

Transition to Independence Program Mentor Training

MEGAN PENNEFATHER, LLMSW
CAMPUS COACH



School of Social Work
Challenging Minds, Leading Change, Transforming Lives

Youth aging out of foster care:

Overview

- ❖ Transitioning from foster care to independence is a stressful process: Many do not receive an allowance for food, clothing or housing.
- ❖ Youth with foster care histories have higher rates of criminal activity, early pregnancies, trouble obtaining employment and homelessness.
- ❖ Slightly more than half of foster care youth graduate from high school, and anywhere from 2% to 5% graduate from a four-year college.
- ❖ Youth in foster care and those with foster care histories have higher rates of mental health disorders and learning disabilities due to past trauma and neglect.

What is TIP Wayne State?

The Transition to Independence Program at Wayne State University (TIP Wayne State) works to increase college access and improve graduation rates of foster care youth through research, advocacy, academic and financial support, all while helping students to create lasting personal and professional connections.

More than 800 youth age out of the foster care each year in Michigan.

- ❖ Coaching: TIP offers campus coach services, tutoring, case management, support, counseling, food assistance.
- ❖ Confidence: TIP provides peer mentors and leadership opportunities.
- ❖ Career: TIP helps with work study, internships, career mentors, and career preparation.
- ❖ Only 13% of these youth enroll in college, and only 2% to 5% graduate.

What happens to youth who attend college?

- ❖ Most youth coming from foster care are patching together the financial resources to attend college.
- ❖ Most lack the emotional support to stay in college, and they often do not have anywhere to spend holidays and school breaks.
- ❖ This lack of support often leads youth to drop out of college.
- ❖ Youth are at a disadvantage when they do not have relationships with adults who can expose them to a wide range of career options and who can counsel them on the types of education and training required to attain their goals (Anderson & Deller, 2003).



That's where you come in!



What is a mentor?



❖ Friend

- ❖ A mentor has time to listen and give thoughtful, caring advice and assistance.

❖ Role Model

- ❖ A mentor is someone who has had successful life experiences and who is willing to share them.
- ❖ Modeling can happen in different ways: It can be as tangible as making a craft or playing a sport, or it can be less concrete, like controlling one's anger and using good manners.

❖ Link to community

- ❖ A mentor should be knowledgeable about the community and be willing to research any information that is unknown to him or her. He or she will teach the young person how to access local resources.

What you can expect: Stages of mentoring

❖ Building Trust

- ❖ **Testing:** The youth may test the mentor to see what the limits are.
 - ❖ How might a mentee test a mentor?
- ❖ **Learning to communicate:** Youth and adults communicate in different ways and tend to talk about different things.
 - ❖ What topics do you think you and your mentee will discuss?
- ❖ **Compromise and bridging differences:** You and your mentee will have different opinions on a variety of topics.
 - ❖ In what areas do you expect to encounter differences?

What to expect: Stages of mentoring

❖ Exploring possibilities

- ❖ **Setting goals:** Mentors and mentees establish a relationship by creating and meeting goals together

- ❖ What types of goals might a mentor and mentee set?

- ❖ **Choosing activities:** Mentors and mentees are matched based on common interests.

- ❖ What activities do you anticipate sharing with your mentee?

- ❖ **Recognizing and celebrating your mentee:** Mentors are in a position to assist the mentee in raising his or her self-esteem and achievement expectations.

- ❖ In what ways can mentors celebrate their mentees' accomplishments?

What to expect: Stages of mentoring

❖ Navigating rough spots

- ❖ **Knowing your limits:** Mentors need to take care of themselves in order to be a good role model.

- ❖ What circumstances may lead a mentor to re-evaluate his or her commitment?

- ❖ **Remaining committed:** Mentors do not always witness changes in their mentee's progress or receive proper appreciation from their mentee. Believe it or not, the mentor has an incredible impact on the mentee's life.

- ❖ What are some of the things a mentor can do to remain committed?

❖ Closure

- ❖ **Acknowledging the relationship:** At the end of the mentoring relationship, it is important for all parties involved to look back at the highs and lows of the experience.

Mentoring Do's

- ❖ Be consistent!
 - ❖ Youth with foster care histories often do not have experiences with a consistent adult. If your actions are consistent with your words, then you will increase the level of trust between the two of you.
- ❖ Be yourself
 - ❖ Trying to be something you're not tells young people that you are insecure about your own identity. It also sends a message to young people that you think you can fool them with phony behavior.
- ❖ Practice healthy communication skills
 - ❖ Eye contact, listen, ask questions for clarification, do not interrupt, be open-minded.

Mentoring Do's

- ❖ Understand your influence
 - ❖ The mentee comes to you for guidance. Always take his/her concerns seriously.
- ❖ Be honest
 - ❖ Being dishonest shows youth that you do not respect them.
- ❖ Confront inappropriate behavior
 - ❖ Carefully explain to the youth that there are standards in the world with which adults are expected to comply.
- ❖ Inform the youth if you will be unavailable for a time
 - ❖ Make sure he/she understands that you have responsibilities and that you are not trying to avoid the relationship.

