors neither conflict nor support scores differed significantly across conditions. There was no evidence that levels of relationship support (either mentee or mentor rated) predicted changes in teacher-rated externalising problems.

Cavell et al. (2009) explicitly examined the importance of relationship quality in youth mentoring. Additionally, the randomised design allows for inferences of causality to be made. Validated measures of relationship quality were utilised in this study which adds to the strength of the findings. These measures had been used in the previous studies, which enables a comparison of their use in the area of mentoring relationships. The addition of a measure of negative aspects of the relationship for mentors is another strength of this study. Not only does this add to our understanding of the nature of the relationships in the two different mentoring programmes, but it also allows inferences to be made about whether the existence of negative features of the relationship impacted on outcomes. The repeated measurement of relationship quality at three different time points, over a long period is also beneficial. This means that relationships have had a chance to develop and embed before their quality is assessed and also that differences over time can be examined.

**Other studies.** Parra et al. (2002) tested a model where the impact of distal influences (e.g., mentor efficacy beliefs) on mentoring outcomes (perceived mentoring benefits and continuation of the relationship) were suggested to be mediated by features of the relationship. In addition, relationship closeness was predicted to mediate links between other relationship features, such as amount of contact, and outcome. Young people and their mentors were assessed prior to being matched in a BB/BS programme. Relationship quality was assessed with a single question about relationship closeness in monthly telephone interviews over the

following one year period. An average of the ratings for the active period was computed to derive an overall “closeness index”. Amount and nature of youth-mentor contact and relationship obstacles were also measured in this way. Mentor-perceived self efficacy was measured at baseline and perceived relationship benefits at six months and one year.

Path analysis confirmed the model proposed was a good fit. With regards to relationship closeness, the key findings were that within the mediational pathways identified, feelings of closeness, as rated by either mentor or youth, demonstrated the most proximal linkages to perceived benefits or relationship continuation. The authors suggested that closeness was important as a common pathway through which other facets of the relationships exert influence on outcome. Closeness was also found to be important in pathways linking non-relationship variables such as mentor efficacy beliefs to outcome. The authors report good convergence between ratings by mentors and youth, except in relation to perceived benefits for youth.

The relationship quality measure employed here was a single question regarding closeness. As discussed previously, this limits conclusions that can be drawn about relationship quality. Computing closeness as an average of monthly ratings may have provided a more reliable indicator of overall quality than a one-off rating. However, averaging also obscures any variation in the scores over time which may have been interesting to examine, particularly in relation to early relationship processes and difficulties in those relationships that ended prematurely. A further limitation of this study is that objective outcome measures (such as academic achievement or psychosocial functioning) were not included in the study, with outcomes limited to mentoring variables. However, the use of a multi-informant

design is an important strength of this study, as is the measurement of outcomes at both six and 12 months post-match.

Goldner and Maysel (2009) assessed relationship closeness, dependency and unrealistic expectations and their associations with outcome. Participants were from the “Perach” mentoring project, a well-established mentoring programme based in Israel. The mentoring programme lasted for an academic term of eight months, with undergraduates as volunteer mentors. Mentees’ social support and teachers’ assessments of social, emotional and academic adjustment were assessed at the beginning of the relationship (Time 1) and at the end (Time 2). Relationship quality was measured at the end of the Time 2.

An adapted version of the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI: Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was completed by mentees to assess relationship closeness and unrealistic expectations. The questions taken from the NRI have good face validity for assessing children’s views of relationship quality, having been designed to assess a range of relationships in young peoples’ lives (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Six of the social support items - companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, affection, nurturance and admiration - made up a measure of “closeness”. The seventh item, reliable alliance, was combined with three additional items developed by the authors to create a measure of ‘unrealistic expectations’. The items measuring negative interchanges were not included. Mentors completed two subscales of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992) to assess closeness and dependency in the mentoring relationship. The STRS was designed to assess teachers’ perceptions of their relationship with a particular student.

Closeness, unrealistic expectations and dependency were positively correlated with improvements in academic and social adjustment as rated by teachers



and mentees. This was the case for closeness rated both by mentor and mentee. Neither closeness nor dependency ratings were associated with changes in emotional functioning reported by teachers. Interestingly, mentee-rated closeness showed a greater correspondence with outcome than mentor-rated closeness. Mentee-rated closeness was associated with increased social support from mothers, but not fathers or friends. Perceptions of quality of the relationship between mentors and mentees were not correlated.

The NRI appears to be a useful tool for assessing youth's views of mentoring relationships, although items from the original scale measuring negative interchanges were excluded in this study, despite this being an area of growing interest for mentoring researchers (Spencer, 2007). The STRS was not designed to measure the one-to-one, more intimate relationships that mentoring programmes might hope to foster and seems less appropriate. In particular, expectations for the levels of dependency appropriate in teacher-pupil relationships as opposed to mentoring relationships may be quite different. The authors concluded that the study provides evidence of the association between closeness in relationships and progress in social and academic adjustment, and highlight the role of dependent relationships in promoting adjustment. However, there are a number of design limitations to this study. As it is correlational, this limits what it tells us about causal relationships between quality and outcomes as it is likely that other variables also play a part. Also, relationship quality was assessed at the end point of the relationship, so ratings would have been affected by feelings about ending and issues regarding recall.

Nakkula and Harris (2010) reanalysed data pertaining to relationship quality collected over six years from a BB/BS programme. Relationship quality was assessed using the Youth Mentoring Survey (YMS) for mentees and the Match

Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ) for mentors. These assessed match structure and quality, looking at the interactions that took place and their focus. The YMS includes measures of both positive and negative aspects of the relationship, whilst the MCQ measures only positive aspects. The measures were designed to be used together and alongside objective measures such as relationship duration (Nakkula & Harris, 2005). Associations between the subscales of the surveys were looked at to examine links between mentoring structure and quality, and also to assess whether the two measures mapped on to a theoretical framework for mentoring relationships (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010). This framework suggests that mentoring relationships can be understood within three dimensions: (1) focus of the interactions (relational vs. instrumental); (2) purpose of mentoring (predominantly conventional vs. playful); (3) authorship of the relationship (collaborative or didactic).

For mentees, a greater 'fun' focus was positively correlated with relational quality, whilst greater instrumental focus was positively correlated with instrumental quality. A sharing focus interacted significantly with fun and instrumental focuses to predict their respective qualities. For mentors, again, fun was strongly correlated with relational quality, but was also found to be associated with most qualities. Sharing was found to moderate the relationship between closeness and other purpose scales, and when both fun and sharing were rated highly this increased the association with closeness. The authors concluded that having fun is a key ingredient of mentoring relationships, particularly when combined with sharing, and that sharing also improves the links between an instrumental focus and higher relational quality.

This study had a strong theoretical basis, examining an empirically derived framework of mentoring relationships using two validated relationship measures.

Thus interesting links between relationship structure and quality can be made. However, as only these measures were examined no conclusions about how these factors are linked to outcomes can be drawn. Additionally, with reference to the theoretical framework, the third dimension of authorship was not addressed by either of the measures, and so any conclusions about this can only be inferred. However, overall this study is a very useful addition to understanding how the structure and quality of mentoring relationships are related and interact.

**Summary.** The use of adapted measures in three of the five studies in this section is positive, as these have been researched and validated. However, specific features of mentoring relationships such as their informality and one-to-one nature should be considered when selecting measures. Two of the four studies employed a randomised design and included a comparison group with a less intensive relationship, in order for inferences to be made about the impact of quality on outcome. All five studies benefit from having assessed relationship quality from the dual perspectives of mentor and mentee. Their findings suggest that mentor and mentee ratings of relationship quality are likely to differ, which could be due to the assessment tools used, or may indicate that ratings mean different things to mentees and mentors. Cavell and Hughes (2000) suggest that mentor ratings may be a more holistic measure of the child's interactional style, whilst mentee ratings more specifically reflect views of that individual relationship. It is also likely that perceptions of relationship quality will impact differentially on outcome. Mentee views of relationships as positive and supportive may impact on feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy, which may be important in fostering improvements in social, academic and interactional domains. Meanwhile, mentor views of the relationship

may reflect their prior expectations and the organisational structure and support of the mentoring programme.

Higher ratings of relationship quality were associated with improvements in academic performance and social competence in one of the studies (Goldner & Maysless, 2010). Cavell and Hughes (2000) found significant decreases in aggression in both treatment conditions regardless of the difference between the two mentoring interventions. This was further examined in a later study where the mentoring intervention in the control group was altered to reduce opportunities to build close emotional bonds (Cavell et al., 2009). Results indicated significantly more improvements on measures of aggression and peer acceptance in the treatment condition where closer emotional bonds were encouraged than in the control group.

### **Relationship Quality Rated by a Third Party**

Dicken, Bryson and Kass (1977) examined mentee characteristics, mentoring relationship quality and youth outcomes. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were randomised into either an intervention group, where they were matched with a mentor, or to a waiting list control group. Mentors were undergraduate students who met with mentees for an academic semester. There were two relationship quality measures. Firstly, the semester grade given by the mentor's weekly supervisor, and secondly visit report ratings. Visit reports were completed once a week by the mentors, detailing activities and conversations had with the mentor on a structured checklist (Goodman, 1972). Global ratings of the "closeness" and "constructiveness" of the relationship were made by two independent judges who examined the visit reports. These concepts were defined as "warmth, intimacy, involvement and the contribution of the relationship in advancing the best interests of the child". Measures assessing the personality functioning of the mentee from their

own, their parents, and their teachers' perspectives were administered at pre- and post-intervention. The personal qualities of the mentor were also assessed by means of a structured exercise where observers rated important "helper" characteristics of empathy, acceptance and openness (GAIT; Goodman, 1972).

Correlations between the ratings of mentees' personality functioning at the end of the intervention, mentors' semester grade and visit ratings were examined. Although the predominant finding was of a lack of association, there were modest correlations between child-rated personality functioning at the end of mentoring and relationship quality assessed by semester grade and visit rating. GAIT ratings of empathy in mentors were found to significantly predict relationship quality. Overall, the study found limited support for therapeutic change in mentoring, with only significant differences between intervention and control groups on parent-rated functioning.

A key strength of this study is that relationship quality was measured from multiple perspectives, including those of supervisors and independent judges, which is unique in the studies within this review. The visit reports are a useful tool as they measure the development of the relationship over time. However, the means by which the independent judges derived their ratings of constructiveness and closeness is not fully described; and the provision of examples as to how the ratings were derived would have been highly instructive. There are a number of limitations, including the small sample size and high attrition rate which may indicate some sampling bias. The mentoring programme itself was only of a short duration, again limiting conclusions that can be drawn about how relationship quality may develop over a longer time period.

## **Discussion**

This review examined how mentoring relationship quality has been quantitatively assessed, and the extent to which it has been found to be associated with outcomes of mentoring interventions. The studies included in the review largely drew on American mentoring organisations (13 of 15) with eight using data from BBBS mentoring programmes, reflecting a more general North American bias in the youth mentoring literature and the predominance of research emanating from BBBS programmes in particular. Relationship quality was assessed by 10 scales of which six were designed with youth mentoring relationships in mind and four adapted from pre-existing measures of other types of relationships. The studies largely demonstrated that relationship quality was associated with better outcomes for youth; however, any conclusions about the directions of causality are limited as the majority of studies assessed quality and outcome at a single time point. Two studies with more sophisticated designs (Cavell & Hughes, 2000; Cavell et al., 2009) found associations between relationship quality and outcomes, lending stronger support to the conclusions.

### **Measurement of Relationship Quality**

The measures used to assess relationship quality tapped a large number of differently named constructs. However, most assessed one, or more aspects of the relationship, including empathy, trust, closeness and fun/enjoyment. Each of these is considered briefly in turn, followed by a summary of how and when relationship quality was assessed.

Mentees' perception of empathy in their mentors was assessed in three of the 10 measures. Empathy refers to the ability to understand and respond sensitively to the needs of others and is vital to the formation of positive relationships (Rhodes,

2002). Being empathic is necessary to enable mentors to understand a young person's experiences within their current, often complex situations, for example by being sensitive to the young person's needs, the family's values, and any cultural differences (Spencer, 2006). It is also one of the key helper qualities within Rogers' client-centred theory of therapeutic relationships (Rogers, 1980) and research evidence points to the importance of perceived empathy in maintaining therapeutic alliance and promoting better outcomes (Spencer, 2004). Given some of the parallels between these two types of helping relationships, similar relational processes are likely to be underway within mentoring relationships.

Trust (including consistency, dependability, and consistent support) was also measured by three of the 10 measures. Having a dependable adult, who can be relied on as someone who will "back up" the young person is linked to the concept of a secure base in attachment theory (Rhodes, 2002). In providing such a "corrective" experience, trusting relationships may enable young people to be better at tolerating conflict. Qualitative research has found trust to be a key part of mentoring relationship success (Styles & Morrow, 1995) and it may be a factor contributing to the benefits of longer relationships.

Closeness can be defined as feeling connected to someone and cared for, and provides a useful organising construct in mentoring research (Nakkula & Harris, 2005). In the studies reviewed here, it was assessed within two of the measures (Network of Relationships Inventory; Student Teacher Relationship Scale) and as a single question to measure relationship quality in two studies (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Parra et al., 2002). Closeness has been measured across mentoring contexts (e.g., school-based, group) as well as in one-to-one youth mentoring (Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Theoretically, closeness has been described as either being preceded by

(and requiring) empathy and trust, or as encompassing these qualities (Nakkula & Harris, 2005). Mentoring relationships that are less close have been found to have less effect (Deutsch & Spencer, 2010) and qualitative studies have found that overt emotional closeness in relationships is highly valued (Spencer, 2007).

Fun or enjoyment in the relationship was measured by four of the scales. Whilst more familiar territory for friendships, the importance of “sharing a laugh” with a mentor is borne out in qualitative work (Philip et al., 2004) and may be what differentiates mentoring from other more professional helping relationship and softens the potential difficulties of accepting criticism and challenge (Philip, 2008).

It is also vital to consider when and how relationship quality was assessed. Most commonly this was at a single time point at follow-up (e.g., in the four studies drawing on Grossman & Tierney’s BBBS evaluation) or at termination (e.g., Goldner & Mayseless, 2010). There are a number of difficulties with this. Firstly, responses may depend on recall if the relationship has already ended. Additionally, if the relationship recently terminated or was due to end imminently, emotional responses to the ending are likely to have impacted on ratings. Regular measurement, for example using a weekly diary and rating scale, can avoid these problems and help to capture the dynamic nature of relationship quality (Deutsch & Spencer, 2010) and was employed by a few of the studies included in this review (e.g., Dicken et al., 1976; DuBois & Neville, 1997). Furthermore, all but one of the studies (Dicken et al., 1976) measured relationship quality through self-report only, which precludes an objective view of the interactional processes within the relationship. Relationship quality was also mostly assessed from a single perspective, thus not accounting for the interactional nature of relationships. Incorporating interviews or observational approaches to measurement, and assessing multiple perspectives would therefore be



highly beneficial in order to triangulate the data and strengthen the validity of any findings.

### **Relationship Quality and Mentoring Outcomes**

The 15 studies reviewed here provide evidence that relationship quality is associated with mentoring outcomes. Higher ratings of quality were associated with improvements for youth in the domains of academic performance (Rhodes et al., 2005; Goldner & Mayseless, 2010), social competence (Goldner & Mayseless, 2010), aggressive behaviour (Cavell et al., 2009) and relationships (Thomson & Zand, 2010). These findings support Rhodes' model of mentoring relationships, suggesting that a close bond between mentor and mentee is key to successful mentoring. More specifically, the evidence that higher levels of mentoring relationship quality are associated with improved relationships with others supports the notion that this is one of the pathways by which mentoring relationships influence outcome (Thomson & Zand, 2010).

A number of studies have conducted more sophisticated analyses of relationship quality and outcomes. Langhout et al. (2004) found that unconditionally supportive relationships were in fact associated with decreases in self-esteem and increases in feelings of alienation. Further examination of the links between high support relationships and outcomes would elucidate this potentially valuable finding. When examined as a moderating variable, relationship quality attenuated the negative impact of certain mentee characteristics on outcome, and accounted for approximately a quarter of the variance in the association between relationship duration and self-esteem (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2005). Parra et al. (2002) found that quality mediated links between relationship characteristics and

outcome. Again, the evidence is promising for the moderating or mediating role of relationship quality; however further investigation of such links would be instructive.

A large number of the studies reviewed here are limited by the fact that relationship quality and outcome were measured at the same time point, meaning that no conclusions can be drawn about directions of causality. This also means that the studies generally provide a snapshot of the mentoring relationship at a given time, but do not shed light on the processes underlying relationship development. A further methodological issue is the considerable variation in how outcome was measured, with some studies employing multiple perspectives and objective measurements, whilst others relied solely on either mentors' or mentees' reports of perceived benefits of mentoring (Du Bois & Neville, 1997; Parra et al., 2002). When quality was rated by both mentor and mentee, there was either limited or no association between their ratings (Goldner & Mayseless, 2010; Cavell et al., 2009; Hughes & Cavell, 2000) which highlights the importance of triangulating views on the relationship within studies.

