Policies and Guidelines for Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Caregiver’s Choice

Welcome to the Mentoring Children of Prisoner’s Voucher Demonstration Program “Caregiver’s Choice.” Established in 2007, the Voucher Demonstration Program is designed to increase access to mentoring services nationwide and provide caregivers and parents the choice to select a mentoring program that meets high quality standards. The Family and Youth Services Bureau, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded a grant to the National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) to coordinate the distribution of the vouchers. The goal is to serve children who reside in areas not served by a Mentoring Children of Prisoner’s basic grant, Native American children and children residing in rural areas. In addition, MENTOR provides ongoing training and technical assistance to all community based Caregiver’s Choice Mentoring Providers and their Affiliates.

Please note that all disbursement of funds is at the sole discretion of The Family and Youth Services Bureau. This includes any changes to the milestone payment schedule or overall suspension of remittance.

Policies Regarding Children

1.0 Application and Eligibility of Children

Eligibility for Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Caregiver’s Choice is determined at the time the caregiver or parent completes an application for a child to join the project. The caregiver or parent may initiate an application through the Caregiver’s Choice toll-free number, MENTOR’s Caregiver’s Choice Web site (https://voucher.mentorpro.org/(S(ey4uzy45oqlg3ebkzqt0xwmx))/childlogin.aspx) or through an intermediary organization authorized to enroll children.

At the time of the application, a child must meet the following eligibility criteria in order to be issued a voucher:

- Be at least four years-old but less than eighteen years-old;
- Not be in a formal one-to-one match relationship with an adult mentor;
• Have one or both parents currently serving a sentence at a state, federal or tribal correctional facility, or serving a sentence at a local facility under the custody of the state or federal correctional system; and
• Have the permission of the parent or legal guardian (referred to as caregiver throughout this document) charged with the responsibility of caring for the child while the parent(s) is incarcerated.

All Caregiver’s Choice programs use a one-to-one mentoring model. Therefore, children who are currently in a group or team mentoring relationship or on a wait-list for a one-to-one mentoring relationship are eligible to join Caregiver’s Choice. If a child is currently in a one-to-one mentoring relationship through a formal program, he or she is not eligible for Caregiver’s Choice. If it is determined that a child has an incarcerated parent after he/she has been matched with a mentor, he/she is NOT eligible to apply for Caregiver’s Choice, as that child is already receiving formal one-to-one mentoring services.

Once a child is determined to be eligible and is issued a voucher, the caregiver may continue forward with the process of selecting a mentoring program and being assigned a mentor, even if the initial eligibility conditions change. For example, if the incarcerated parent is released from prison before a child is matched with a mentor, the child continues to be eligible to use the voucher based on the initial eligibility determination.

2.0 Participation and Voucher Redemption

Once a child is determined to be eligible, he or she will be officially enrolled in Caregiver’s Choice. At that time, the caregiver will receive a welcome package including instructions, a voucher, and a list of voucher-approved mentoring programs. The caregiver may contact the approved mentoring programs on the list to ask for additional information regarding the program’s model, practices, and length of wait-list. The caregiver then selects the program that best meets their needs. At any time, the caregiver may contact the Caregiver’s Choice toll-free number for assistance with mentoring program selection.

The caregiver must then contact the program of their choosing and provide the voucher to initiate the enrollment process. The mentoring program will verify the voucher and match the child with an appropriate mentor who has already met all of the pre-match screening and training requirements mandated by Caregiver’s Choice. After the program verifies the voucher, it is considered as “redeemed” by the parent or caregiver.

3.0 Caregiver Expectations for the Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs should make all efforts to match the child with a mentor within three months from the date of voucher redemption. If the child is not matched with a mentor within three months, the caregiver may:
1. The caregiver can choose a different mentoring program and receive a new voucher; or

2. Stay with the original mentoring program and continue to wait for a mentor for the child. If the caregiver decides to stay with the original mentoring program there is no action required of the caregiver or mentoring provider.

