



Mentor Screening Recommended Tools/Processes

	<i>Minimum Standards</i>	<i>Highly Recommended</i>
Staff training and supervision	✓	
Applicant database	✓	
Written eligibility criteria/ policy	✓	
Distinct process for youth volunteers *	✓	
Mentee training		✓
Parent/ caregiver training		✓
Mentor position description	✓	
Commitment statement	✓	
Eligibility, screening, monitoring processes	✓	
Orientation		✓
Written application	✓	
In-person interview	✓	
Home visit		✓
Criminal history background – state	✓	
Criminal history background – federal	✓	
Sex offender registries	✓	
Child abuse registries		✓
Driving record		✓
Internet/ social media searches	✓	
Character references	✓	
Psychometric/ psychological tests		✓
Health screening *	✓	
Pre-match training	✓	
Final decision	✓	
Ongoing mentor check-ins	✓	
Ongoing mentee check-ins	✓	
Ongoing parent/ caregiver check-ins	✓	
Rescreening continuing mentors		✓

- Necessary only when specified by agency's or collaborators' policies



Checklist of Guiding Questions in Developing or Strengthening

Screening and Monitoring Practices

- ✓ What tools and processes are currently in use for mentor screening and youth protection and to what extent are program staff consistently and completely using them?
- ✓ Is staff sufficiently trained in child sexual abuse perpetrators to use their informed intuition throughout the application and monitoring process?
- ✓ How useful are existing tools and processes for our mentor screening process?
- ✓ What recommended tools and processes must be added?
- ✓ What other tools and processes for mentor screening and youth protection are essential to include in the program?
- ✓ What other tools and processes could we add, given our resources and mentor selection pool?
- ✓ What resources are necessary to add additional tools or processes?
- ✓ What barriers (other than resources) exist to adding any specific tools or processes and how can these be addressed?
- ✓ How can we use the information that is being obtained to strengthen the process of screening and monitoring mentors and their relationships with youth?

Prioritizing Youth Safety with Research-Based Mentor Screening Practices

Resources

SAFE (Screening Applicants for Effectiveness): Guidelines to Prevent Child Molestation in Mentoring and Youth-Serving Organizations <http://www.friendsforyouth.org/SAFE.html> and the *Mentor Screening and Youth Safety* chapter in the **Handbook of Youth Mentoring**, 2nd ed., <http://www.sagepub.com/books/Book234516> contains the most thorough research and recommendations.

In regards to other sources of materials that programs can reference, here's what we recommend:

- *Supervision of Children and Teens Never Includes Sex* brochure from the Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance [http://www.insurancefornonprofits.org/Documents.cfm?VarsU=%3D6U6%5CHZ%3A8%3D*I6M%25B%40M%3B%2B.15\(3B!%5E%2CQXFYA8U%3BR%3F\(%20%0A](http://www.insurancefornonprofits.org/Documents.cfm?VarsU=%3D6U6%5CHZ%3A8%3D*I6M%25B%40M%3B%2B.15(3B!%5E%2CQXFYA8U%3BR%3F(%20%0A)
- *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan* report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/pdf/childhood_stress.pdf
- *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis (For Law Enforcement Officers Investigating the Sexual Exploitation of Children by Acquaintance Molesters)* report from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/149252NCJRS.pdf>
- *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations* report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/PreventingChildSexualAbuse-a.pdf#page=1>
- *Screening Volunteers to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: A Community Guide for Youth Organizations* report from the National Collaboration for Youth <https://www.nationalserviceresources.org/library/items/r0872>
- *Who's Lending a Hand? A National Survey of Nonprofit Volunteer Screening Practices* report from The National Center for Victims of Crime <http://www.victimsofcrime.org/docs/Public%20library/who-s-lending-a-hand.pdf?sfvrsn=10>
- *More Than a Matter of Trust: Managing the Risks of Mentoring* from the Nonprofit Risk Management Center https://www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub_detail.asp?id=10

More information is included in several of the more general mentoring practices material:

- MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership's Elements of Effective Practice <http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/elements_and_toolkits>
- National Mentoring Center/Mentoring Resource Center, including *The U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Program's Guide to Screening and Background Checks* and their *Fact Sheet 11: Managing Risk After the Match Is Made* < <http://educationnorthwest.org/nmc#4>>

Some generalized child sexual abuse information as it may relate to volunteers or programs:

- Child Welfare Information Gateway listing of sexual abuse prevention programs/publications, <<http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/types/sexualabuse.cfm>>
- Prevent Child Abuse America series on Sexual Abuse, <<http://pcaamerica.channing-bete.com/> and <http://www.preventchildabuse.org/advocacy/downloads/child_sexual_abuse.pdf>
- Kidpower offering personal safety, confidence, advocacy, and self-protection skills for all ages and abilities, <<http://www.kidpower.org>>
- Darkness to Light <<http://www.darkness2light.org/>> Stewards of Children curriculum is an evidence-based adult-focused child sexual abuse prevention training program available in instructor-led and online formats. According to Darkness to Light, the Stewards of Children program is the only adult-focused child sexual abuse prevention program proven effective in increasing knowledge, improving attitudes and changing participant's child-protective behaviors over the long term.

Prioritizing Youth Safety with Research-Based Mentor Screening Practices

This presentation will focus on a review of research on mentor screening and youth protection in mentoring programs, as well as the recommended tools and approaches from the *Mentor Screening and Youth Protection* chapter from the 2nd edition of the ***Handbook on Youth Mentoring and SAFE (Screening Applicants for Effectiveness): Guidelines to Prevent Child Molestation in Mentoring and Youth-Serving Organizations***. For those familiar with screening practices, you will have the opportunity to delve deeper into how to use both subjective and objective components to make the best decision. If you have never attended a similar training, you will learn about what is recommended and why, though it is suggested that you have a good understanding of the screening process and its relevance and purpose to serving youth in volunteer programs prior to attending.