A few of the studies also examined the associations between relationship quality and other characteristics of the mentors, mentees and the mentoring relationships, with limited findings. Not surprisingly, relationship quality was found to be positively correlated with relationship duration (Rhodes et al., 2005) and amount of contact between mentor and mentee (Madia & Lutz, 2004; Chan & Ho, 2010), and inversely associated with contacts with mentoring programme staff and reported obstacles in the relationship (DuBois & Neville, 1997). In addition, mentees being female and more competent predicted higher levels of relationship quality in one study (Zand et al., 2009), although another found that mentees' gender and relationship quality were not related (Rhodes et al., 2005).

## **Other Methodological Issues**

This review endeavoured to examine relationship quality measures used in studies across a range of youth mentoring programmes, based on a community mentoring model. However, there were some important differences in the programmes described in these studies. A number were time-limited and employed graduate students who received academic credits for participation (Cavell et al., 2009; Goldner & Mayseless, 2009; Hughes & Cavell, 2000). In one study, most mentors were police officers who had volunteered to take part in the programme (Chan & Ho, 2010) as opposed to the more traditional adult volunteer model (in the BBBS programmes). Such differences between the interventions may have introduced systematic differences in the quality of relationships. In addition, whilst a one-to-one, adult-child mentoring relationship was required for inclusion in the study, age limits were not set. Although this was a pragmatic decision, the age and developmental stage of the mentee is likely to have a significant impact on their needs within a mentoring relationship, and thus the appropriateness of a measure of relationship quality. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that a large number of the studies in this review examined mentoring relationships in BBBS programmes, thus the generalisability of any conclusions about mentoring relationships within this long-running, structured and standardised mentoring organisation to other programmes is questionable.

## **Limitations of This Review**

The present review has a number of limitations. Firstly, the focus on youth mentoring meant that a number of studies of mentoring relationships in other contexts were excluded. Lessons can be learnt from studies in other contexts, as long as the impact of the context on the relationship is considered. A second limitation is

that this review only considered publications in peer reviewed journals. Given the growth of mentoring in government policy and voluntary sector organisations devoted to mentoring, there is a large grey literature regarding mentoring which was not within the scope of the present review. Finally, for the purposes of clarity, this review only addressed quantitative measures specifically addressing the emotional, interactional process which make up relationship quality within mentoring. Relationship duration, frequency of contact and type of activity undertaken have been conceptualised as external quality factors which contribute to relationship quality in mentoring (Nakkula & Harris, 2005) and should be measured as part of quality assessment and linked to outcome.

### **Future Research Implications**

Research into the quality of mentor-mentee relationships is in its early stages. Further qualitative research exploring mentoring relationships at different stages, for example at the outset of the relationship, or once the relationship is well-established, would provide valuable information about underlying interactional processes. Assessment of quality from multiple perspectives, with repeated measurement would also be very beneficial. Future research should endeavour to replicate findings linking higher quality relationships with improved outcomes using longitudinal and experimental designs. There are limited, but important findings suggesting links between certain types of relationships and specific outcomes and this warrants further investigation.

Overall, the findings of this review are consistent with previous research suggesting that higher levels of relationship quality are associated with improved outcomes. The importance of an evidence based approach to mentoring is beginning to be recognised, and guidelines for mentoring programmes have been produced

(Rhodes, 2002; p. 104). The evidence in this review suggests that such efforts to foster and monitor close and consistent bonds between mentor and mentee are important and should be continued within mentoring programmes in order to realise the potential of youth mentoring interventions.

## REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M.D. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, *44*, 709–716.
- Bowlby, J. (1988) *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Byrne, D. (1971) *The attraction paradigm*. New York, NY: Academic Press
- Cavell, T.A., Elledge, C.L. Malcolm, K.T., Faith, M.A. & Hughes, J.N. (2009) Relationship quality and the mentoring of aggressive, high-risk children. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *38*, 2, 185-198.
- Cavell, T.A. & Hughes, J.N. (2000) Secondary prevention as context for assessing change processes in aggressive children. *Journal of School Psychology*, *38*, 3, 199-235
- Chan, C.C. & Ho, W.C. (2010) An ecological framework for evaluating relational- functional aspects of youth mentoring. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *38*, 4, -867
- Deutsch, N.L. & Spencer, R. (2009) Capturing the magic: assessing the quality of youth mentoring relationships. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *121*, 47-70
- Dicken, C., Bryson, R. & Kass, N. (1977) Companionship therapy: A replication in experimental Community Psychology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *45*, 4, 637-646
- DuBois, D.L., Holloway, B.E., Valentine, J.C. & Cooper, H. (2002) Effectiveness of mentoring programs: a meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *30*, 157-197

- DuBois D.L. & Neville, H.A. (1997) Youth mentoring- iInvestigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 25, 3, 227-234
- DuBois, D.L., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J.E., Silverthorn, N. & Valentine, J.C. (2011) How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 12, 2, 57-91
- East, P.L. (1991). The parent-child relationships of withdrawn, aggressive and sociable children: child and parent perspectives. *Merrill-Palmer quarterly*, 37, 3, 425-443
- Eby, L.T., Allen, T.D., Evans, S.C., Ng, T. & DuBois, D.L. (2008). Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72, 254–267
- Furman, W. & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children’s perception of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology*, 21, 6, 1016-1024
- Garraway, H., & Pistrang, N. (2010). “Brother from another mother”: Mentoring for African-Caribbean adolescent boys. *Journal of Adolescence*, 33, 719-729.
- Goldner, L. & Mayseless, O. (2009) The quality of mentoring relationships and mentoring success. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38, 1339-1350
- Goodman (1972) *Companionship therapy: Studies in structured intimacy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

- Grossman, J.B. & Bulle, M.J. (2006) Review of what youth programs do to increase the connectedness of youth with adults. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 39*, 788-799
- Grossman, J.B. & Rhodes, J.E. (2002) The test of time: predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*, 2, 199- 219
- Grossman, J. B. & Tierney, J. P. (1998) Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big brothers/big sisters program. *Evaluation Review 22*, 403-426.
- Hughes, J. N., Cavell, T. A. & Meehan, B. (2001) Preventing substance abuse in aggressive children: final report of R01-DA10037 submitted to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- Hughes, J. N., Cavell, T. A., Meehan, B., Zhang, D. & Collie, C. (2005) Adverse school context moderates the outcomes of two selective intervention programs for aggressive children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*, 4, 731–736.
- Karcher, M.J., Nakkula, M. & Harris, J.: (2005) Developmental mentoring match characteristics: correspondence between mentors' and mentees' assessments of relationship quality. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 26*, 2, 93- 110
- Karcher, M. J. & Nakkula, M. J. (2010) Youth mentoring with a balanced focus, shared purpose and collaborative interactions. *New Directions for Youth Development, 126*, 13-32.
- Langhout, R .D., Rhodes, J. E. & Osbourne, L. N. (2004) An exploratory study of youth mentoring in an urban context: adolescents' perceptions of relationship styles. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33*, 4, 291-306



- Madia, B. P. & Lutz, C. J. (2004) Perceived similarity, expectation-reality discrepancies, and mentors' expressed intention to remain in Big brothers/big sisters programs. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34, 3, 598-623
- Meier, R. (2008) Youth mentoring- A good thing? Centre for Policy Studies
- Nakkula, M. & Harris, J. *Assessing mentoring relationships*. Handbook of youth mentoring. D. Dubois & M. Karcher (eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2005.
- Nakkula, M. J. & Harris, J.T. (2010) Beyond the dichotomy of work and fun: measuring the thorough interrelatedness of structure and quality in youth mentoring relationships. *New Directions in Youth Development*, 126, 71-87
- Parra, G., DuBois, D., Neville, H.A., & Pugh-Lilly, A.O. (2002) Mentoring relationships for youth: investigation of a process-oriented model. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 4, 367-388
- Pederson, P.J., Woolum, S., Gagne, B. & Coleman, M. (2009) Beyond the norm: extraordinary relationships in youth mentoring. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 1307-1313
- Philip, K. (1999) *Young people and mentoring: A literature review for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation*. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.
- Phillip, K. (2003) Youth mentoring: the American dream comes to the UK? *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 31, 1, 101 — 112
- Philip, K. & Hendry, L. B. (1996) Young people and mentoring: Towards a typology? *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 3, 189–201

- Phillip, K., Shuksmith, J. & King, C. (2004) Sharing a Laugh? A qualitative study of young people and mentoring. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [www.jrf.org.uk/publications/mentoring-vulnerable-young-people](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/mentoring-vulnerable-young-people)
- Philip, K. (2008) She's my second mum: young people building relationships in uncertain circumstances. *Child Care in Practice*, 14, 1, 19-33
- Pierce, Sarason & Sarason (1991) General and relationship-based perceptions of social support: are two constructs better than one? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 1028-1039
- Rogers, C. (1980) *A Way of Being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Rhodes, J. E. (2002) *Stand by me: the risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press
- Rhodes, J.E. (2005) "A theoretical model of youth mentoring." In D. L. DuBois & M. A. Karcher (Eds.) *Handbook of youth mentoring*. (pp. 30-43). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Press.
- Rhodes, J. E. & DuBois, D. L. (2008). Mentoring relationships and programs for youth. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17, 254-258.
- Rhodes, J.E., Grossman, J.B. & Resch, N. (2000) Agents of change: Pathways through which mentoring relationships influence adolescents' academic adjustment. *Child Development*, 71, 6, 1662-1671
- Rhodes, J.E., Grossman, J.B. & Lee, J.M. (2002) Volunteer mentoring relationships with minority youth: an analysis of same-versus cross race matches. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32, 10, 2114-2133
- Roberts, A. (2000). Mentoring revisited: A phenomenological reading of the literature. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 8, 2, 145-170

- Roberts, H., Liaibo, K., Lucas, P., DuBois, D. & Sheldon, T.A. (2004) Mentoring to reduce anti-social behaviour in childhood. *British Medical Journal*, 328, 512-514
- Royse (1998) Mentoring high risk minority youth: evaluation of Brothers project *Adolescence*, 33, 145-158
- Sale, E., Bellamy, N., Springer, F. & Wang, M.Q. (2008) Quality of provider-participant relationships and enhancement of adolescent social skills. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 29, 263-278
- Shelmerdine, S. & Louw, J. (2008) Characteristics of mentoring relationships. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 20, (1), 21-32
- Shirk, S. R. & Saiz, C. C (1992) Clinical, empirical, and developmental perspectives on the therapeutic relationship in child psychotherapy. *Development and Psychopathology*, 4, 4, 713-728
- Shorey, H.S. & Snyder, C.R. (2006) The role of adult attachment styles in psychopathology and psychotherapy outcomes. *Review of General Psychology*, 10, 1, 1-20.
- Sipe, C.L. (2002) Mentoring programs for adolescents: a research summary. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 31, 251-260.
- Spencer, R. (2004) Studying relationships in psychotherapy: an untapped resource for youth mentoring. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 103, 31-43
- Spencer, R. (2006) Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults. *Youth and Society*, 37, 287-315
- 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

- Thomson, N. R. & Zand, D. H. (2010) Mentees perceptions of their interpersonal relationships: the role of the mentor-youth bond. *Youth Society*, 41, 3, 434-445
- Tolan, P., Henry, D., Shoeny, M. & Bass, A. (2005) Mentoring interventions to affect juvenile delinquency and associated problems. The Campbell Collaboration.
- Verhofstadt, L., Buysse, A., Rosseel, Y. & Peene, O. (2006) Confirming the three-factor structure of the quality of relationships inventory within couples. *Psychological Assessment*, 18, 1, 15-21.
- Zand, D. H., Thomson, N., Cervantes, R., Espiritu, R., Klagholz, D., LaBlanc, L. & Taylor, A. (2009) The mentor-youth alliance: the role of mentoring relationships in promoting youth competence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32, 1-17

## **PART 2: EMPIRICAL PAPER**

### **Youth mentoring: The development of the child-mentor relationship**

## Abstract

**Aims.** Mentoring interventions have the potential to effect positive changes for vulnerable young people; however this depends on the development of a close, long-lasting connection between mentor and mentee. This qualitative study investigated how mentors and mentees experienced their relationship during the first six months, what facilitated engagement and what was challenging. Caseworkers' perspectives on the relationship and the support they provided were also examined.

**Method.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven mentor-mentee pairs six months after the relationship began. Mentors were adult volunteers and mentees were children aged 9 -12 years old. Caseworkers for each pair were also interviewed (n=4). Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results.** Factors facilitating the development of the relationship were: mentor-mentee pairs taking part in enjoyable activities; mentors taking a collaborative approach; building trust through being consistent, non-judgemental, and authentic; connecting with the mentee's family; and creating a sense of "specialness". Considerable challenges arose, including mentees' reticence in communicating, mentors' self-doubt, negotiating the mentor role and addressing difficulties in mentees' lives.

**Conclusions.** Within six months of first meeting most mentors had been able to build strong, close bonds with their mentees. The support of caseworkers was essential. Further research is required to examine the impact of mentees' age on relationship development and to investigate what support for mentors is helpful in facilitating positive, long-lasting mentoring relationships.

## **Introduction**

Changes in the structures of families, communities and employment have led to the reduced presence of caring adults in the lives of many young people, and particularly in poor, urban areas increasing numbers of young people are at risk of social exclusion, unemployment and criminal activity (Rhodes, 2002). One response to this has been the growth of youth mentoring programmes both in the United States and in the UK (Meier, 2008; Sipe, 2003). Such programmes pair adult volunteers with young people deemed to be at risk of difficulties due to challenging circumstances such as family break-up or loss. Mentors and mentees meet on an individual basis, outside the home or school setting, and spend time taking part in leisure activities and building up a close relationship which provides the basis for improvements in the young person's life.

Mentoring relationships are thought to influence young people by enhancing social skills and emotional wellbeing, improving cognitive skills through talking and listening, and by mentors serving as role models and advocates, all within the context of a close emotional connection (Rhodes, 2002). Rhodes (2002; 2005) proposes that the mentoring relationship should be characterised by mutuality, trust and empathy. Individual, family and contextual influences, such as relationship duration, interpersonal skills and environmental adversities, are suggested to moderate the establishment of a close connection and the influence of the mentoring relationship on outcome.

Attachment theory may provide a useful framework for understanding the relational processes that take place within mentoring (e.g., Rhodes, 2002). This theory proposes that early relationships with primary caregivers form the basis for children's internal working models of interactions with others and how they perceive

and respond to the social environment (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1988). Young people who are referred for mentoring interventions and come from single parent homes, or have experienced unsatisfactory parental relationship may have developed “problematic” attachment styles, including fears of being abandoned or uncared for (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

Early experiences and consequent attachment styles may impact on whether young people are able to develop close, trusting and long-lasting relationships with mentors. Only a few studies have investigated the links between attachment styles and mentoring relationships and these lend preliminary support to this idea. One study found that adolescents with more secure attachment have stronger mentoring relationships (Soucy & Larose, 2000) and another that those with secure attachment styles were more likely to have “naturally occurring” mentors (Georgiou, Demetriou & Stavrinides, 2008) . However, further research in this area is required.

Attachment theory can also help to explain how mentoring improves outcomes for young people. Rhodes (2002) suggests that one of the ways in which close and long-lasting mentoring relationships may be beneficial is by helping to alter internal working models of relationships through sensitive listening, consistent support, and modelling effective communication and understanding. In support of this, mentoring has been linked to significant improvements in young peoples’ interpersonal relationships with parents, peers and other adults (DuBois, Neville, Parra & Pugh- Lilly, 2002; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman,& Grossman, 2005). Furthermore, in one study, higher quality mentoring relationships were associated with improvements other relationships in a young person’s life (Thomson & Zand, 2010). However, more examination of the impact of mentoring on attachment style is required.



To further understand the relational processes underlying mentoring, it may be helpful to consider research into formal psychotherapy, which is similarly a relationship-based, “helping“ intervention (Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2004). A strong therapeutic alliance between therapist and child is associated with improved outcomes across different therapeutic approaches (Shirk & Karver, 2003). Research into the interpersonal characteristics which are important in therapists, both in child and adult psychotherapy, has built on Carl Rogers’ (1980) concepts of empathy, warmth/acceptance and genuineness. Such interpersonal qualities have also been found to be important in mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2006) and encouraging these in mentors may be beneficial to engaging mentees and to the development of long-term, positive relationships. Additionally, other process variables such as parental engagement and commitment to therapy are also associated with better outcomes of therapy with children (Karver, Handelsman, Fields & Bickman, 2006). Involving parents in mentoring is likely to support a young person’s engagement in the mentoring relationship, and acknowledging the potential for parents to have conflicting feelings about their child’s mentor may help to reduce the possibility of split loyalties or competing influences on the young person (Rhodes, 2002).