In addition, if the caregiver is dissatisfied with the services provided by the mentoring program, they may contact the Caregiver’s Choice toll-free number to discuss their concerns. The call center staff will attempt to resolve the issue so that the child can remain with the mentoring program. However, if the mentoring program is not fulfilling its obligations to the child or is not following appropriate best practices, the voucher will be invalidated and a new voucher issued so the caregiver can select a different mentoring program.

4.0 Additional Years of Mentoring

Mentoring programs are required to continue to support mentoring matches beyond the initial twelve-month commitment should the mentors and mentees wish to remain matched. Additional Caregiver’s Choice funds will not be rendered to support the match beyond the twelve-month period.
Policies and Guidelines for
Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Caregiver’s Choice

Policies Regarding Mentoring Programs

1. Application and Approval Policies

1.1 Application and Eligibility of Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs must meet a number of requirements related to program model, program practices, length of the mentoring relationship, frequency of match meetings, and program capacity. This ensures that children served by Caregiver’s Choice are referred to mentoring programs with the capacity and ability to foster and sustain quality mentoring matches.

The program requirements for eligibility to qualify and maintain approval as an approved Caregiver’s Choice provider:

My program:

- Is a community-based or site-based mentoring program.
- Has at least one year (12 consecutive months) of experience sponsoring and supporting one-to-one, in-person mentoring relationships between adults and youth.
- Requires (or agrees to require) an initial match commitment of at least 12 consecutive months.
- Requires mentors and mentees to meet at least 4 hours in person per month and have weekly contact (via e-mail, phone, etc.).

My program has the following best practices in place:

A. Screening and Safety

- Has written policy and procedures related to screening (must be submitted with application).
- Has written mentor application.
• Uses FBI fingerprint-based background check for mentor.

• Conducts in-person interview with mentor.

• Conducts at least two reference checks (cannot be a family member/spouse or staff person of the mentoring organization) on mentor.

• Has clear mentor eligibility requirements.

• Has mentor job description.

B. Training

• Provides a minimum of 2 hours of pre-match mentor training.

• Provides a minimum of at least 1 hour of age-appropriate orientation/training to mentees and/or caregivers.

• Conducts quarterly ongoing training (at least 2 hours in duration) for mentors.

C. Matching

• Matches mentors and mentees based on similar interests.

• Matches mentors and mentees based on the needs of the child.

• Respects the preferences of the parent/guardian during the matching process.

D. Match Support and Monitoring

• Provides ongoing support/case management to matches through in-person or telephone contacts with the mentor and mentee (or parent/guardian):
  
  a. Twice a month for the first month of the match.
  b. Monthly after the first month of the match.

• Has a closure policy in place.
My program meets the following capacity requirements:

- Has staffing that includes at least 1 paid full-time equivalent dedicated to mentoring for every 15 matches.
- Has sustainability and/or development plan in place.
- Has written policy and procedures manual in place.
- Has proof of liability insurance.

My program agrees to meet the following general eligibility requirements:

- Obtain permission from the Board of Directors to participate.
- Participate in training on working with children of prisoners and project guidelines.
- Update policy and procedures manual to include information about working with children of prisoners and participating in the voucher project.
- Complete training on the use of MentorPRO® Basic and use MentorPRO® Basic to track voucher-supported mentoring relationships (requires internet access).
- Comply with all project guidelines.
- Cooperate with all evaluations and return survey forms in a timely manner.
- Provide W-9 and letter verifying tax status.

Frequently asked questions regarding program qualifications may be found at: http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_1173.pdf

1.2 Securing Final Approval to Participate

MENTOR will review each application to determine whether a program meets the minimum eligibility requirements for participation. Programs meeting eligibility requirements will receive provisional approval. To receive final approval, a mentoring program must:

- Submit a signed agreement from the Chair of the Board of Directors or Executive Director authorizing the mentoring program to participate, and agreeing to abide by project policies and requirements;
Participate in a webinar training session on how to use MentorPRO® Basic—the online tracking and evaluation tool that approved programs are required to use to track Caregiver’s Choice mentoring relationships;

Participate in a training session (in person, via teleconference, or via webinar) on the unique opportunities and challenges of working with children of prisoners; and

Agree to adapt volunteer training content and program policies and procedures to address the needs of this population.