Mentoring Don'ts

- ❖ Don't compare the youth to yourself at the same age
 - ❖ This breeds competition, resentment and jealousy.
- ❖ Don't trivialize the youth's feelings
 - ❖ You may not understand it, but accept it and listen.
- ❖ Don't judge or jump to conclusions
 - ❖ There are two sides to every story. Don't believe everything you hear.
- ❖ Don't play, "Can you top this?"
 - ❖ Be careful not to make light of inappropriate behaviors from your own life.
- ❖ Don't try to take the place of parents, teachers, social workers
 - ❖ It's important to know your place in the youth's life and the boundaries of your relationship.

Mentoring foster care youth

- ❖ Many young people with a foster care history may be “emotionally sensitive.” They may have a heightened sensitivity to interpersonal interactions and external stimuli.
- ❖ Some examples of this include: cringing when comments are directed at them, withdrawing when others offer constructive criticism or areas of improvement.
- ❖ This heightened sensitivity is largely due to the young person’s lack of being nurtured and cared for in the past.



Emotionally sensitive mentees

- ❖ Youth with foster care histories may be emotionally sensitive, and therefore may react defensively at some point.
- ❖ The two most common defensive behaviors are **self-handicapping** and **defensive pessimism**.
- ❖ **Self-handicapping**
 - ❖ Students deliberately create obstacles for themselves to avoid revealing the actual amount of talent they possess.
- ❖ **Defensive pessimism**
 - ❖ Students claim they will not be able to do well with an upcoming task.

Emotionally sensitive mentees

- ❖ Be patient
- ❖ Start with and praise the good
- ❖ Be cordial and congenial
- ❖ Allow plenty of time
- ❖ Proceed in slow, incremental steps
- ❖ Validate the youth's past experiences
- ❖ Be gentle
- ❖ Look for emotional strengths (signs of resiliency)
- ❖ Allow the student to proceed in the relationship at his/her own pace.
- ❖ Teach the student coping skills: how to deal with failure, how to deal with difficult people, how to handle change and stress, and how to cope with the insensitivities of others.

Four steps to good listening

- ❖ **Step 1: Hear and listen to the message**
 - ❖ We hear sounds constantly, but we do not usually listen to them. We listen to and remember what is important, interesting or unusual.
 - ❖ You will need to pay attention to what your mentee is saying.



Four steps to good listening

❖ Step 2: Interpret the message

- ❖ Listening allows a person to form an understanding of the speaker's meaning through words, tone of voice, and non-verbal cues.
- ❖ Words and tone of voice: Simple statements can be interpreted depending on tone of voice.
- ❖ How would you interpret the statement, "Oh, I see you changed your hairstyle?" What phrase could be added to clarify the meaning of this statement?

Four steps to good listening

❖ Step 3: Evaluate the message

- ❖ Sometimes this will be necessary, but not always.
- ❖ You may need to ask follow-up questions and analyze evidence.
- ❖ Avoid jumping to conclusions.
- ❖ The reliability of the source should always be considered.

Four steps to good listening

❖ Step 4: Respond to the message

- ❖ It is important to provide either verbal or nonverbal feedback about what you heard and how you interpreted it.
- ❖ Two ways to respond is to use **reflective listening and “I messages.”**
- ❖ **Reflective listening** is rephrasing what someone has said or putting into words the way someone is feeling.
 - ❖ “You seem disappointed about what happened today.”
 - ❖ “Do you want to talk about it?”
 - ❖ “It sounds as if you are sad about how things turned out.”

Four steps to good listening (cont.)

- ❖ **“I Messages”** are a good way of addressing a behavior or attitude that is bothering you.
 - ❖ “I wish I knew why you were crying.”
 - ❖ “When I don’t know why you are angry, I don’t know how to support you.”
 - ❖ “It makes me frustrated when you’re not here for a scheduled visit.”
 - ❖ DO NOT SAY: “You are really irresponsible by not being here when you said you would be.”
 - ❖ Rather than make the message into a critique, make it reflect how the other person’s action made you feel.

Setting boundaries

- ❖ Poor boundaries can result in an unhealthy relationship, creating a victim mentality, an inability to say no and extreme dependency.
- ❖ **Examples of good boundaries:**
 - ❖ I care about you, but I cannot take away your problems.
 - ❖ I need time to be alone.
 - ❖ I will not be the object of rage.
 - ❖ I can disagree with you and still care about you.
 - ❖ I form my own opinions.
 - ❖ I only accept phone calls until 9 p.m. unless there is an emergency.
 - ❖ I will not allow others to make me feel guilty.
 - ❖ I will not do something for you that you are able to do for yourself.

Setting boundaries

- ❖ If you find yourself saying, I will do this just this one time STOP!
- ❖ Remember: Youth, even older youth, need boundaries to feel safe, healthy and cared for.
- ❖ It is much easier to set very strong boundaries in the beginning and loosen them over time than trying to strengthen weak boundaries.



Reporting your time

❖ You should report each interaction with your mentee. This is done on TIP's Weebly site. The link is below:

❖ <http://mentortip.weebly.com/>

Thank you for being a mentor!



“If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of a giant.”

- Isaac Newton