Whilst mentoring and psychotherapy share some commonalities, there are also crucial differences between them which are likely to affect the types of relational processes underway in these relationships and the challenges that can arise (Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2004). Mentors are unpaid volunteers who usually have minimal training in working with young people, whilst therapists tend to be highly trained professionals. Mentors may therefore require additional support in understanding their own feelings and responses to the developing relationship, and when managing challenges. Therapists tend to work towards ameliorating specific

emotional difficulties, in a goal-oriented, boundaried and often time-limited context. This is in contrast to mentors who are focused on promoting general positive development, usually based in informal settings. As such, challenges may arise relating to the role of a mentor in the child's life and setting appropriate boundaries for the relationship. Additionally, mentoring relationships often focus on engaging with young people in enjoyable activities and providing respite from difficulties, whilst psychotherapy tends to be a problem-based, talking intervention aimed at addressing difficult issues. Mentors therefore may require other qualities, which may be less important for therapists in formal therapy settings, for engaging young people and developing and maintaining close and connected relationships.

There is an extensive evidence base which supports the effectiveness of youth mentoring interventions (e.g., DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008) but overall effect sizes are modest and outcomes vary considerably. This variation is partly explained by individual factors such as the characteristics of the mentor and mentee, and also by features of the mentoring programme including procedures for selecting and matching mentors and the provision of on-going support (DuBois et al., 2011). Additionally, both the *quality* and the *duration* of mentoring relationships have been found to impact on outcomes; young people with mentoring relationships rated as of greater intensity or quality on average have better outcomes (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002) and those who meet for longer derive more benefits from the intervention (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

It is estimated that half of all mentoring relationships terminate before the planned date (Rhodes, 2002) which may reduce potential benefits of the intervention, and in some cases cause harm. Whilst there has been limited research into the effects

of mentoring relationships breaking down, one study found that mentoring relationships which ended within three months of commencement were associated with decreases in the young person's self-worth and perceived educational achievement (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

Research has begun to examine the relational processes that underlie successful, long-lasting mentoring bonds. These qualitative studies have tended to examine "stronger" matches, and looked at both the mentors' and mentees' perspectives. Spencer (2006) interviewed 24 pairs of mentors and mentees, with an average relationship duration of four years; their accounts suggested that authenticity and empathy were particularly important at the beginning of the relationship and that enjoyment of each other's company appeared to deepen over time depending on the commitment and involvement of the mentor. Philip (2008) interviewed young people, volunteer mentors, paid keyworkers and parents or carers, finding that themes of reciprocity, challenge, continuity and providing respite from difficult situations or relationships were all components of successful relationships. Shelmerdine and Louw (2008) interviewed eight mentors and mentees in relationships of approximately one year in duration; several different narratives underpinned mentoring relationships in terms of the mentors' purpose in the relationship being either of "friendship for its own sake" or "to help", with the former tending to have more positive outcomes for young people

A few qualitative studies have also focused on specific types of mentoring dyads, such as male mentor-mentee relationships deemed to be strong and successful (Spencer, 2007) and mentoring of Afro-Caribbean boys (Garraway & Pistrang, 2010). Findings from these studies also support the importance of emotional closeness, a sense of pleasure and connectedness and high levels of trust between mentoring pairs.

A third study, which examined communication in 10 adolescent-adult mentoring pairs of an average of four years duration, found that defining the relationship and establishing boundaries was a key process undertaken between mentor and mentee but also with the mentees' family network (Barrowclough & White, 2011).

Whilst the studies detailed above have begun to illuminate relational processes, predominantly in strong mentoring matches, much is still unknown about how mentors and young people interact and feel during the beginning of the mentoring relationship. Furthermore, the processes that facilitate initial engagement and the development of the relationship, and the challenges that arise in the early stages of mentoring and how these are addressed have yet to be examined.

### **Aims and rationale of the present study**

It is evident that mentoring interventions have the potential to effect positive changes for vulnerable young people; however, this is dependent on the development of a close, long-lasting connection between the mentor and mentee. As mentors are unpaid volunteers typically with limited training and experience, developing and maintaining relationships with potentially vulnerable young people is likely to be challenging. Given that mentoring programmes often target young people who may find building relationships difficult and that many mentoring relationships break down in the early stages with negative outcomes, it is vital to know more about how mentors and mentees relate to each other in the early stages of mentoring.

The present study examined the experiences of mentors and mentees during the first six months of the mentoring relationship, focusing on the relational processes between them, and the challenges that emerged and how these were managed. In addition to obtaining the perspectives of the mentor and mentee, the third perspective of the caseworker was also obtained. Caseworkers were

professionals who worked alongside mentors and families, providing support and supervision for the duration of the mentoring relationship. They had detailed knowledge about each mentoring pair they supervised and how the mentor-mentee relationship was developing. Their professional training and experience of supervising different mentoring pairs provided them with a broader view, enabling them to comment on relational processes and compare these across mentoring relationships.

A qualitative approach was used as this enabled an in-depth examination of individual experiences. By addressing personal perspectives and analysing the detailed and rich descriptions individuals provide, it was hoped that a qualitative approach could go beyond some of the simplifications inherent in numerical approaches (Pistrang & Barker, 2010). Qualitative approaches focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular issue or phenomenon, with the opportunity to continuously refine research questions, develop hypotheses and pursue emerging avenues of inquiry (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). This seemed appropriate for the current study, which sought to examine complex relational processes, looking at a small number of individuals' experiences in fine detail. Additionally, given the limited understanding of such relational processes during the early stages of mentoring, and the lack of previous research in this area, the exploratory approach offered by qualitative methodology was most appropriate.

The study aimed to address the following questions:

1. How do mentors and young people experience their relationship during the first six months? Specifically, what facilitates engagement and what, if anything do they find challenging or difficult?

2. How do caseworkers perceive the development of the relationship in the first six months, in particular the challenges and difficulties, and how do they support mentors at this time?

### **Method**

This study was part of a joint project with two other UCL Clinical Psychology Doctorate students, Matthew Evans and Nicky Mountain (Evans, 2011; Mountain, to be completed). The distinction between each project is outlined in Appendix I.

### **Setting**

The mentors, mentees and caseworkers in this study were recruited from a mentoring programme in London run by a voluntary organisation. The mentoring programme was open to young people from single parent families who were between the ages of five and 16 who had experienced loss, separation or needed additional support in their lives. Referrals were accepted from schools, voluntary organisations, social services and families themselves. A caseworker assessed each family and child who was referred to the programme to discuss how a mentor could meet their needs, before looking for an appropriate mentor to match them with. Mentors were adult volunteers who had undergone a detailed interview assessing their suitability for mentoring, followed by a two day training programme if they were accepted onto the programme. The mentors were required to agree to a commitment of meeting with the young person for at least 4 hours most weekends for two years. The mentors were provided with anonymised information about three potential mentees who had been selected as appropriate by the organisation, and invited to select from these the young person they felt would be most suitable for them.

Once they began meeting with their mentee, mentors received regular supervision from a dedicated caseworker, initially via weekly and then monthly telephone calls. Mentors were also able to contact caseworkers to talk about any difficulties that arose. Caseworkers liaised with mentees' families and other agencies involved with the child's welfare (e.g., social services) regarding the mentoring relationship. The caseworkers' role afforded them a unique view of the developing relationship, with an observer perspective. In addition, given their experience and professional training, they were well placed to comment on wider issues of mentoring and to provide a "meta-perspective".

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained, as part of a larger evaluation of youth mentoring, by the University College London Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix II; mentoring was referred to as "befriending" as this was the terminology used by the mentoring organisation).

### **Participants**

**Recruitment.** Pairs of mentors and mentees who had been recruited to the larger evaluation study were invited to participate in the qualitative study on an on-going basis as they reached the six month point in their mentoring match. The inclusion criteria for the larger study were that the child was aged between 9 and 12 and spoke English. During the time period of the present study, seven mentoring pairs reached the six month point in their relationships and were approached to take part, with all agreeing.

**Characteristics of participants.** Seven mentor-mentee pairs and their caseworkers were interviewed (see Table 1). One caseworker supervised four of the pairs, so four caseworkers were interviewed in total. Of the seven children

interviewed, three were girls and four were boys; their ages ranged from 9 to 12 years old, with a mean age of 10. Four were White British, one was mixed European Asian, one was Black African, and one was mixed White and Black British. All were living at home in a single parent family, and were in primary education at the time of the study. Four had been referred to the mentoring programme by Social Services, and three had been referred by their parent.

The mentors were six women and one man ranging in age from 24 to 50, with a median age of 28. Five were White British, one was Black African and one was Asian. All were employed. The caseworkers were three women and one man. All were employees of the mentoring organisation and had qualifications in social work or teaching.

## **Procedure**

Caseworkers were contacted and asked to approach mentors and mentees to explain the nature of the present study and to check if they were happy to be contacted by the researcher. If they agreed, the researcher then contacted them to explain the study in more detail and to arrange a convenient time and place for interview.

Interviews were conducted in private either at home or for some mentors, at their workplace. Caseworkers were interviewed at the offices of the mentoring organisation. Information sheets and consent forms were provided to all participants (Appendix III and IV; mentors were referred to as “befrienders” in information sheets and consent forms). All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The mentor and caseworker interviews were all conducted by the author of this study; four of the seven mentee interviews were conducted by another doctoral student who was conducting a quantitative study of youth mentoring (Appendix D).



Table 1 – Participant Characteristics

Participants	Age	Sex	Referral Reason	Caseworker ID
Pair 1 Child 1 <sup>a</sup> Mentor 1	10 30's	Male Female	Mother's health problems prevented her from being able to do activities	1
Pair 2 Child 2 <sup>a</sup> Mentor 2	9 30's	Male Female	Mother's health problems prevented her from being able to do activities	1
Pair 3 Child 3 Mentor 3	10 20's	Male Male	Part of child protection plan Behavioural Problems History of domestic violence	2
Pair 4 Child 4 Mentor 4	10 50's	Female Female	Mother's lack of social support networks History of domestic violence	1
Pair 7 Child 7 Mentor 7	12 20's	Female Female	Negatively affected by parents' separation and divorce	1
Pair 11 Child 11 Mentor 11	10 20's	Male Female	Sister had a mentor and mother felt it would be beneficial in terms of new experiences	3
Pair 12 Child 12 Mentor 12	10 20's	Female Female	Shy and lacking confidence	4

<sup>a</sup>Child 1 and Child 2 were brothers

Note. Pair ID numbers were not sequential as participants were recruited from a larger quantitative study. Caseworker ID numbers ranged from 1-4 because one caseworker supervised four of the pairs

## **Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interview guides were developed for the study with the aim of eliciting detailed accounts of each participant's experience of the first six months of the mentoring relationship. Separate guides for mentors, children and caseworkers covered a broad range of topics (Appendix V). Mentors and mentees were asked about their expectations of the relationship, their experiences of the relationship so far and how they viewed the development of the relationship. Questions for the mentees were more concrete and specific as appropriate to their age and ability. The interviews with the caseworkers elicited their views on the early stages of the relationship and how the mentor and young person interacted and built up a connection. To gain a detailed picture of the developing relationship, questions about any difficulties or challenges that had emerged in the relationship were included in interviews with mentees, mentors and caseworkers. Caseworkers were also asked about the support that they offered to the mentor and the impact this had on the developing relationship.

The questions in the interview guides were designed as triggers for participants to talk (Willig, 2008). The ordering of questions was flexible and the researcher followed up interesting areas as relevant and followed particular concerns or interests expressed by the participant, asking for examples as illustrations. An empathic, curious, non-judgemental and attentive interviewing style was adopted to facilitate rapport with participants (Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002). Interviews with mentors and caseworkers lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour. For the mentees, interviews were much briefer, lasting approximately 20 minutes.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

Transcripts of interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, which aims to identify important ideas and patterns of responses that emerge from the data. Thematic analysis is a flexible approach which is essentially independent of theory and epistemology, whilst still providing a coherent and rigorous set of procedures for qualitative data analysis. The stages of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed: (1) interviews were transcribed and re-read in order for the researcher to become familiarised with the data set, (2) codes were generated to describe features of the data relevant to the research questions in a systematic manner, (3) codes were then collated into potential themes, generating an initial thematic map, (4) themes were then checked and verified across the data set, (5) ongoing analysis was conducted to refine, review and name the themes, and finally, (6) quotations from the transcripts were selected to illustrate the themes and provide a rich sense of the data. Appendix VI provides examples of initial coding of transcripts.

To identify important themes for each relationship and integrate the three perspectives of mentor, child and caseworker, transcripts were initially analysed within each mentor-child-caseworker "triad". Subsequently, themes were also reviewed across participant type (i.e., for all child participants) to ensure that the analysis had identified all the key issues for each participant type.

## **Quality Criteria for Qualitative Research**

Qualitative data collection methods are flexible, and analysis procedures involve interpretation by the researcher, thus it is important to ensure that research is conducted in a systematic and rigorous way (Barker & Pistrang, 2005). Importantly, all interpretations made were grounded in the data, and the interpretative framework

was examined to ensure cohesiveness and rigour. Triangulation of the data was obtained by collecting data from more than one source: i.e., the mentor, mentee and the caseworker. Patterns of convergence between different respondents were examined to ensure a more comprehensive and reflexive approach (Mays & Pope, 2000). Themes which arose were compared with findings from the quantitative study to enable further verification. A transparent approach to data collection and analysis, including the disclosure of the researcher's perspective, was taken to ensure that any preconceptions and biases of the researcher were taken into account when considering the findings. Finally, credibility checks were undertaken (Barker & Pistrang, 2005) to ensure that data analysis was rigorous and systematic and to verify the themes that were identified. These were: (1) the thesis supervisor, an expert in qualitative research, read transcripts and reviewed themes so that a consensus on coding was reached and (2) particular attention was paid to any examples which did not fit within themes, and which seemed to contradict the emerging patterns of results (Mays & Pope, 2000). This helped to refine the analysis and ensure that a thorough and comprehensive picture of the data emerged.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

Given the subjective nature of qualitative research, it is important to consider and disclose the perspective of the researcher conducting the research (Barker & Pistrang, 2005). I am a White European, middle class, female, doctoral student. Whilst conducting this research I worked for a year as a Trainee Clinical Psychologist in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. I had no prior contact or involvement with a mentoring scheme, but had worked with individual clients who had benefitted from their own involvement in mentoring programmes. I have also undertaken teaching and training in various aspects of child psychology and

therapeutic approaches with children. My social and professional location are likely to have influenced my reading of the data (Harper, 2008), for example in privileging underlying psychological processes and conceptualisations of engagement and support. However, I attempted to “bracket” my own beliefs and personal and professional experiences during all stages of the research process.

## **Results**

Nine key themes were identified relating to the process of engagement and the development of the mentoring relationship in the first six months. These were grouped into two domains: (1) Processes facilitating the development of the relationship and (2) Challenges to the developing relationship (See Table 2). An overview of the initial stages and the trajectories of the mentoring relationships is provided followed by a detailed description of each of the nine themes.

### **Overview**

The mentoring relationships all started with a sense of ‘nervousness’ on both parts, with mentors expressing feelings of worry about being liked and accepted by their mentees. Mentees also talked about being scared before the first meeting: worrying that their mentor did not know anything about them, feeling unsure about how it would feel to have a mentor, or whether they would like them and get on well.

For all but one of the pairs, the children and their mentors became closer over the initial six months of the relationship, describing feeling increasingly comfortable and confident together. This was evident in how they interacted, for example mentees expressed pleasure and excitement about meeting, talked more about sensitive issues and shared worries. Mentors described feeling less unsure about how to talk and interact with their mentees and increasingly enthusiastic about meeting.

Table 2 – Domains, themes and subthemes

Domain/Theme	Subthemes
<b>Domain 1 - Processes facilitating the development of the relationship</b>	
Theme 1.1 Bonding through activities	Enjoying time together Activities as the main focus not the relationship Engaging the mentor
Theme 1.2 Taking a collaborative approach	Responding to the child’s interests Building the child’s agency and sense of achievement
Theme 1.3 Building trust	Being consistent and reliable Being non-judgemental Being authentic Links with social services
Theme 1.4 Connecting with the child’s family	Building a close relationship with the family Difficulties in the relationship with the family
Theme 1.5 Creating a sense of “specialness”	One-to-one dedicated time Mentoring relationship as a “unique experience” Listening to and acknowledging the child’s ideas and feelings
<b>Domain 2 - Challenges to the developing relationship</b>	
Theme 2.1 Mentee reticence in communicating	Impact of the silence of child Mentors’ responses to silence- empathy Mentors’ responses to silence- activities Communication remains difficult
Theme 2.2 Mentor self-doubt and uncertainty	Worrying about doing the “wrong” thing Absence of self-doubt
Theme 2.3 Negotiating the mentor role	Defining the relationship in comparison to others Issues of confidentiality Setting boundaries with money
Theme 2.4 Addressing difficult issues in the child’s life	Not pushing the child to talk about difficult issues Being there for the child Challenges for mentors with limited training and experience Considering future changes and potential difficulties for the child

Caseworkers also reflected on the developing bond that had emerged. However, two of the mentoring pairs had a different trajectory to their relationship. Mentor 2 described feeling very “stuck” because she felt that the relationship with her mentee had not progressed and she continued to find spending time with him challenging. Mentor 12 described an initial “honeymoon” period, followed by her mentee withdrawing and being less open and relaxed in meetings; however, she noted a more recent improvement and increased understanding and closeness between them.