Once a mentoring program completes these requirements, MENTOR will move the program to final approved status. At this point, a program’s information will be listed on the approved provider list made available to caregivers, and a program may redeem vouchers from enrolled children.

Mentoring programs that are currently receiving funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) grant program must meet special eligibility requirements to participate in Caregiver’s Choice. This ensures that a program is currently meeting its expectations for the grant, and will be able to serve more children of prisoners with the additional funds provided by Caregiver’s Choice.

All MCP programs are eligible to apply to become a Caregiver’s Choice mentoring agency. MCP grantees interested in becoming an approved provider should visit the Caregivers Choice web site at www.mentoring.org/find_resources/caregiverschoice/ or contact MENTOR via e-mail at caregiverschoice@mentoring.org. MENTOR is the FYSB grantee charged with the responsibility for operating and managing the voucher (Caregivers Choice) program. MENTOR works with networks of state and local mentoring organizations to leverage resources and provide the support and tools that mentoring organizations need to effectively serve young people in their communities.

The legislation requires that MCP grantees must first exhaust their capacity for providing mentoring services in the service area identified in the original or revised approved grant application prior to receiving and redeeming a voucher to serve a child of an incarcerated parent(s) from the approved service area. Therefore, FSYB will allow programs to receive vouchers to serve youth from the program’s indentified service area only after a program has reached the goals stated in the original or revised approved grant application for each budget period of the program’s three year project.

In order to receive and redeem a voucher for serving a youth from the indentified service areas, programs must send a letter to their Federal Project Officer stating that they have reached their MCP match goals for the budget period.

1.3 Eligibility and Policies for Current HHS Mentoring Children of Prisoners Grantees
If a child comes to a program from outside the service area identified in the approved original or revised grant application (e.g. an adjacent county or other jurisdiction), a program may receive and redeem a Caregiver’s Choice voucher for serving that child whether or not the program has made 100% of its match goal for that budget period. However, these children will be counted as Caregiver’s Choice voucher matches and will not be counted towards any MCP grant match goal requirements.

If a program receives a referral from the Caregiver’s Choice program from its service area and you have not met the MCP match goal established in the program’s original or revised approved grant application, the program may serve the child through its regular MCP program and count the child as one of its matches towards its MCP goal. However, the program may not accept a voucher or redeem a voucher for serving this child.

2. Caregiver Enrollment and Voucher Redemption Policies

2.1 Recruiting Eligible Children

Mentoring programs may use Caregiver’s Choice recruitment materials to encourage eligible children and their parents or caregivers to enroll in Caregiver’s Choice. Children on a program’s wait-list or involved in a group or team relationship are eligible for Caregiver’s Choice. However, children in an existing one-to-one mentoring relationship are not.

An approved Caregiver’s Choice provider may self-recruit potential caregivers; however, caregivers still retain the right to choose another mentoring organization for their child to utilize the Caregiver’s Choice voucher certificate for one year of mentoring services. Caregivers are not obligated in any way to issue their Caregiver’s Choice voucher certificate to the approved Caregiver’s Choice provider that advertised the program to them. The underlying foundation of Caregiver’s Choice is to empower the caregiver to choose a program that best fits the needs of his/her child(ren).

2.2 Following Up on Caregiver Interest

When caregivers enroll children in Caregiver’s Choice, they receive a list of approved mentoring programs within their area. The list includes a description of each mentoring program and contact information. The caregiver is encouraged to contact mentoring programs on the list to ask for additional information, such as the program model, goals, and length of wait-list. Approved programs are encouraged to respond promptly to inquiries from caregivers.
Once a caregiver selects a mentoring program, he or she must contact the program to begin the enrollment process. The caregiver must provide the mentoring program with the Caregiver’s Choice voucher.

Before enrolling the child, the mentoring program must first verify the voucher’s authenticity. Programs will utilize MentorPRO® Basic to log in the child’s name and voucher number. MENTOR will verify that the child’s name and voucher number match, that the voucher has not been previously redeemed, and that the program is approved to redeem vouchers. The chosen mentoring organization should have the actual voucher certificate in its possession to ensure accurate data entry in MentorPRO® Basic.