The primary duty of youth service programs is to care for the well-being, healthy development, and growth of young persons. Mentoring programs seek to fulfill this duty by pairing each participating youth with one or more specific adults (or, in some instances, older peers). These mentors, most of whom are volunteers, are typically expected to serve as models for healthy relationships, show youth that they have valuable gifts to share with others, and illustrate through action that someone cares deeply about their well-being. These relationships carry with them a potential for deep and lasting enrichment to young people and their development. At the same time, because of their direct and close relationship-based approach to working with youth, mentoring programs present risks for youth to be deliberately harmed that are not necessarily found in other types of youth services or programs. In some instances, for example, child molesters have specifically sought out involvement in youth mentoring programs, presumably in part because such programs provide unsupervised access to vulnerable youth. Organizations in this way may inadvertently assist perpetrators by helping them to gain the trust of parents and by serving to legitimize the relationship (Arevalo, Cooper, & Smith, 2006), as many parents or caregivers are inclined to trust the program without asking many questions. Along with the well-demonstrated power of mentoring programs to benefit youth through close and often intimate relationships (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Valentine, & Silverthorn, 2011) comes a fundamental ethical responsibility to protect the youth involved from harm.

Media articles over the years have documented numerous substantiated instances of sexual abuse of youth by adults with whom they have been paired in formal mentoring programs (Terry & Tallon, 2004). Such instances of youth being abused in mentoring programs are generally assumed to be relatively infrequent, though even one occurrence is too many. Reliable estimates of their prevalence are not available. Moreover, there is remarkably little research in general to inform mentor screening and monitoring practices and policies directed toward youth safety in mentoring programs.

In addition to this lack of evidence, programs face numerous other obstacles in creating policies and procedures in this area. These include a broad denial of the potential for child sexual abuse within communities, especially with regard to the possibility that well-known and well-respected individuals such as those volunteering to serve as mentors can be perpetrators (van Dam, 2001, 2006). Likewise, given such perceptions, there is understandably often a reluctance of victims or those responsible for their care to report instances of abuse. One survey of adults who were sexually victimized by adults as children reported that 91 percent did not disclose the abuse when it was happening (Arevalo et al., 2006). Programs, too, may feel pressure to conceal incidents of potential sexual abuse of mentees for fear of potential liability and loss of credibility.

Furthermore, as programs strive to ensure youth safety, they face a need to balance protective measures with other important programmatic concerns. There may be a tension, for example, between potentially useful mentor screening steps and the ability to complete the application process within a reasonable time before interest is lost and the potential mentor has moved on to another opportunity (Roaf, Tierney, & Hunte, 1994; Schmiesing & Henderson, 2001). Agency staff must balance their own cautious attitude and potential suspicions toward applicants with the openness necessary to build positive relationships and trust with mentors who ultimately are approved (Herman, 1995; Roaf et al., 1994). Programs, as they

develop their protocol, also need to determine when to encourage staff to be open and non-judgmental and when to trust staff's informed intuition regarding potential risks to youth safety. When engaging youth and families, programs may often find themselves walking a fine line between communicating to parents or caregivers the seriousness of the possibility of child sexual abuse occurring in their program despite their stringent screening standards while at the same time conveying a reassuring attitude about the benefits of mentoring (Schmiesing & Henderson, 2001). Finally, and not least significantly, programs must balance the pressure to serve sufficient numbers of youth, often required by funding sources, with the priority of ensuring that only safe mentors and relationships are allowed.

From these challenges emerge the opportunity to strengthen screening and monitoring processes and develop mandatory standards for the field to use effectively. With such standards, programs can then customize tools and processes for their particular setting and population. Opportunity also lies in establishing standards that do not reduce mentor supply, divert agency resources, or require programs to engage in unethical practices (such as excluding mentors based on lifestyle preferences), all common misperceptions among professionals.

These considerations underscore the importance of taking a proactive approach to ensuring youth safety within mentoring or any program intended to benefit young people: youth safety "should not be about abuse response... We cannot afford to wait until the child is victimized to take action" (Patterson, 2008). Thorough screening and monitoring demonstrate a program's commitment to youth and their families; it shows that an agency takes their safety seriously and emphasizes that the priority of services is focused on the youth, not the mentors. Issues of mentor screening and youth protection, furthermore, are issues applicable to all types of programs and settings in which adults (or older peers) have contact with young persons for purposes of mentoring – for example, not only community-based, but also site-based mentoring – as all provide an introduction and access to youth that has the potential to be exploited for harm.

While no process is guaranteed to remove the risk of unsafe mentors, our recommendations are intended to provide a useful foundation for youth protection in mentoring programs. Attendees will learn that material from this workshop should not be regarded as sufficient for fully realizing this goal, nor do they apply to every program or every state's legal requirements.

References

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Mentor Screening Practices**

The Starfish Story

Adapted from "The Star Thrower" by Loren Eiseley

A man was jogging down the beach after a major storm had just come through the area. He was dismayed by the large amount of starfish that the storm had washed up on the beach. He thought that there was nothing he could do because of the immense numbers.

As he continued down the beach, he saw an old man throw something into the water. As he got closer, he saw the old man walk a little farther down the beach, bend over, pick up a starfish, and throw it back into the water. As the jogger approached, the old man stopped again, bent over, picked up another starfish, and was about to throw it into the water.

The jogger stopped him and asked, "Why are you doing that? There are thousands of starfish on the beach. You can't possibly make a difference." The old man looked at the starfish, threw it back into the water, then replied, "I made a difference to that one, didn't I?"