### **Origin and quality of data**

There was significant variation in the quality of the data from each of the three types of participants in the study, with the majority of data coming from mentors and caseworkers rather than mentees. However, to facilitate a comparison of the relational processes between mentor-mentee pairs and synthesis of a large amount of data, the themes identified in mentors, mentees and caseworkers were collapsed. The relative balance of mentor, mentee and caseworker data that contributed to each theme is noted so that this can be taken into account.

## **Domain 1 - Processes facilitating the developing relationship**

### **Theme 1.1 Bonding through activities**

One of the key factors which facilitated engagement in the mentoring relationship was mentors and children doing activities together which they enjoyed. Mentees were offered experiences of new places, activities and ideas that they otherwise may not have had. Mentors had invested considerable thought and effort into planning enjoyable activities for their mentees and ensuring these were appropriate to their interests and abilities. The children consistently referred to their enjoyment of the time spent with their mentor and having the opportunity to do new things. These seemed to act as an incentive for them to engage in the mentoring relationship.

*“I have a laugh. I enjoy myself. It makes me more happier.”(Child 4)*

*“It gives me stuff to do on the weekends when I’m bored at home. And it’s entertaining just to go out anywhere.” (Child 7)*

Mentors also reflected on the growing enthusiasm that mentees demonstrated about meetings, which in itself was rewarding and engaging for themselves.

*“It’s really nice, the little things, like, after a couple of weeks....I would call him up and say I would be at his house in five minutes and he would run down the street to meet me. It sounds a bit corny but it’s nice to see that he would run to meet me.” (Mentor 3)*

Doing enjoyable activities together provided a way for the mentor and child to get to know each other, and to build up shared experiences that they could then talk about each week, which facilitated a feeling of connectedness in the early stages. One caseworker reflected on this:

*“They’ve got a real sort of dialogue going between them now, so it’s not um, you know a sort of visit in isolation, it’s that there’s um, you know, there are conversations being picked up each week and there is very much a sort of, shared history and a shared understanding between the two of them.” (Caseworker 1 about Pair 4))*

Several of the mentors emphasised that it was the activities, rather than a close bond and talking openly, that were the main focus of the mentoring. This seemed important at the outset of the relationship and helped to reduce the mentors’ expectations about the extent to which mentees would engage and talk with them. One mentor talked about offering her mentee time away from home and the chance to do “fun” things as her first aim, but then described a close bond developing as a result of that. Caseworkers also actively encouraged this approach for mentors in the early stages. One of the caseworkers reflected on how lowering expectations of how much talking would take place had helped one mentor:

*“She’s got more confidence in herself, that you know, it’s ok to hang out and just not talk about anything deep and give [child] space and then she is there if she wants to talk, which she does, actually.”(Caseworker 4 about Pair 12)*



The mentors themselves also became more engaged in the relationship through their own enjoyment of the activities they undertook with their mentees, and frequently reflected on this in the interviews.

*“I am doing things I would never make time to do, so things we do together are things I enjoy doing. So I am not sacrificing anything spending time with him.” (Mentor 1)*

Enjoyment of the time spent together was a motivating factor for the mentors, who had committed a substantial amount of time and effort to the relationship. In addition, the mutual enjoyment of the child and the mentor appeared to facilitate the bonding process, creating a relaxed and easygoing atmosphere where both felt pleased to be engaged in a joint activity.

### **Theme 1.2 Taking a collaborative approach**

Most of the mentors took a collaborative approach to planning their meetings and activities, and encouraged their mentees to make choices about trips and activities, and how to spend their weekly budget: *“Doing what he wants, not turning up and saying this is what we are doing.”(Mentor 3)*. Caseworkers often suggested mentors involve the mentee in organising their activities in order to help engage them in the process, commonly recommending putting together a list of activities or places they would like to go to together during their first meeting. One of the mentors reflected on how this had helped her at the outset:

*“[We] went to the park. Just to have a sit down and think about things we might like to do, and that was a good ice-breaker. Making a list of things we are both interested in to get an idea of what kind of activities we might like to do together over the coming weeks and months. And that at least gave me a point of reference for things I knew he liked.”(Mentor 1)*

Mentors listened to and acknowledged mentees’ interests, and this seemed to be appreciated by the mentees and engage them further in the relationship.

*“She [mentor] is fun and she lets me go to, she lets me choose whatever I want to do, like go to museums or the cinema.” (Child 2)*

This approach also offered mentees an opportunity to experience feelings of agency, which for some may have been a novel experience.

*“[Mentor] has really encouraged him [child] to ask questions and to think about what he likes. She was saying that one of the things she found amazing is that when they started meeting he didn’t really have any concept of having a personal choice or preference. In that family it is 4 siblings and it is a bit of a one size fits all, because you can’t, you know, what is on offer is the only thing on offer so therefore you have to do it really. So the idea of having a choice or making a decision or doing two separate things and weighing them up, like, yes I preferred that because of this, and I would like to do that rather than this. He didn’t have any idea he could do that.” (Caseworker 1 about Pair 1)*

Another mentor talked about encouraging his mentee to research activities and trips on the internet, and to work out routes and timings for travel. By doing this, the mentor encouraged the child to invest in the relationship and to achieve a sense of “ownership” regarding the trips. Regularly completing tasks and having these validated by the mentor may have helped to engage the child by providing him with experiences of mastery and achievement which he may have found rewarding.

### **Theme 1.3 Building trust**

The consistency of the mentoring relationship was important in facilitating the development of a close and trusting bond. Mentors were conscious of the importance of this for their mentees, in particular given their sometimes chaotic home lives.

*“I think it is part of my thinking, is that there is a lot of disruption in his life and uncertainty and people letting him down, so I don’t like to say oh I am not going to see you next week. So my time frames, I like to keep them quite certain. So it is always a Saturday, always 11-3ish, and if I am going away then as soon as I know I have booked leave I will say...and we have a calendar where we keep everything scheduled.” (Mentor 1)*

Regular, reliable weekly meetings facilitated the process of engaging the child in the relationship, supporting the idea that mentors were a stable presence in their mentees’

life. Mentees also mentioned that meeting regularly helped them to open up and talk more with their mentors, for example with one saying he felt more “used to” his mentor and felt less shy and more able to share his feelings (Child 11). Caseworkers also reflected on the importance of this consistency for the children’s families, and that being able to establish a regular routine had a positive effect on the development of the relationship.

*“they [mentor and child] have just managed to hit a very natural rhythm quite quickly, which in a family where there is such chaos, and ups and downs and all over the place I think is amazing....I think [mentor] does tend to do the same time on a Saturday for their visits, and she tends to ring at the same time on a Friday to confirm everything, so that actually probably does help a lot, that there’s some regularity, even though it wasn’t necessarily set up from the start it was going to be that way, it has been. I think that is much easier for the family to manage and if it’s something that’s happening at that time, to plan around.” (Caseworker 1 about Pair 4)*

Some of the mentors talked about the importance of taking a non-judgemental and open-minded stance to the child and their family, which may have enabled the mentees to feel accepted and comfortable with their mentor, and contributed to a feeling of trust.

*“There is no judgement on my part, I don’t have anything to force her to do.....and I wonder whether there is maybe a bit of security there, because I do do what I say I will” (Mentor 4)*

Being authentic and real in their manner and engaging with their mentees without pretence was also vital to the development of trust within the relationship. One mentor described this approach as “I just be me” (Mentor 7). This authenticity enabled the relationship to develop in a natural and comfortable way, depending on the personalities of the mentor and mentee. For one pair (a boy matched with a male mentor), the caseworker reflected on how this led to an informal, somewhat jocular friendship.

*“I know they have quite a good, matey relationship I would call it, not just boisterous, but more teasy and boy-y.” (Caseworker 2 about Pair 3)*

Social services were, or had been involved with a number of the children or their families. Where they continued to be involved, caseworkers noted the importance of being open about the communication that was taking place between the mentor, caseworker and social worker. For one child, whose family had extensive input from social workers and the police, establishing the mentor’s authenticity as a volunteer rather than a professional was necessary to enable him to engage with and trust his mentor.

*“So at first I think he [child] might have still been in the mode that, this is somebody’s job. But I think after a while he got used to the fact that [mentor] did this because he wanted to and it wasn’t his job, he wasn’t being paid for it.” (Caseworker 2 about Pair 3)*

It should be noted that this theme was identified solely within the adult interviews, both those of mentors and caseworkers, but was not the child interviews. This may have been due to the developmental stage and reflective ability of the children.

#### **Theme 1.4 Connecting with the child’s family**

Connecting with the child’s family also facilitated the development of the relationship, and was an important theme in the mentor and caseworker interviews. In some cases this allowed the mentor to gain an understanding of the child’s home life and then use this as a means of engaging with them. As one mentor described:

*“I have a closer relationship with the family. I know about the dynamic and how he fits into it, where I can say to him, oh I heard this happened to your brother, is everything, are you ok?” (Mentor 1)*

For another mentor, who was closer in age to the child’s parents, establishing a close connection with her mentee’s mother enabled her to feel more comfortable taking the child out, improved communication about practical issues between the mentor and the family, and meant that the mother talked to the mentor about what was happening

within the family. All these factors facilitated the development of a closer mentoring relationship.

*“And [mentee’s] mum has been very open and I think felt very secure with [mentor] from the start.....and so when there’s been lots of things going on in the family I think [mum] has felt quite safe to tell [mentor] about those things and fill her in, which is nice, so [mentor] has felt very much part of the family.” (Caseworker 1 about Pair 4)*

However, connecting with the family also led to some difficulties and dilemmas. Some mentors talked about difficulties when a parent tried to involve them in a long conversation or talked with them about what they felt were inappropriate issues. A number of the mentors mentioned feeling uncomfortable in the family home, and talked about wanting to minimise contact with their mentees’ families to avoid becoming involved in family dynamics, and to ensure they maintained their role as their child’s mentor. In response to these difficulties, mentors distanced themselves or avoided unnecessary contact with the family. One mentor described how he tried to manage this:

*“The mother, she has always spoken to me quite a bit, because she doesn’t have many friends or support networks, so I think anyone who comes to the house she likes to try and have a little chat with, but I do try and keep that very separate. I don’t stay for long” (Mentor 3)*

Other mentors used their caseworker for advice and support about managing their relationship with the family and deciding when to reduce contact with them. Caseworkers and mentors talked about the use of simple strategies such as meeting the child at a library or cafe, which had enabled mentors to manage these difficult situations.

### **Theme 1.5 Creating a sense of “specialness”**

The one-to-one, focused time and attention that mentors provided enabled mentees to have a sense of being “special” and being listened to that seemed to be

important in facilitating the development of the relationship in the early stages. This theme was evident in interviews with the children, mentors and caseworkers. In some cases this was linked directly to the absence of this kind of attention within the child's life.

*"He's got an adult in his life, if only for three or four hours a week, who is consistent, reliable and who is presenting the same. So immediately he has got a different experience. He's got someone that is there for him, that will take an interest in what he does, listen to him. That's huge." (Caseworker 3 about Pair 11)*

*"I am an adult in his life just for him" (Mentor 3)*

Having this attention and one-to-one time helped mentees engage and open up, especially where they may have felt anxious in larger groups or in a school or youth club setting. Perhaps surprisingly, the child whose mentor felt he was not opening up and they had not become closer described finding it easier to talk with her than when he was around school friends and larger groups.

*"..at school all my friends talk all the time, but sometimes, me and [mentor] talk sometimes but not all the time....It's easier because there is only one person to talk to, not like 5 people, or loads of people." (Child 2)*

The time and dedicated attention that the mentors offered was unique for many of the children and the mentors recognised that listening to and acknowledging their mentees' thoughts and feelings was an important part of their role.

*"I don't think she has a stable kind of individual in her life that takes time to get to know her, to listen to her and to take her out, and I think she, she gets a lot out of that, just having that time with someone that'll be there to listen to what she has got to say." (Mentor 12)*

This sense of a different quality of interaction, and "specialness" of the relationship seemed to facilitate a growing closeness where the children felt listened to and cared for, which in turn facilitated their developing bond with the mentor and their

engagement in the relationship. One mentee reflected on the different quality of the interaction with her mentor as opposed to teachers.

*“She lets me talk. She listens to me. She comments on what I say and what I think and sometimes she helps me....Like whenever I talk to her, for example my teachers are like “Um, hmm, yes yes, I’ve got to go now, bye” and she’s not really like that. She laughs at them [her ideas] and gives comments and stuff.” (Child 4)*

## **Domain 2 - Challenges to the developing relationship**

### **Theme 2.1 Mentee reticence in communicating**

The initial quietness of the mentees was mentioned by all the mentors as a challenge at the outset. The children talked about feeling shy and unable to open up at the beginning of the relationship: *“It was scary a bit and I was shy and didn’t talk much” (Child 2)*. For most of the relationships, this changed at varying speeds into a more conversational and two-way relationship. Almost all of the mentors talked about finding this early stage uncomfortable: *“The first three weeks were really difficult. Everything was really one-sided.” (Mentor 1)*. For some this led to feelings of worry and anxiety about what the child was feeling and how the mentoring relationship would develop. Others questioned whether their mentee liked them or was happy or enjoying themselves.

*“At the beginning it’s trying to fill in the blanks, so that there’s so many thoughts in your mind – Oh my gosh, what is she thinking? Does she like me? You know stuff like that. So at the beginning it was quite scary really.” (Mentor 7)*

It was also evident that mentors, encouraged by their caseworkers, attempted to understand the experiences of their mentees, informed by an awareness of their backgrounds and family contexts, and to think about how this might affect their confidence and ability to relate to others. Understanding the child’s context and experiences increased the mentors’ ability to empathise with them.

*“ I think she [mentor] can really step back and understand the bigger picture around, yeah, sort of [child’s] experiences and things that are still happening to her, and how that might affect certain parts of her life or sort of the way she acts with people, or the way she, um, yeah, the way she builds relationships”.(Caseworker 1 about Pair 4)*

During initial visits, mentors also talked about managing the child’s quietness by organising engaging activities, using humour, trying out different conversational topics and taking a “trial and error” approach with all of these and other strategies. Mentors talked about learning about what their mentees were like and adapting their interactions to make them feel more comfortable.

*“I remember just trying to do too much speaking, and I just took a lead from her that she was just really quiet and sometimes she needed space. You know, not to be talked at all the time.”(Mentor 13)*

The majority of mentors turned to their caseworker for advice and support in the early period. The support provided by caseworkers included offering space to talk about what was happening in the relationship and validating and normalising the difficulties mentors were experiencing, passing on positive feedback from the child and family about the mentoring, suggesting “ice-breaker” activities, and encouraging mentors to empathise with mentees and consider their age and backgrounds when trying to engage with them.

*“The calls, that you have, weekly calls with your caseworker in the first six months, are quite important, because it is more of a venting process than anything. And it is a bit, not daunting, but the first few weeks are really tough, if your well, [child] is not non-responsive but his mono-syllabic answers..it is just nice having someone who has been through it, who knows how it works and can give you tips on what’s normal”(Mentor 1)*

One of the mentors (Mentor 2) was struggling to engage with her mentee and felt that there had been no improvement in the levels of communication and engagement with



him over the six months they had been meeting. She expressed frustration and hopelessness about the relationship.

*“I just think now, I think it’s like, I have taken you out so many, I know I don’t know you as well as a family member, or I feel like, if you haven’t spoken much to me now then when are you ever going to speak to me? When is it going to happen, that you are going to come and tell me school was great last week?” (Mentor 2)*

She found her mentee’s quietness difficult to tolerate and described spending time with him as “hard work”. She also reflected that her expectations of how much her mentee would communicate, along with him being quite shy, was making it harder for the relationship to develop.

*“I think I have been used to talkative kids that do not stop talking, and you would come up for air with some kids, and he is just so the opposite of that. He doesn’t want to tell me anything about school work or football or anything or what he has done; it is me dragging it out of him. I suppose I am not used to that, from my exposure to two kids, I didn’t think that at that age, 10 years old, that you would have to, I thought they would just want to tell me about themselves. I didn’t expect them to ask about me about myself, I didn’t expect that, if I asked how has school been they would say how has work been, it just wouldn’t happen, or ask me anything. I didn’t expect that. But the whole talking, I thought he might just talk to me sometimes, but he hasn’t.” (Mentor 2)*

The caseworker also felt that the mentor’s unrealistic expectations about how much her mentee would open up to her, given his age and personality, were contributing to her feelings of failure and frustration about the relationship. She reflected that the time required to build up a good bond with a child can be quite lengthy and that the mentor was finding that in itself challenging.