The voucher certificate identification number will **not** be issued over the phone to the mentoring organization with or without the caregiver being present on the call.

The voucher certificate identification number may be provided over the phone to the caregiver, if there has been at least two attempts to mail the welcome packet to the caregiver. Welcome packets are mailed within 5 business days from the date that the child application was reviewed, verified, and approved. If more than two weeks has passed since the caregiver applied, the caregiver should call and verify approval to participate in Caregiver’s Choice and request the welcome packet be mailed out again.

The chosen mentoring organization should **NOT** match the child with a mentor, **until presented** with the voucher certificate. If the mentoring organization chooses to match the child **BEFORE** the voucher certificate is issued, presented, it will invalidate the match and **no payment** will be rendered for this match.

Once the voucher has been validated, it is considered “redeemed” by the caregiver, and the child is associated with the mentoring program that submitted the validation request. The mentoring program may then move forward with its usual child enrollment process.

If the voucher is found to be invalid, MENTOR will contact the caregiver to discuss the situation and determine what steps need to be taken to supply a valid voucher. If a mentoring program chooses to enroll a child without validating the voucher, the program will not receive funds to support that mentoring match.

### 3. Mentoring Relationship Requirements

**3.1 Mentor Characteristics**

Mentoring programs should be aware of specific requirements for mentors matched with Caregiver’s Choice children:
• Mentors must be at least eighteen years of age. Caregiver’s Choice does not support peer mentoring relationships.
• Mentors cannot be paid for their services. Stipends for travel or activities are allowed, but the mentor cannot receive any compensation for time spent mentoring.
• Mentors must be matched in a one-to-one mentoring relationship with a child. Caregiver’s Choice does not support group or team mentoring relationships.
• Mentors must receive a job description that clearly denotes the requirements for time commitment, frequency of meetings, and length of the mentoring match.

3.2 Screening Mentors

Each prospective mentor must undergo a thorough screening process. Four specific screening elements must, without exception, be performed for each mentor prior to being matched with a Caregiver’s Choice child:
• Mentor application;
• FBI fingerprint background check;
• In-person interview; and
• Two reference checks (not a family member or spouse, not a staff member of the approved Caregiver’s Choice mentoring organization).

Mentoring programs may choose to add additional screening requirements to conform to their usual volunteer screening process.

The FBI fingerprint background check is required by the federal legislation that created Caregiver’s Choice and may be conducted through the appropriate agency within the mentoring program’s state or through MENTOR’s SafetyNET program (www.mentoring.org/safetynet/). A state-only fingerprint search or a name-based search is not sufficient to meet this screening requirement.

Once the background check has been completed, the mentoring program may not use a volunteer that has a felony conviction for any of the following crimes:
• Child abuse or neglect;
• Spousal abuse;
• A crime against a child (including child pornography);
• Violent crimes, such as rape, sexual assault, or homicide; or
• Assault, battery or drug-related felony convictions that are less than five years old.

A background check conducted by SafetyNET will flag any individual who has a conviction for any of these crimes as “does not meet the criteria.” Please note that the SafetyNET background check includes more types of crimes than the criteria listed above; therefore an individual with a “does not meet the criteria”
determination may still be eligible to volunteer as a mentor. For example, a prospective volunteer who has committed a white-collar felony (e.g., embezzlement) or was convicted of felony drug possession ten years ago would be flagged by SafetyNET as “does not meet the criteria”. This individual would not necessarily be disqualified as a volunteer under legislative requirements. Mentoring programs are encouraged to ask volunteers with negative determinations to request their full criminal history to better understand if they are ineligible to be a mentor to a Caregiver’s Choice child.

In addition, each state agency that conducts FBI background checks uses different standards in their determinations. Please contact the agency in your state for a list of the criteria used.

In either case, programs are strongly encouraged to develop clear eligibility criteria for prospective mentors reflecting the needs and safety of the children served.

Furthermore, we strongly recommend that programs conduct a full background check, including an FBI fingerprint background check every 12 months. Also, we advise that background checks be conducted by your agency (regardless of whether a mentor has had a background check conducted for place of employment or other volunteer organization) and be done no more than six months prior to being matched with a newly enrolled Caregiver’s Choice child. This overall guidance is recommended for the safety of the children being served as well as protection of your agency as a best practices policy.