*“It is hard work and can feel demoralising sometimes. When you have put a lot of thought into a visit and tried really hard, to not feel like it is being enjoyed. But you know, I don’t think it is a case that he is not enjoying it; I think sometimes he is quite overwhelmed by things, needs time to take stuff in and is going to feel quite silly telling [mentor] about the visit they did last week, when that is all he has got to talk about.” (Caseworker 1 about Pair 2)*

The caseworker identified that the mentor's response to this challenge was to withdraw from the child, engage in "bigger" activities and avoid opportunities to engage and talk. This actually perpetuated the difficulties in the relationship and created a "rut", making it difficult to move forward with the relationship.

*"He is not at the point to be massively communicative with her and she has taken a little bit of the stance of well, fine if this is all its going to be then...I am not putting any more into it almost...They need to do the little stuff together, where they are spending time with each other....so it is a little bit like she is putting herself out of the activity where she could have more interaction with him."(Caseworker 1 about Pair 2)*

Whilst this theme arose from both the adult interviews and those of the children, it was the mentors and caseworkers who identified this as a challenge to the developing relationship, and reflected on how they had coped with it.

## **Theme 2.2 Mentor self-doubt and uncertainty**

Self-doubt and uncertainty about what to do or say at the outset of the relationship was evident among a number of the mentors: *"It's like raising a child but not knowing, like being a first time mum."(Mentor 7)* One mentor repeatedly questioned her caseworker in the early stages of the relationship, in particular when the child was quiet.

*"Is this going right? Am I doing anything wrong? Is this what happens? This this this..?" (Mentor 1)*

Another described herself as : *"... really paranoid that maybe I wasn't doing a good job of being a mentor." (Mentor 12).* Caseworkers provided support for mentors around this worry and self-doubt by reassuring them and advising them about how to address any difficulties that arose. Mentors also sought advice and support from friends and family where they encountered challenges in the relationship. The mentor who felt her bond with her mentee had not progressed expressed a lot of uncertainty

about saying the “wrong thing” and upsetting her mentee, which seemed at times to limit her ability to be authentic and to interact in a relaxed way with her mentee.

*“I just don’t want to say the wrong thing and offend him and highlight that you are poor, or that’s not the norm...”(Mentor 2)*

Interestingly, some of the mentors did not show any uncertainty or self-doubt about the mentoring process and engaging with their mentee. This is likely to be due in part to personal factors such as age and personality, and prior experience of working with children may have also reduced their worries and fears about engaging with their mentee. For two of the mentors the caseworker noted how aspects of their characters impacted on the developing relationship.

*“I think there is something about [Mentor 1] and [Mentor 4], you know that calmness and stability in themselves, and like, they are two volunteers who know who they are and are very comfortable in themselves and know what their skills are and you know, aren’t very flappable about anything. So I do think that’s probably, yeah, it massively helps in order to make a child feel really comfortable with you if you give that sense.”(Caseworker 1 about Pair 1 and Pair 4)*

One caseworker recognised the benefits of another mentor’s confidence in engaging the child, but also the drawbacks in terms of taking up the support offered by the mentoring programme.

*“He is a little bit over-confident I think, because he has got some experience before, and so he was a bit over-confident...Like I know how to do this, I’ll be alright. So he is not great at phoning for supervision. So he kind of leaves that and I have to remind him and keep him on track with that.” (Caseworker 2 about Pair 3)*

### **Theme 2.3 Negotiating the mentor role**

Delineating the mentor role was a challenge in the early stages of the relationship, and was identified in both mentor and caseworker interviews. Mentors described their role as “different” and “unusual”, although they also attempted to draw parallels between similar relationships, framing mentoring as a friendship or

sibling relationship. Where the mentor and mentee had not developed a close bond (Pair 2), the mentor's expectation of emulating her own relationship with her brother may have set high expectations and contributed to her frustration and disappointment with the mentoring relationship. For another mentor-mentee pair, who were from the same ethnic background and relatively close in age, the caseworker reflected that a sisterly role seemed to have emerged.

*"It's very much like it could be an older sister younger sister type thing, which is very much how [mentor] views it, as she was the youngest in her family so she never had the sort of, a younger sister. So that's very much how [mentor] views [child], as like the younger sister she never had." (Caseworker 1 about Pair 7)*

Issues regarding confidentiality emerged between this pair, where the mentee had talked about wanting to get tattoos and piercings; her mentor experienced some confusion over how to respond to this and sought help from the caseworker in how to manage the issue without affecting the relationship. She was initially uncertain about how to respond to her mentees questions about tattoos and piercings, and also when confidentiality might need to be broken and the mother informed. She described seeking advice from her caseworker, but also having a strong sense that it was important to show her mentee that she could be spoken to in confidence:

*"I don't want her to be telling me things that I am going back and telling her mum, and obviously our relationship is not going to be that." (Mentor 7)*

For other mentors, confidentiality issues arose in relation to passing on information or concerns about the child's wellbeing and care to their caseworker, or social services. This was evident for a number of the mentors, who talked about their dilemmas about passing on such concerns, whilst acknowledging their responsibilities.

*"I would hate to say anything that could impact on my relationship with the family, or how they think I feel about [child] or the children, because I know I*

*wouldn't not want to see him because he smelt or his clothes were filthy, and I wouldn't ever want to bring that up in case the perception was anyone could say, she said that about you. So I wouldn't want to." (Mentor 1)*

Mentors tended to manage this by referring issues to their caseworker who could respond to them on their behalf.

*"I have called [the caseworker] once or twice about little things, like concerns I have had and again the training [from mentoring organisation] was quite good about this, and all the child protection stuff. I am fairly well versed in this stuff. But there is a balance between being his confidante, but I think my rule is, if after what he told me or what I have seen or heard, would I be morally guilty if I hadn't told my caseworker?" (Mentor 3)*

Finally, the negotiation of how the weekly activity budget was managed and present-giving also presented a challenge for some of the mentors. One mentor in particular had started spending large amounts of money during meetings and was finding it difficult to keep the mentoring as primarily about the time spent together and the relationship, rather than things that could be bought for her mentee.

*"I just thought I was like the bank account, really just going out and she was asking for lots of things....I didn't set the boundary at the beginning." (Mentor 7)*

Other mentors talked about being very mindful of buying only inexpensive presents for their mentees, and being transparent and using the weekly activity budget as an opportunity to involve the child in planning the activities they could do together.

#### **Theme 2.4 Addressing difficult issues in the child's life**

Many of the children experienced difficult events or underwent major changes in their family lives during the first six months of their mentoring relationships, which affected their moods and behaviour, and had the potential to present significant challenges to the relationship. Addressing difficult issues in the child's life was a theme which was identified primarily in mentor and caseworker interviews, but was also reflected in a few of the mentees accounts of their

relationships. Mentors talked about some of the difficult situations their mentees had to manage and how this made them feel about the role mentoring could play:

*“I never thought I could change everything, but now I realise there is so much else going on.”(Mentor 3)*

However, mentors’ responses to these events often meant that the children were able to talk about their difficulties, or be distracted from them and enjoy themselves. They tended not to push children into conversations about these sensitive issues, often discussing concerns with their caseworkers first and then taking a tentative and child-led approach when asking the children about how they were feeling.

*“I did [bring up the police raid] yeah, but not in a straight way of “I hear the police came round”, not like that but more like “how have things been this week, [caseworker] said some stuff had happened?” Like that. You know it’s that thing, I am not going to force him to talk about anything, like.” (Mentor 3)*

Some of the children felt able to talk about their difficulties with their mentors; as one child put it: *“I can tell him about my problems and stuff.” (Child 3)* This became more evident as the relationships progressed; for example one caseworker noted:

*“..[child was] beginning to use an outlet he didn’t have initially, someone who was going to be attentive and listen to how he felt.”(Caseworker 3 about Pair 11)*

For mentors, who typically had little training or experience in dealing with emotional difficulties, addressing such topics may have been challenging; caseworkers reflected on this, offering support and guidance to mentors when this was needed.

*“I think over the last couple of months, I think [child] has talked about how bad it makes him feel when other kids at school refer to him as fat. I think he is at the early stages of processing that, and for [mentor] it was difficult, when obviously you hear a child talking about his difficult experiences in the immediate, to try and resolve that and make things better. And actually you need to give them space to talk about it and actually sit with them yourselves*

*as the mentor. And I think [mentor] has done that.”(Caseworker 3 about Pair 11)*

Mentors often did not have much information about the significant changes or events in the child’s life, and observed that their mentees were often reluctant to talk about these issues. This meant they often had to accept and cope with the uncertainty and questions that this might leave them with.

*“He has since told me, and only since last week or the week before, I think, he told me that he actually sees his dad every week and I don’t know if that is the case or not. He says he goes to see him every Sunday, which, if it is the case it surprises me, because he has never mentioned a visit to his dad before to me. So I can only assume that it’s not the most positive of relationships with his dad if he never talks about him.”(Mentor 11)*

Some of the mentors seemed to take a flexible approach and prioritise their mentees’ needs at times of difficulty, as one caseworker reflected:

*“[mentor is good at] going with the flow....or just to be that little more flexible, or not get too flustered if something isn’t quite as you planned it.”  
(Caseworker 1 about Pair 4)*

Mentors often reflected on how the child may have experienced any difficulties or changes, and talked with their caseworkers about this, which seemed to help them further understand the child and engage with them as the relationship progressed.

A number of the mentors had also thought about upcoming events and future challenges for their mentees, for example around transfer to secondary school. They had considered how these changes might affect the mentoring relationship and how they might respond. Keeping the young person’s future in mind, and considering potential difficulties was one way in which mentors demonstrated a thoughtful and caring attitude to their mentees. Mentors also reflected on how the mentoring relationship and their role in the child’s life might change.

*“Because I think her [mentor’s] thoughts are towards [child] becoming more of a teenager, she’s going to be changing schools, hopefully there will be new friendship groups out of that, you know that she might be able to develop*

*more of a social set and, um, how that could impact on their time and things...she's just aware of it, and aware that it might that there might be changes to how they do things, or changes in [child's] priorities. I think she's not always expecting to be the most important and exciting thing in [child's] life." (Caseworker 1 about Pair 4)*

## **Discussion**

This study examined the first six months of mentoring relationships, focusing on the relational processes underway between volunteer adult mentors and their mentees. Six months after their first meeting most of the mentor-mentee pairs in this study had built up close, strong and rewarding relationships. Notably, for two of the pairs the direction of the relationship was less clear, and for one of these, the mentor felt frustrated that a close bond had not yet been established.

The themes which were identified in terms of factors facilitating the developing relationship support findings from previous research: that taking part in enjoyable activities, mentor's interpersonal qualities and creating a sense of specialness all helped to facilitate the development of a close emotional connection between mentor and child. Significant challenges also arose during the first six months: mentees were reticent about communicating with mentors who then experienced feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty about the process; the remit and boundaries of the mentoring role were sometimes uncertain and had to be negotiated; and difficult issues arose in mentees' lives. These findings add new information to the existing research evidence, where negative feelings and experiences have only had limited examination (Spencer, 2007). In this study, mentors largely managed the difficulties they encountered with the help and support of their caseworkers which was identified as a key factor in facilitating developing relationships. This supports previous research findings that certain programme practices, such as ongoing training and support, are vital to positive outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002).



The results of this study provide interesting data about the early stages of mentoring. Largely, themes identified are consistent with previous qualitative studies of mentoring relationships which highlight the role of enjoyable activities and “sharing a laugh” in facilitating relationship formation (Philip, 2008; Spencer, 2007). Greater levels of activity rather than conversations or problem-solving have been found to lead to more improvements for mentees (Langhout, Rhodes & Osbourne, 2004). It has also been suggested that the development of an emotional connection as the main goal of mentoring may be of limited value, or even unhelpful (DuBois et al., 2011).

In this study, spending time together, taking part in enjoyable activities and sharing new experiences enabled the development of a close emotional bond. This was key to facilitating the development of the relationship in its early stages, especially given the young age of the mentees in this study, as they were not as able to engage in deeper forms of reflection and personal growth as older youth (DuBois et al., 2011). Focusing on enjoyable activities provided a distraction and a joint focus for meetings, enabled mentors to “break the ice” and reduced mentees’ nervousness. During middle childhood and early adolescence children’s anxieties tend to move towards more socially-based worries (Barrett, 2000). All the mentees in this study talked about feeling shy or scared when first getting to know their mentor. In addition, potentially vulnerable young people, who may have a history of difficult relationships or loss, are likely to find it harder to develop relationships with adults (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Thus spending time doing enjoyable activities together was perhaps particularly important in engaging the children in the present study, who all came from single parent families and had been referred to the mentoring programme due to specific concerns or identified needs.

The current results extend our understanding of the relational processes in mentoring to children in middle childhood. The impact of a child's developmental stage on mentoring has had limited examination in previous research, although younger mentees have been found to disclose more and tend to report better friendships than older youth (Thomson & Zand, 2010).

Another key finding from this study is that focusing on pleasurable activities rather than on establishing a close emotional bond tempered mentors' expectations about the developing relationship. Previous research has found that discrepancies between expectations and the reality of mentoring have been found to reduce mentors' intentions to stay in the relationship (Madia & Lutz, 2004) and unmet hopes for mentoring relationships can lead to frustration and disappointment (Spencer, 2007). However findings from the present study suggest that focusing on activities rather than a close bond may be vital in managing mentor's expectations.

As in previous research on mentoring relationships (see review by Sipe, 2002) mentors' interpersonal skills and their approach towards the relationship were crucial to the development of a close bond with their mentees. Being consistent enabled the mentors to become part of the fabric of the child's life and establish trust. These findings, whilst not new, lend further support to Rhodes' (2002; 2005) model of mentoring relationships. Again, supporting previous findings, being authentic and non-judgemental also seemed to facilitate the development of a trusting relationship, providing further validation that these qualities are indeed important in fostering high quality mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2006; Thomson & Zand, 2010). A collaborative approach to the relationship, where mentors and mentees both made decisions, helped to engage the mentees. This is similar to findings from earlier studies, for example, Morrow and Styles (1995) found that "youth driven" as

opposed to “prescriptive” mentor-mentee pairs were more satisfied with their relationships, whilst Langhout et al. (2004) concluded that a balance of “friendship” and structured “parental type” input was most effective in obtaining positive outcomes.

Although parental involvement has been found to contribute positively to mentoring relationships and outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002; Karcher, Davis & Powell, 2002; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000), the present study indicated that links with mentees’ families and the impact of these on the developing mentor-mentee relationship were more complex. For some of the mentors in this study, becoming “friends” with the child’s family facilitated the development of a close mentor-mentee relationship. For others it was the demarcation of the mentoring relationship as separate, and for the child alone, that was important and supported the child’s engagement. This may be partly explained by the varied processes of separation and individuation which begin in middle childhood, when parental and sibling influence begins to decrease whilst peer influence increases (Berk, 2007). The children in this study were at a range of stages in this process which is likely to have impacted on how they felt about the connections between their parent and their mentor. Furthermore, where family settings were the source of stress or difficulty, time away and a clearly separate relationship with their mentor may have been more highly valued, whereas for others a close connection between mentor and parent may have been reassuring.

Negotiating boundaries with families has been highlighted as an important process in building a mentoring relationship (Barrowclough & White, 2011) and parental interference has also been found to be the cause of early terminations (Spencer, 2007). Thus it seems that establishing effective relationships with mentees’

families, depending on the needs of the individual child for independence from the family or the reassurance of a close connection with the family, is key to facilitating the development of a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

The important role of the caseworkers in supporting and guiding mentors was a key finding from this study. The caseworkers in this study offered a vital source of support and advice for mentors, particularly when managing the challenges that arose during the early stages. They fulfilled a number of important functions, including helping mentors to manage their anxiety and self-doubt about the mentoring process, assisting them with managing their expectations about the relationship, and providing support and advice when difficult issues arose. This role can be likened to that of a clinical supervisor for helping professionals such as psychologists or social workers. Regular clinical supervision of trainee and qualified helping professionals has been described as providing normative, restorative and formative functions (O'Donovan, Halford & Walters, 2011). For caseworkers, normative functions were ensuring that mentors were conducting their meetings appropriately and safely; restorative functions involved offering space to reflect on what being a mentor felt like and supporting mentors through any difficult experiences and feelings they might have; formative functions comprised instructing mentors in specific skills such as reflective listening. The restorative and formative aspects of caseworkers' roles seemed to have been particularly valued by the mentors in this study and supported the developing relationship between mentor and mentee.

Attempting to understand the experiences and minds of their mentees helped the mentors to maintain positive, supportive relationships, particularly when challenging situations arose. "Mentalising" refers to this process of attempting to make sense of ourselves and each other, implicitly and explicitly, in terms of

subjective states and mental processes (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004). In one of the pairs, the mentor's apparent difficulty in mentalising may have added to the challenges in the relationship, leading to her becoming overwhelmed by uncomfortable feelings of hurt and rejection. Providing help and support to take a mentalising stance was a key role of the caseworkers: they provided a sounding board for mentors' concerns, were able to contextualise some of the child's behaviours in terms of their past experiences and current contexts, and were also able to model a mentalising stance themselves thanks to their supervisory role and broader knowledge.

### **Limitations**

The present study was only partly successful in answering the research questions posed, which may have been for a number of reasons. Firstly, the data obtained from the interviews with the children were limited. This may in part have been due to the developmental stage of the children or children's anxieties about the purpose of the interview (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Additionally, children may not have found the format of the interviews engaging enough. Encouraging children to talk through play, story-telling, photography and within a focus group setting or engaging in participant observation may have been more effective (Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005) and multiple interviews could have provided an opportunity for children to become used to and more comfortable being interviewed (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Although research into children's autobiographical memory suggests that children of six and over have the cognitive and language capacities to be interviewed, specific prompts may be required and children may withhold or mask negative emotions (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999).

Another limitation is that the study was conducted in a single mentoring organisation. This organisation was a long-running and well-organised enterprise: mentors were rigorously screened before being accepted onto the programme; brief but comprehensive training was provided; pairing of mentors and mentees was given detailed consideration; and a caseworker provided extensive on-going supervision to mentors. Mentoring programmes vary in the quality of mentor recruitment, screening, training and supervision they provide, with some making exaggerated claims about mentoring to attract volunteers and offering little follow up or support once mentoring begins (Rhodes, 2002; Sipe et al., 1997). Thus the findings of the present study may be limited in their generalisability. However, the publication of recent minimum guidelines for mentoring programmes (MENTOR, 2009) and findings from a recent meta-analysis (DuBois et al., 2011) suggest greater cohesion in organisational practices within the youth mentoring field.

A final limitation is that this study relied on retrospective accounts of the development of the relationship over the first six months of mentoring. It is possible that the participants had reached a positive stage in their relationships and found earlier, more challenging aspects of the relationship difficult to recall. To counter this, repeated interviews at briefer intervals may have been more effective. However, given the mixture of positive and negative reflections that emerged from the interviews this seems to not have been particularly problematic in the present study.

### **Practice and Research Implications**

This study supports the idea that strong, close mentoring relationships require skilled, thoughtful and committed mentors. Guidelines for mentoring programmes have been produced which outline minimum standards for mentor selection, training and support (MENTOR, 2009). Such efforts to foster close and consistent mentor-

mentee relationships in an evidence-based manner are vital. Mentoring organisations should provide comprehensive training for mentors, particularly addressing potential difficulties in relationships. Good quality, supportive supervision conducted by experienced caseworkers is necessary to help mentors negotiate challenges, and to build their confidence and competence. Little is known about what constitutes helpful support for mentors, and this is an area that should be examined further. In addition, some mentoring programmes regularly offer peer support groups (groups of mentors who meet regularly to discuss their mentoring relationships) and structured group activities which mentor-mentee pairs can partake in with other pairs. These should also be examined to ascertain their utility in facilitating relationship development.

Given that the vast majority of research into youth mentoring has focused on adolescents (see DuBois et al.'s (2002) review of 55 mentoring studies) future research should also examine the different processes underway and challenges that arise in mentoring relationships with younger children. A more in-depth understanding of how a child's age and developmental stage impacts on engagement and the developing relationship could usefully inform the training and supervision of mentors, and be incorporated into future mentoring guidelines.

## REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M.D. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, 44, 709–716.
- Barker, C., Pistrang N. & Elliott, R. (2002). Research methods in clinical psychology: An introduction for students and practitioners. (2nd ed.). Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Barker, C. & Pistrang, N. (2005). Quality criteria under methodological pluralism: implications for doing and evaluating research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 35, 201-212.
- Barrett, P. M. (2000). Treatment of childhood anxiety: Developmental aspects. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 20, 479–494.
- Barrowclough, K. H. & White, C.H (2011) Negotiating Relational Boundaries in Adult-Adolescent Mentoring Relationships. *Southern Communication Journal*, 76, 2, 137–154
- Bateman, A. W. & Fonagy, P. (2004) Mentalization-Based Treatment of BPD. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 18, 1, 36-51,
- Berk, L. A. (2007) Development through the lifespan. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston, Allyn and Bacon
- Bowlby, J. (1988) *A secure base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Buhrmester, D. & Furman, W. (1990) Perceptions of Sibling Relationships during Middle Childhood and Adolescence. *Child Development*, 61, 5, 1387-1398
- Docherty, S. & Sandelowski, M. (1999) Focus on qualitative methods: interviewing children. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 22, 177-185



- DuBois, D.L., Holloway, B.E., Valentine, J.C. & Cooper, H. (2002) Effectiveness of mentoring programs: a meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30*, 157-197
- DuBois D.L. & Neville, H.A. (1997) Youth mentoring- Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology, 25*, 3, 227-234
- DuBois, D. L., Neville, H. A., Parra, G. R., & Pugh-Lilly, A. O. (2002). Testing a new model of mentoring. *New Directions for Youth Development, 93*, 21–57.
- DuBois, D.L., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J.E., Silverthorn, N. & Valentine, J.C. (2011) How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 12*, 2, 57-91
- Eby, L.T., Allen, T.D., Evans, S.C., Ng, T. & DuBois, D.L. (2008). Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 72*, 254–267
- Elliott, R., Fischer, C.T. & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 38*, 215-229
- Evans, M. (2011). *Long-term mentoring for disadvantaged young people*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University College London.
- Furman, W. & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perception of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology, 21*, 6, 1016-1024
- Garraway, H & Pistrang, N. (2010) "Brother from another mother": Mentoring for Afro-Caribbean boys. *Journal of Adolescence, 33*, 719-733

- Georgiou, S.N., Demetriou, A. P. & Stavriniades, P. (2008) Attachment style and mentoring relationships in adolescence. *Educational Psychology*, 28, 6, 603–614
- Grossman, J.B. & Rhodes, J.E. (2002) The test of time: predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 2, 199- 219
- Harper, D. (2008) Clinical Psychology. In Willig, C & Stainton-Rogers, W. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. (pp. 430-454) London: SAGE
- Karcher, M.J., Davis, C. & Powell, B. (2002) The Effects of Developmental Mentoring on Connectedness and Academic Achievement. *The School Community Journal*, 12, 2, 35-50
- Karver, M.S., Handelsman, J.B., Fields, S. & Bickman, L. (2006) Meta-analysis of therapeutic relationship variables in youth and family therapy: The evidence for different relationship variables in the child and adolescent treatment outcome literature. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26, 1, 50-65
- Langhout, R .D., Rhodes, J. E. & Osbourne, L. N. (2004) An exploratory study of youth mentoring in an urban context: adolescents' perceptions of relationship styles. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33, 4, 291-306
- Madia, B. P. & Lutz, C. J. (2004) Perceived similarity, expectation-reality discrepancies, and mentors' expressed intention to remain in Big brothers/big sisters programs. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34, 3, 598-623
- Mauthner, M. (1997) Methodological aspects of collecting data from children: Lessons three research projects. *Children and Society*, 11, 16-28

- Mays, N. & Pope, C. (2000). Assessing quality in qualitative research. *British Medical Journal*, 320, 50-52
- Meier, R. (2008) Youth mentoring- A good thing? Centre for Policy Studies
- MENTOR (2009) Elements of effective practice for mentoring. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.  
[http://www.mentoring.org/program\\_resources/elements\\_and\\_toolkits](http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/elements_and_toolkits)
- Morrow, K. V., & Styles, M. B. (1995). *Building relationships with youth in program settings: A study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures
- O'Donovan, A., Halford, W. K. & Walters, B. (2011) Towards Best Practice Supervision of Clinical Psychology Trainees. *Australian Psychologist*, 46, 101-112
- Philip, K. (2008) She's my second mum: young people building relationships in uncertain circumstances. *Child Care in Practice*, 14, 1, 19-33
- Pistrang, N. & Barker, C. (2010). Scientific, practical and personal decisions in selecting qualitative methods. In M. Barkham, G.E. Hardy & J. Mellor-Clark (Eds.), *Developing and delivering practice-based evidence: A guide for the psychological therapies* (pp.65-89). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Pope, C., Ziebland, S., & Mays, N. (2000) Analysing qualitative data. *British Medical Journal*, 320, 114-116.
- Rhodes, J. E. (2002) *Stand by me: the risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press
- Rhodes, J.E. (2005) "A theoretical model of youth mentoring." In D. L. DuBois & M. A. Karcher (Eds.) *Handbook of youth mentoring*. (pp. 30-43). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Press.

- Rhodes, J.E., Grossman, J.B. & Resch, N. (2000) Agents of change: Pathways through which mentoring relationships influence adolescents' academic adjustment. *Child Development, 71*, 6, 1662-1671
- Rhodes, J. E., Liang, B. & Spencer, R. (2009) First Do No Harm: Ethical Principles for Youth Mentoring Relationships. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 40*, 5, 452–458
- Rhodes, J. E., Reddy, R., Roffman, J., & Grossman, J. (2005). Promoting successful youth mentoring relationships: A preliminary screening questionnaire. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 26*, 147– 168
- Rogers, C. (1980) *A Way of Being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Shelmerdine, S. & Louw, J. (2008) Characteristics of mentoring relationships. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 20*, (1), 21-32
- Shirk, S. R. & Karver, M. (2003). Prediction of treatment outcome from relationship variables in child and adolescent therapy: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*, 452–464.
- Sipe, C.L. (2002) Mentoring programs for adolescents: a research summary. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*, 251-260.
- Soucy, N. & Larose, S. (2000). Attachment and control in family and mentoring contexts as determinants of adolescent adjustment at college. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14*, 125–143.
- Spencer, R. (2004) Studying relationships in psychotherapy: An untapped resource for youth mentoring. *New Directions for Youth Development, 103*, 31-43
- Spencer, R. (2006) Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults. *Youth and Society, 37*, 287-315

- Spencer, R. (2007) "I just feel safe with him": emotional closeness in male youth mentoring relationships. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 8, 3, 185-198
- 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
- Thomson, N. R. & Zand, D. H. (2010) Mentees perceptions of their interpersonal relationships: the role of the mentor-youth bond. *Youth Society*, 41, 3, 434-445
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

**PART 3:**

**CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

## **Introduction**

This critical appraisal reflects on a number of key areas of the research process. Choosing a qualitative approach and undertaking a thematic analysis is discussed. Some of the benefits and challenges of collecting data through semi-structures interviews, particularly with children, are also considered. The phases of transcribing and analysing the data are reflected upon, with reference to the theoretical literature around these. Finally, some personal reflections are offered. It is hoped that this appraisal will be useful for researchers in the field conducting similar studies.

## **Qualitative Approach**

Having decided to focus my empirical study on relationship processes in mentor-mentee relationships, a qualitative approach seemed the natural path to follow. Firstly, a qualitative approach is suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular issue or phenomenon, and allows constant refinement of the research questions and development of hypotheses, so is appropriate for exploratory research (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). Personal and practical issues also come into play when choosing a methodological approach (Pistrang & Barker, 2010). In my case, having previously conducted a qualitative study I was reasonably confident in my ability to collect and analyse qualitative data. The smaller sample size required for a qualitative study was also more realistic given the estimated number of mentor-mentee pairs who would have been eligible for the study within the timeframe available.

I chose to employ thematic analysis to analyse the data, which is a flexible approach free from some of the theoretical constraints of other qualitative approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is compatible with both an essentialist/realist and a

constructionist paradigm; however it is important for researchers to make clear their epistemological assumptions, as these will inevitably involve assumptions about the nature of the data and what they represent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research study falls within the essentialist/realist camp, which has an inherent assumption that it is possible to report the “reality” of an individual and that it is of interest to investigate and unpick the meaning that their experiences have for them. Adopting a realist perspective also meant I could incorporate the concepts of reliability and validity as they apply to qualitative work, to ensure that the research was conducted in a systematic and thorough manner (Mays & Pope, 2000).

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are one of the most common forms of data collection within qualitative approaches (Willig, 2008) and offer a means of collecting rich, personal data. Conducting the interviews allowed me to become acquainted with the participants, to see their homes or workplaces and to meet mentees’ families. Qualitative researchers often study people in their own territory, “open systems” where researcher and participant interact and which are continuously changing (Willig, 2008). This was all rich data which triggered thoughts and ideas and influenced my interpretations of what was said in the interviews. Interviewing a mentor in their corporate working environment and then a child living in high-rise council housing certainly reinforced some of my preconceptions about mentoring, its potential benefits and some of the inherent difficulties of building relationships across social divides.

For some of the pairs, issues had been raised in the interviews about connecting with the child’s family, or difficulties in the child’s life related to the family context. Interviewing the children at home meant I met (albeit briefly) their



families and saw their home environment. I was aware of observing the setting and relationships at home in light of information from mentor and caseworker interviews, or if conducting the child interview first, thinking back and reflecting on what I had seen and how I had felt in the family home. As a number of the child interviews were conducted by a different researcher, for these I relied solely on the recording and transcript. My understanding of these participants felt less rich, and in an effort to counter this I discussed the interview process with the other researcher and drew on their perceptions of the child and home environment.

The ubiquity and seemingly straightforward nature of semi-structured interviews belied a number of the challenges I encountered. One of these was developing an appropriate interviewing style which enabled me to both build rapport and elicit information from participants. I consciously used pre-existing clinical interviewing skills to establish rapport with participants as well as preparing the use of specific questions for entry, unfolding and follow-up probes to elicit useful and good quality data (e.g., Pistrang, Barker & Elliott, 2002). Semi-structured interviews can be challenging as they combine formal features (such as a fixed timeframe and clear roles) and informal features (open-ended discussion) of interaction, and the ensuing conversational style interaction can then be disrupted when the interviewer's role becomes salient (Willig, 2008). Certainly I was aware of this dynamic during interviews, for example when adjusting the voice recorder.

Whilst conducting the interviews I wondered if mentors may have felt constrained by their positioning as "*mentors*" and what that role implied. This may have affected their ability to express themselves fully about the relationship and the support they were receiving from their caseworkers. Potter and Hepburn (2005) suggest that the "interview set-up" is potentially critical, suggesting that the category

under which people have been recruited influences what they say. Providing details of how researchers and participants communicate before interviews has been suggested as one way of being clearer about such categorical definitions (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Whilst participants in this study were recruited under clearly defined labels, they seemed able to express negative views and experiences during interview. This may have been encouraged by the fact that the study was clearly stated as being conducted independently from the mentoring organisation and also that questions tapping into negative experiences were included in interview guides.

### **Interviewing Children**

Examining and considering children's perspectives as active participants in matters pertaining to their own wellbeing is vital in order to gain a full understanding of their experiences (Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005). I was very keen to include the child's perspective in this study. When designing the interview guide for the children, particular attention was paid to using simple concrete language, including multiple prompting questions and asking about specific events to aid recall and discussion (Mauthner, 1997). Disappointingly, despite this most of the children were not talkative during the interviews and appeared to find it difficult to reflect on the questions that were asked, thus the data gathered was quite limited.

There are a number of factors which I believe contributed to this. Having never worked with children either in research or clinical roles prior to conducting the interviews my lack of experience undoubtedly impacted on the quality of the data that was collected. As mentioned previously, another researcher conducted a number of the child interviews, thus there was also less opportunity for reflecting on and revising my interviewing style and the questions that were asked in the interviews.

In addition, the unequal power relations between an adult and child may make it difficult for children to talk openly and discursively; a more open-ended, reflexive and responsive style, where children are allowed to follow their own agendas and talk about a range of topics more freely, could counteract this (Mauthner, 1997). It may also be that the format of a one-to-one interview was not engaging enough for the children in this study. Encouraging children to talk through play, story-telling, photography and within a focus group setting or engaging in participant observation may be more effective (Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005). Furthermore, multiple interviews could have provided an opportunity for children to become used to and more comfortable being interviewed (Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

Finally, explanations of the task expectations may have led to children feeling confusion or anxiety about the purpose of the interview. This issue was highlighted by an anecdote from an interview with one of the mentors, who described telling her mentee about the upcoming interview.

*“I said, “these people, they’re looking at [mentoring programme] and they want to maybe ask us some questions about whether we’re enjoying our time together, that kind of thing” and he, his reaction was, and I can’t remember what the exact phrase I used was to make him think this but he just said, “oh, but I don’t want them to get me a new friend, I like you”...” (Mentor 11)*

Such misunderstandings about the purpose of the interviews could be avoided by a greater emphasis on “socialising” children into the interview process, as they are likely to relate it to other similar interactions with teachers and professionals (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). In addition, providing more information to children about what the interview will entail may also be helpful. This could involve clarifying any actions which might occur as a result of the interview to pre-empt

worries children might have about talking about negative experiences and feelings (Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

### **Transcription of the interviews**

Transcription offered an opportunity for me to reflect back on the experience of meeting and interviewing the participants and hearing their views. As this was conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the research project, it also offered a chance to reflect on the quality of the data that was being collected and to alter the interview guides or my interview style and questioning accordingly, which is an important feature of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Transcribing interviews is also a key phase of analysis, and has been described as a process “where meanings are created” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Indeed, I was conscious of my own interpretative role, for example when deciding on punctuation placement or when choosing whether to include incomplete sentences, false starts and laughter, or to “tidy up” the data. All these decisions constitute a translation of the spoken word into *something else* (Willig, 2008). I also wanted to fully describe the *way* in which things were said, which on some occasions involved incorporating non-verbal utterances in transcripts, but only when these seemed particularly relevant and meaningful. Given that the aim of this study was to examine multiple viewpoints and identify overriding themes in a relatively large data set, some sacrificing of detail was made for the sake of time and clarity, and it is argued that taking this flexible approach to transcribing can be justified (Smith, Holloway & Mischler, 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

By the time the interviews were completed I had become very familiar with the stories of each mentor-mentee pair, and had made initial notes on the ideas and

themes that seemed important during all stages of the research project. Despite this, beginning the formal data analysis phase was daunting due to the volume of data collected. I was faced with the challenge of understanding and representing the different stories, integrating the multiple perspectives of child, mentor and caseworker and identifying themes across participants. My aim in analysing the data was to provide a rich and interesting depiction of the entire data set, which would necessarily entail losing some depth and complexity whilst being true to individuals' experiences of the mentoring process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes in the data were identified using an inductive approach; the themes were strongly linked with the data themselves, with the aim of providing a rich, general description, rather than a theoretically driven examination of a particular issue (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, although themes were data-driven rather than theory-driven, I inevitably brought my own theoretical and epistemological assumptions to the analysis of the data. In particular, familiarity with the evidence base regarding youth mentoring and relationship quality is likely to have impacted on the saliency of certain aspects of the data. My psychology training also underpins my views on engagement and the basis of supportive helping relationships, and this too will have guided my interpretation of the data, for example, by privileging constructs which are considered important in psychological thinking such as empathy and being non-judgemental.

Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate between the levels at which themes are identified, as either "semantic" or "latent", suggesting that a semantic approach initially involves a superficial description, which is then organised and interpreted in the light of existing literature. This is in contrast to a "latent" thematic analysis, where initial coding itself involves some interpretation and theorising. The approach

taken in this study identified themes at a semantic level initially, later interpreting the meaning underlying what people had said. At times this felt challenging and I was aware that I took a more interpretative stance on some occasions, particularly when coding the children's transcripts. Processes of psychological reflection and constant comparison were both helpful when identifying meaning and categorising themes. Psychological reflection has been likened to empathy and in this context refers to an attempt to "dwell" on the meaning of what has been said, whilst constant comparison refers to a continuous effort to explore the similarities and differences between the categories that are identified (Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002).

Another potential challenge of data analysis was deciding how to integrate the multiple perspectives of child, mentor and caseworker. If these had been highly divergent then it might have been necessary to code separate themes for each group of participants; however this needed to be balanced with providing a clear and relatively concise analysis within the remit of the study. Once I began the analysis process I found that the perspectives mostly overlapped and complemented each other. The themes that were identified in the mentors' accounts tended to be embellished and reflected on more broadly in the caseworker interviews. Where differences arose these were commented on in the write up and illustrated with example quotes.

### **"Real world" research**

This study was "real world" research, conducted as part of a larger evaluation and taking place in a busy organisation. Therefore it was not possible to control all aspects of the research and it was necessary, at times, to make pragmatic decisions due to resources. Such research fits in with the "practice-based evidence" paradigm (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003) which refers to research conducted within the

parameters of routine practice rather than highly controlled trials. Practice-based research has a high degree of external validity and often focuses on facilitating improvements in routine practice; however there is a greater potential for confounds to emerge which dramatically reduces internal validity (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003)

In the present study, one unexpected difficulty was the timing of the interviews soon after mentors and caseworkers had held a six-monthly review meeting. This was a compulsory meeting for mentors, with the purpose of thinking about and reflecting on how the mentoring was progressing and to plan for the upcoming six months. It seems likely that the convergence between mentors' and caseworkers' accounts of the relationship may have partly been due to having recently met and discussed issues very similar to those raised in the interviews. Additionally, this repetition is likely to have made the interviews less engaging and thought provoking than they might have been. However, in spite of having realised this midway through data collection, it was not always possible to arrange the interviews to take place prior to the six-month review.

There were also benefits to conducting applied research in a "real world" context. Crucially, I was aware from the outset that the research would be relevant and valued by the mentoring organisation, and might lead to improvements in their practice. This was motivating when the research process became challenging. Additionally, having the organisation on board meant that recruitment was straightforward and participants were keen to be involved in the study.

### **Personal Reflections**

When conducting qualitative research it is important to reflect upon the ways in which the researcher's values, experiences, beliefs and social identities have

shaped the research, and how the research may have affected the researcher, personally and professionally (Willig, 2008). There is no doubt that my social and professional location influenced my reading of the data (Harper, 2008). My position as a researcher and also a trainee clinical psychologist had a significant bearing on the design and conceptualisation of the study, as well as the interview and analysis process. Although I attempted to be self-aware and “bracket” my own beliefs, I may have given more weight to aspects of caseworkers’ or mentors’ explanations which fitted into my own prior knowledge and epistemological perspective, and not pursued others which did not fit so well.

As I began interviewing participants for this study I also started a year-long clinical placement in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). As a trainee clinical psychologist in a Tier 3 service I worked with children with moderate to severe mental health or behavioural problems and their families, predominantly in a clinic setting. It was very interesting to consider a preventative, community-based intervention such as youth mentoring and how different this approach was to that of a CAMHS clinic. When children and families presented with multiple, systemic difficulties that at times felt overwhelming in therapy sessions, I wondered whether these children might too benefit from having a mentor in their lives, and the positive potential of a long-term supportive relationship with a mentor. Thanks to conducting the research, I became more aware of the wide range of voluntary organisations which were available for the children and families I was working with. Signposting to such services can be a valuable intervention in itself, and a number of successful outcomes resulted from taking this approach within my CAMHS work.

The contrast between the clinic-based and community-based approaches also led me to think about the value of conducting home and school observations and



visits, and to keep in mind a holistic picture of the children being referred to CAMHS. Often referral and assessment procedures emphasise difficulties, and children's multiple roles and strengths can be overshadowed (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997). This linked to my growing interest in systemic practices, particularly in narrative therapy's emphasis on moving children away from problem-saturated "dominant" stories towards unique positive outcomes and strengths-based "alternative" stories about themselves (Bennett, 2008). These ideas seem to fit naturally with the aims of the mentors and caseworkers in this study, and I think a tremendous amount can be learned from this that is helpful in clinical practice.

Youth mentoring can also be understood in the broader context of community psychology. A key principle of community psychology is that problems are located in social, cultural and political contexts and, as such, interventions should aim to build and strengthen communities by focusing on resources and prevention rather than treatment (Orford, 1992). Youth mentoring is precisely such an intervention; developing positive, supportive relationships which lead to improved outcomes for many young people, and a sense of achievement and enjoyment for them and their mentors. Through conducting this study I came to understand that mentoring is a valuable intervention which builds on existing resources within communities and offers a non-stigmatising opportunity for young people to address their difficulties and develop their confidence as they face the challenges of growing up in the modern world.

## REFERENCES

- Barker, C., Pistrang, N. & Elliott, R. (2002). Research methods in clinical psychology: An introduction for students and practitioners. (2nd ed.). Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Barkham, M. & Mellor-Clark, J. (2003) Bridging Evidence-Based Practice and Practice-Based Evidence: Developing a Rigorous and Relevant Knowledge for the Psychological Therapies. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 10, 319–327
- Bennett, L. (2008). Narrative Methods and Children: Theoretical Explanations and Practice Issues. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 21, 1, 13-23
- Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C. & Schiller, W. (2005) Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more? *Qualitative Research*, 5, 4, 417-436
- Freeman, J. Epston, D. & Lobovits, D. (1997) *Playful approaches to serious problems: Narrative therapy with children and their families*. New York, Norton.
- Freeman, M. & Mathison, S. (2009) *Researching Children's Experiences*. New York: Guildford Press
- Harper, D. (2008) Clinical Psychology. In Willig, C. & Stainton-Rogers, W. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. (pp. 430-454) London: SAGE
- Mauthner, M. (1997) Methodological aspects of collecting data from children: Lessons three research projects. *Children and Society*, 11, 16-28

- Mays, N. & Pope, C. (2000) Assessing quality in qualitative research. *British Medical Journal*, 320, 50-52
- Orford, J. (1992) *Community Psychology: Theory and Practice*. Chichester: Wiley
- Pistrang, N. & Barker, C. (2010). Scientific, practical and personal decisions in selecting qualitative methods. In M. Barkham, G.E. Hardy & J. Mellor-Clark (Eds.), *Developing and delivering practice-based evidence: A guide for the psychological therapies* (pp.65-89). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Pope, C., Ziebland, S., & Mays, N. (2000) Analysing qualitative data. *British Medical Journal*, 320, 114-116.
- Potter, J. & Hepburn, A. (2005). Qualitative interviews in psychology: Problems and possibilities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2(4), 281-307.
- Smith, J.A., Holloway, W. & Mischler, E.G. (2005) Commentaries on Potter and Hepburn, 'Qualitative interviews in psychology: Problems and possibilities.' *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2(4), 309-32
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Buckingham: Open University Press.

**Appendix I**  
**Joint Project Information**

This study was conducted as a joint research project with Matthew Evans and Nicky Mountain, fellow UCL clinical psychology doctorate students. All three projects were part of an ongoing evaluation of the mentoring organisation. The other studies were (a) a quantitative study examining mentoring relationship quality over time (ME) and (b) a qualitative study looking at caseworker and mentor perceptions of mentoring after one year (NM). All three projects were conducted within the same mentoring organisation, and supervised at UCL by Nancy Pistrang.

### **Joint work**

Liaison with mentoring organisation regarding recruitment to study

Child interviews (4 conducted by Matthew Evans, 3 conducted by Marta Prytys)

### **Independent Work**

The literature review

The design and research questions of the empirical study

Development of interview guides for 6 month interviews with children, mentors and caseworkers

All mentor and caseworker interviews

All qualitative analysis and the write up of the empirical paper

**Appendix II**  
**Ethical Approval Letter**



Dr Nancy Pistrang  
Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology  
UCL

29 September 2009

Dear Dr Pistrang

**Notification of Ethical Approval**  
**Ethics Application: 0484/001: Processes and outcomes of befriending for young people**

I am pleased to confirm that your study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee for the duration of the project, i.e. until October 2013.

Approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. You must seek Chair's approval for proposed amendments to the research for which this approval has been given. Ethical approval is specific to this project and must not be treated as applicable to research of a similar nature. Each research project is reviewed separately and if there are significant changes to the research protocol you should seek confirmation of continued ethical approval by completing the 'Amendment Approval Request Form'.

The form identified above can be accessed by logging on to the ethics website homepage: <http://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/ethics/> and clicking on the button marked 'Key Responsibilities of the Researcher Following Approval'.

2. It is your responsibility to report to the Committee any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to participants or others. Both non-serious and serious adverse events must be reported.

**Reporting Non-Serious Adverse Events.**

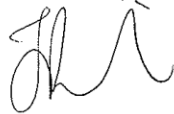
For non-serious adverse events you will need to inform Ms Helen Dougal, Ethics Committee Administrator (h.dougal@ucl.ac.uk), within ten days of an adverse incident occurring and provide a full written report that should include any amendments to the participant information sheet and study protocol. The Chair or Vice-Chair of the Ethics Committee will confirm that the incident is non-serious and report to the Committee at the next meeting. The final view of the Committee will be communicated to you.

**Reporting Serious Adverse Events**

The Ethics Committee should be notified of all serious adverse events via the Ethics Committee Administrator immediately the incident occurs. Where the adverse incident is unexpected and serious, the Chair or Vice-Chair will decide whether the study should be terminated pending the opinion of an independent expert. The adverse event will be considered at the next Committee meeting and a decision will be made on the need to change the information leaflet and/or study protocol.

On completion of the research you must submit a brief report (a maximum of two sides of A4) of your findings/concluding comments to the Committee, which includes in particular issues relating to the ethical implications of the research.

Yours sincerely



**Sir John Birch**  
Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee

UCL Research Ethics Committee, c/o The Graduate School, North Cloisters, Wilkins Building  
University College London Gower Street London WC1E 6BT  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 7844 Fax: +44 (0)20 7679 7043  
h.dougal@ucl.ac.uk  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/gradschool](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/gradschool)



**Appendix III**  
**Information Sheets for Participants**



## **An evaluation of befriending**

### **Information Sheet for Befrienders**

We are inviting you to take part in this research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **Who are we?**

We are researchers from University College London and we are working together with [mentoring organisation]. Our contact details are at the bottom of this sheet.

#### **What is the project about?**

The purpose of this research is to get a detailed picture of how befriending may help young people. There are a number of studies of befriending (sometimes called mentoring), but few have looked at long-term befriending and how change occurs over time. We hope to learn more about this by getting the views of the young people, their befrienders and their parents.

#### **Who is being invited to take part?**

We are asking young people who have been matched with a befriender at [mentoring organisation] to take part, as well as their befrienders and parents.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

We will ask you to fill out questionnaires that ask about your relationship with the young person whom you are befriending. We will also ask you to take part in an informal interview so that we can hear about your experiences of befriending. Because we are interested in how befriending develops over time, we will ask you to fill out questionnaires several times over the next couple of years while you are with [mentoring organisation]. They should not take longer than 30 minutes to fill out and you will be able to do them at a time and place convenient to you.

#### **What will happen to the information that is collected?**

All the questionnaires and interviews will be made anonymous; names and any identifying information will be removed so that you cannot be identified. With your permission, we will audio-record the interviews and then transcribe (write up) what was said. We will delete the recordings after they have been transcribed. All written information will be stored securely and will be destroyed five years after the project has ended. All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Everything that you tell us will be kept confidential; only the research team will have access to what has been said. The only time confidentiality would be broken is if we were worried

that someone was at risk of harm, and we would need to let the appropriate services know. However, we would try to talk to you about this before we spoke to anyone else.

Once the project is over, the results will be written up and may be submitted for publication in a professional journal. Reports will not reveal the identity of anyone who took part. A summary of the findings will be given to those who took part in the project.

**Are there any benefits of taking part?**

We hope that you will find it interesting to fill in the questionnaires and to talk to us about what it is like being a befriender. The research should give us a better understanding of how befriending works, and therefore it should be helpful to [mentoring organisation] and to young people in the future.

**Are there any risks of taking part?**

We do not think there are any risks to taking part. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you do not have to answer them.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, you don't have to take part; it is up to you to decide. If you do decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

**What do I do now?**

If you would like to take part, or if you have any questions, please tell one of the researchers or someone at [mentoring organisation]. Before taking part, we will ask you to sign a consent form.

The researchers are:

Dr Nancy Pistrang <n.pistrang@ucl.ac.uk>  
Dr Chris Barker <c.barker@ucl.ac.uk>  
Matthew Evans <[matthew.evans@hotmail.com](mailto:matthew.evans@hotmail.com)>  
Marta Prytys <[m.prytys@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.prytys@ucl.ac.uk)>

Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology  
University College London  
Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT  
Telephone: 020 7679 5962

**Thanks for reading this information sheet! You can keep this copy.**

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Project ID number 0484/001).



## **An evaluation of befriending**

### **Information Sheet for Caseworkers**

We are inviting you to take part in this research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **Who are we?**

We are researchers from University College London and we are working together with [mentoring organisation]. Our contact details are at the bottom of this sheet.

#### **What is the project about?**

The purpose of this research is to get a detailed picture of how befriending may help young people. There are a number of studies of befriending (sometimes called mentoring), but few have looked at long-term befriending and how change occurs over time. We hope to learn more about this by getting the views of the young people, their parents, befrienders and caseworkers.

#### **Who is being invited to take part?**

We are asking young people who have been matched with a befriender at [mentoring organisation] to take part, as well as their befrienders and parents and caseworkers.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

We will ask you to take part in an informal interview so that we can hear about your experiences of supervising the befriender and your view of how the relationship is developing.

#### **What will happen to the information that is collected?**

All the questionnaires and interviews in this study will be made anonymous; names and any identifying information will be removed so that you or the befriender or child cannot be identified. With your permission, we will audio-record the interviews and then transcribe what was said. We will delete the recordings after they have been transcribed. All written information will be kept confidential and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Once the project is over, the results will be written up and may be submitted for publication in a professional journal. Reports will not reveal the identity of anyone who took part. A summary of the findings will be given to those who took part in the project.

**Are there any benefits of taking part?**

We hope that you will find it interesting to talk to us about your role as a caseworker. The research should give us a better understanding of how befriending works, and therefore it should be helpful to [mentoring organisation] and to young people in the future.

**Are there any risks of taking part?**

We do not think there are any risks to taking part. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you do not have to answer them.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, you don't have to take part; it is up to you to decide. If you do decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

**What do I do now?**

If you would like to take part, or if you have any questions, please tell one of the researchers. Before taking part, we will ask you to sign a consent form.

The researchers are:

Dr Nancy Pistrang <n.pistrang@ucl.ac.uk>

Dr Chris Barker <c.barker@ucl.ac.uk>

Matthew Evans <matthew.evans@hotmail.com>

Marta Prytys <mprytys@hotmail.com>

Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology

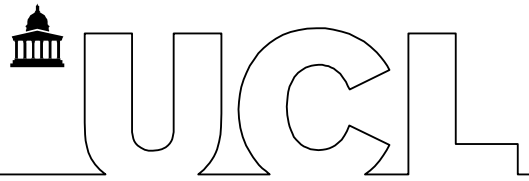
University College London

Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT

Telephone: 020 7679 5962

**Thanks for reading this information sheet! You can keep this copy.**

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Project ID number 0484/001).



## **An evaluation of befriending**

### **Information Sheet for Young People**

We are inviting you to take part in this research project. You should only take part if you want to – if you don't want to, that's OK. Before you decide whether to take part, it's important to read this information sheet carefully (the researcher or someone at [mentoring organisation] can read it out to you if you want). You can talk it over with other people too. Please ask us if there is anything you are not sure about or if you would like more information.

#### **Who are we?**

We are from University College London and we are working together with [mentoring organisation]. Our names are at the bottom of this sheet.

#### **What is the project about?**

We are trying to find out how befriending can help young people. We want to learn about this from young people themselves, and also from their befrienders and parents.

#### **Who is being invited to take part?**

We are asking young people who have been matched with a befriender at [mentoring organisation] to take part. We're also asking their befrienders and parents to take part.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

We will ask you to fill out some questionnaires about yourself and what you think about having a befriender. The questions will be about things like how you feel about yourself, what you think of school, and how you get along with other people your age. We will also talk to you about what it is like having a befriender. We'd like to meet with you a few times over the next couple of years while you are with [mentoring organisation], so that we can see how things are going. The questions will be private and will take about 30 minutes.

#### **What will happen afterwards?**

What you tell us will be kept confidential (private). This means it is between you and us, and your parent and befriender won't see it. However, if you tell us something that makes us worry about your safety, we would have to tell other people. We will make sure your information is kept private by using identification

numbers in place of your name. With your permission, we will audio-record our conversations so that we have a record of what we talked about, but we will take out any information that can identify you. We will then type up what was said and we will delete the recordings. When the study is over, we will write up a report and you will be given a summary of it.

**Are there any benefits of taking part?**

Young people have told us that it can be interesting to fill in the questionnaires and to talk about what it is like having a befriender. We hope that we will learn some important things about befriending from this research. This should help [mentoring organisation] and other young people in the future.

**Are there any risks of taking part?**

We do not think that there are any risks of taking part. We will be asking you about your feelings and things about your life. If you feel upset at any point or do not want to continue, it is OK for you to stop.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, you don't have to take part. It's up to you to decide.

**What do I do now?**

If you have any questions, please ask one of the researchers or someone at [mentoring organisation]. If you decide to take part, we will ask you to sign a consent form.

The researchers are:

Dr Nancy Pistrang <n.pistrang@ucl.ac.uk>

Dr Chris Barker <c.barker@ucl.ac.uk>

Matthew Evans <matthew.evans@hotmail.com>

Marta Prytys <m.prytys@ucl.ac.uk>

Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology

University College London

Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT

Telephone: 020 7679 5962

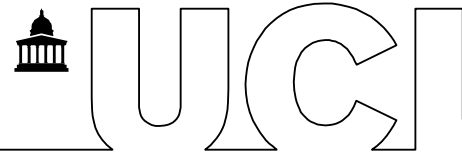
**Thanks for reading this information sheet! You can keep this copy.**

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Project ID number 0484/001).

## **Appendix IV**

### **Consent forms for participants**





## Informed Consent Form for Befrienders

**Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

Title of Project: **An evaluation of befriending**

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee [Project ID Number: 0484/001]

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Before you agree to take part the person organising the research must explain the project to you.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you to decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

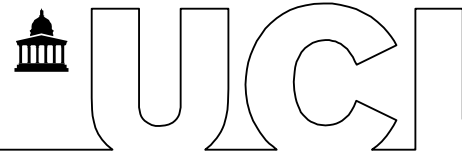
### Participant's Statement

I .....

- have read the notes written above and the Information Sheet, and understand what the study involves.
- understand that if I decide at any time that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately.
- understand that interviews may be audio-recorded, and consent to anonymised quotations from the interviews being used in reports.
- consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study.
- understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in this study.

Signed:

Date:



## Informed Consent Form for Caseworkers

**Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

Title of Project: **An evaluation of befriending**

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee

[Project ID Number: 0484/001]

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Before you agree to take part the person organising the research must explain the project to you.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you to decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

### Participant's Statement

I .....

- have read the notes written above and the Information Sheet, and understand what the study involves.
- understand that if I decide at any time that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately.
- understand that interviews may be audio-recorded, and consent to anonymised quotations from the interviews being used in reports.
- consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study.
- understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in this study.

Signed:

Date:



## Consent Form for Young People

### An evaluation of befriending

Please circle your answer to the questions below:

Have you read (or had read to you) the Information Sheet for Young People?	Yes	No
Has someone explained this project to you?	Yes	No
Do you understand what this project is about?	Yes	No
Do you understand that some of things you say may be in our reports, without people knowing who you are?	Yes	No
Do you understand it's OK to stop taking part at any time?	Yes	No
Are you happy to take part?	Yes	No
If <u>any</u> answers are 'no' or you <b>don't</b> want to take part, <b>don't</b> sign your name!		
<b>If you would like to take part, please sign your name</b>		
<b>Your name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee [Project ID Number:  
0484/001]

**Appendix V**  
**Interview Guides**

## **Mentor Interview Guide**

### *Introduction*

I am hoping to find out about your experience of being a mentor over the last six months

- Consent and confidentiality.
- To help me remember I will use a tape recorder.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

### *Expectations and Early Weeks*

- When you signed up for the programme what were your expectations?
- What did you hope it would be like being a mentor?
- What kind of things were you thinking before about meeting X for the first time?
- Did you have any worries about meeting X? What were they?
- What did you hope it would be like meeting X?
- What was it like when you did meet up? What did you do? How was that?
- What about subsequent meetings in the first few months?
- Were there any difficulties that arose at the beginning? What went well? Any surprises?
- How do you think X found meeting with you initially?

### *Development of relationship over time*

- What kind of things do you do together now? Has that changed? (recent examples)
- What is X like? Has that changed? How do you manage that?
- What is good about it? What is difficult? Has that changed? How do you manage?  
Is it what you expected?
- What kind of things do you talk about together? How easy is it to talk about sensitive topics? Has that changed?
- How has the relationship changed since you first met?

*Reflections on relationship*

- What is it like being a mentor so far?
- What has it been like getting to know X?
- What are the best things about it?
- What are the more challenging or difficult bits? (How have you handled that? How did that make you feel? What support did you get with that? What has helped?)
- How is your relationship with your mentee different from other relationships you have had with children (similarities/differences/adaptations?)
- How do you think your mentee's life is different because of the relationship?
- If you were telling someone else about being a mentor, what might you say?

## **Child Interview Guide**

### *Introduction*

- I am hoping to find out about the experience of having a mentor, the relationship you have with them and how this has affected you.
- Consent and confidentiality.
- To help me remember I will use a tape recorder.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

### *Expectations and Early Weeks*

- When you first heard about having a mentor what did you think about that?
- What did you hope it would be like having a mentor?
- What kind of things were you thinking before about meeting X?
- Did you have any worries about meeting X? What were they?
- What did you hope it would be like meeting X?
- What did you do the first time you met X?
- What was it like? Where did you go? How did you feel? What did you talk about?
- What was it like meeting up again after that?
- Were there any things you were worried about?
- What was good about it? What was not so good?

### *Development of relationship over time*

- What kind of things do you do together now? (recent examples)
- What is good about it? Is there anything that is not so good?
- What kind of things do you talk about together? Is it different from before? In what way?
- Is it different meeting with X now then at the beginning? In what way?

### *Reflections on relationship*

- What is it like having a mentor so far?

- What kind of things do you talk about together?
- What's it been like getting to know X?
- What are the best things about having X in your life?
- Is there anything that's not good about having a mentor?
- How is X different from other people in your life?
- Are they like anyone else in your life (teacher/uncle)? In what way?



## **Caseworker Interview Guide**

### *Introduction*

- I am hoping to find out about your experiences of case working with [mentor and young person] in the first 6 months of their match
- Consent and confidentiality.
- To help me remember I will use a tape recorder.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

### *Expectations and Early Weeks*

- What kind of expectations did the mentor have before meeting [child]?
- What concerns did they have about meeting [child] for the first time?
- What do you think they hoped for from being a mentor?
- How did the first few meetings go? What difficulties arose? What went well?
- How did this continue over the first few months?
- What about the child? How did they find the first few months of the relationship?
- Were there any surprises?

### *Development of relationship over time*

- What kind of things do they do together? Has that changed?
- How do you think the mentor has coped with the challenges that have come up?
- What skills have they gained?
- How do you think the relationship between the mentor and the child has developed over time? Has it changed? In what way?
- What kinds of issues arise now? Is that different from at the beginning of the relationship?

### *Reflections on relationship*

- How do you think the match is going so far?

- How does it compare to other mentoring relationships you have worked with?
- What have been the more challenging or difficult bits? What has gone well?
- How do you think the experience of having a mentor has affected the young person?
- What about the mentor?

### *Support*

- What kinds of support has the mentor asked for?
- How does this relate to other mentors you have worked with?
- What support do you think has been helpful for them?
- What other things could help them more?

**Appendix VI**  
**Thematic Analysis Examples**

## Extract from mentor interview (Mentor 1)

### Initial Coding

<p>Mentor 1: We talk about, um, just, ordinary things. Like he will talk about toys that he has seen or he likes, or films or movies. Or, and his brothers a little bit, so we talked about [child's brother] recently, because they found a knife which he hadn't told his mum. So then [child] asked his mum if she had told me, to know if he could speak about it. That was one thing. But generally we talk about ordinary things. His SATS, writing for school. He loves drawing. Yeah, just a whole wide range of things really</p>	<p>Talking about the family</p> <p>Opening up about difficult experiences</p> <p>Focusing on child's interests</p>
<p>Interviewer: Do you feel it has changed, what you talk about? Are you more able to talk about sensitive issues now, or family issues? Is he more open about that?</p>	
<p>Mentor 1: I probably ask more questions now, or not ask more, initially I was probably less likely to instigate any conversations about his family, but now I know his family more, like with the knife incident, when I picked him up she was telling me about it, So I said oh, that was interesting what your mum said, and he said yeah cos the boys on the estate were chasing him. So it easier to talk about them but I don't ever just pluck things out if nowhere, like I don't say how do you feel about your dad leaving you. But he sees his dad every Sunday so I will ask him, how was your dad, did you have a nice visit, what did you do? So yeah we do talk more, but I don't feel I have to press him you know...</p>	<p>Knowing about the family context</p> <p>Asking about sensitive issues/Not pushing child to discuss sensitive topics</p> <p>Being tentative</p>
<p>Interviewer: Do you find those things come up more, the more sensitive topics or not really?</p>	
<p>Mentor 1: Not particularly. I think, from where I know more about the family then probably yes they come up more. Because I am more aware of what the family is going through and issues they have, or what his mum has told me. Because she is very open and she will talk about everything in front of the boys. So, doesn't matter if I think it is inappropriate or not. Which is reason why I probably don't stay engaged in many conversations, because although it is completely free for her to talk about what she wants to talk about in front of the children if it is not something I feel comfortable talking about then I would prefer not to so I keep the conversations moving or whatever. But because I am more aware of what is happening, then yes, those conversations probably come up a little bit more often, but they are not a pressing matter, or anything</p>	<p>Knowing the family context</p> <p>Relationship with child's mother</p> <p>Boundary issues: need to maintain distance from mother</p> <p>Not pushing child to discuss sensitive topics</p>
<p>Interviewer: Erm, where are we? Ok, nearly done. What would you say the best things about what you have been doing are?</p>	
<p>Mentor 1: Erm, yeah I enjoy that [child] gets a break from his family. I think that is one of the best things, that I see him outside of his family network, and that he is relaxed and comfortable, it's great. Another bonus, well a bonus on that, is that I am doing things that I would never make time to do, so things we do together are things I enjoy doing. So I am not sacrificing anything to spend time with him, So from my point of view, yeah, it is a bonus that he gets so much out of it, because I enjoy what we do</p>	<p>Offering child respite from family</p> <p>Child seems comfortable with mentor</p> <p>Mentor enjoys activities as well</p>

## Extract from child interview (Child 4)

	<b>Initial Coding</b>
Interviewer: So what's good about spending time with [mentor]?	
Child 4: It's fun.	Enjoyment of time together/ fun
Interviewer: Fun.	
Child 4: Fun.	
Interviewer: What about it is fun? What do you mean by fun?	
Child 4: I have a laugh. I enjoy myself. It makes me more happier.	Enjoyment and pleasure
Interviewer: Ok. That's good	
Child 4: She listens to me.	Being listened to
Interviewer: So what kind of things does she listen to you about?	
Child 4: Like whenever I talk to her, for example my teachers they are like "Um hum, yes, yes, I've got to go now, bye", and she's not really like that. She laughs at them and gives comments and stuff.	Mentor offers attention and feedback on child's ideas/different from other relationships
Interviewer: So she listens to you and gives you time?	
Child 4: Yup.	
Interviewer: And what kind of things might you talk about?	
Child 4: School, like my worries about my new school, and, yeah, stuff like that.	Opens up about worries/Future transition to secondary
Interviewer: Does it help to be listened to?	
Child 4: Yeah.	
Interviewer: What about being listened to helps do you think?	
Child 4: Like, I don't have to think, yeah, like if she comments and says "it's not a big problem" then I don't have to worry as much as I did.	Impact of being listened to
Interviewer: So otherwise you would worry about things a lot would you?	
Child 4: Yeah. I'd worry about them much more.	

## Extract from caseworker interview (Caseworker 4 talking about Pair 12)

### Initial coding

Caseworker 4: [child] has opened up and she's talking about, you know, what's on her mind and using [mentor] as a sounding board. And she's going to have a really big transition coming up, not this year but the following year, going to secondary school

Child is talking more/opening up

Upcoming transition

Interviewer: Because she's only ten, is she, she looks older?

Caseworker 4: Yes, yeah, which is something that mum has said people forget quite quickly and I think [mentor] and I have had to remind ourselves, and because she's, she's expressed quite a few concerns about going into secondary schools I've kind of got caught up in, I forgot her age and thought she was moving this September but she's not, she's got another year. And I think that was really important to remember during supervision and for [mentor] to keep in her mind that actually she's young. You start making expectations higher.

Upcoming transition

Considering child's age

Interviewer: So you're saying that [mentor] has learnt quite a lot, can you...?

Caseworker 4: Yeah, we talked it through in her review, but, um, I think just kind of the confidence to...yeah, to just be there for [child] and know that just kind of hanging out with her is enough, and she just doesn't have to...And that, well my interpretation is that, you know, a friendship will take time and they'll kind of work out over that time how they relate to each other and chat to each other, and yeah, just hang out with each other really. But she's always been very patient, I just think, you know, well she went in with the expectation, I don't think she had an expectation that it was going to be easy, I just don't think she had the expectation that she would face as many challenges as she did. So...

Mentor just spending time with child

Mentor expectations/harder than expected

Interviewer: So in that way it's different from what she expected?

Caseworker 4: Yeah I think so, definitely.

Interviewer: And just on that topic, it's also my last question, um, in terms of support from you, what kind of things has she asked for support with, or what kind of support has she needed?

Importance of supervision

Caseworker 4: Just, just really thinking through, there's been lots of elements I guess with the supervision, just as I said, thinking through how *she* feels and kind of supporting her and her levels of anxiety when things weren't going as well. Just giving her the space to talk that through really, and validate it, because it wasn't easy, you know, taking a child out who's not really saying anything to you is really difficult to stick with, and it's really hard not to think what am I doing wrong, how can I make this better. So just kind of supporting her just to stay with that, and checking out that she was ok and not taking it personally. And I guess by thinking through with her what potentially could be going on for [child], and trying to think of all the different scenarios, and I think I would often say to [volunteer], you know, we never know, we're never going to be given all the answers, and it's just sitting with that not knowing, but we can have a think what it might be, I think she's found, well I hope she's found that useful...

Early challenges- mentee silences

Mentor questioning themselves/anxiety

Getting support from caseworker and thinking through child's point of view