### 3.3 Training and Matching Mentors and Mentees

Both mentors and mentees must be properly trained and prepared before being matched. Training requirements include:

- **Mentor Pre-Match Training**: Mentors must receive at least two hours of in-person pre-match training that occurs before the match start date. The training curriculum must include at least some content focused on the challenges and opportunities specific to children of prisoners. Mentoring programs will receive additional guidance on this requirement during the mentoring children of prisoners training that is provided before a program is approved to participate in Caregiver’s Choice.

- **Mentee Pre-Match Orientation/Training**: Mentees must receive at least one hour of in-person, age-appropriate orientation or training before the mentoring relationship begins.

- **Ongoing Mentor Training**: Mentoring programs must provide quarterly, ongoing training opportunities for mentors participating in Caregiver’s Choice. These opportunities may include sessions for mentors to talk with each other about challenges they are facing, workshops on specific mentoring topics, or more formalized training sessions.
Mentoring programs must also have pre-established matching criteria when selecting which mentor to assign to a child. Matching criteria can be the same for Caregiver’s Choice children as for children enrolled in the rest of the mentoring program. However, two key elements must be included:

- The match must respect the preferences of the caregiver and child, and, when appropriate, the incarcerated parent. This could include preferences for the gender or race of the mentor, the faith of the mentor, and other criteria.
- The mentor and mentee must be matched based on similar interests to facilitate an easier bond between the two.
- The mentor cannot be matched with more than three mentees at the same time.

### 3.4 Frequency and Duration of Mentoring Relationships

Caregiver’s Choice mentoring relationships must be at least twelve consecutive months in length. Mentoring programs must be able to support year-round mentoring matches. Mentoring programs that normally offer only nine-month mentoring relationships to coincide with the school year must provide regular match meetings and match support for Caregiver’s Choice matches during the summer to meet the year-round requirement.

Caregiver’s Choice mentors and mentees must also meet regularly over the course of the year. This must include at least four hours of in-person meetings per month, as well as weekly contact. Weekly contact can include in-person visits, phone calls, e-mails, and text messages. By the end of the twelfth month, the mentor and mentee must have met in person at least twelve times, spent a minimum of forty hours together, and maintained weekly contact in some form.

### 3.5 Match Support and Case Management

A Caregiver’s Choice mentoring program must conduct regular and thorough match support to ensure that the mentoring relationship is strong and long-lasting. As the funds for a Caregiver’s Choice match are paid out over the course of a year, it is in a mentoring program’s best interests to ensure that the match endures.

Caregiver’s Choice has minimum requirements for the frequency of match support. Those requirements are:

- During the first month of the mentoring relationship, the program coordinator must conduct match support at least twice a month.
- From the second month to the end of the mentoring relationship, the program coordinator must conduct match support once a month.

Match support contacts must include individual conversations (by phone or in-person) with the mentor and either the mentee or the caregiver (whichever is appropriate based on the mentee’s age). This translates into at least four case
management contacts in the first month and two case management contacts each subsequent month. By the end of the twelfth month, the program coordinator must have conducted at least eighteen total case management contacts, either in person or by phone, with the mentor and the mentee (or the caregiver).

### 3.6 Evaluating the Impact of Mentoring Relationships

An important part of Caregiver’s Choice is the evaluation of the quality and impact of the mentoring relationships it supports. As such, there are a number of surveys that mentoring programs must administer during the mentoring relationship. All surveys will be supplied through MentorPRO® Basic at the appropriate time in the mentoring relationship. MENTOR will provide this data to HHS for use in any evaluation of the Caregiver’s Choice project. Mentoring programs do not need to compile data or evaluate the impact themselves; they simply administer the surveys and return the data to MENTOR.

The required surveys are:

- A baseline survey for the mentee, to be conducted before the mentoring relationship begins (this includes documenting that the parent was offered/signed to either consent or decline consent for their child(ren) to complete the surveys);
- A relationship quality survey for the mentee, to be administered at the nine month mark in the mentoring relationship;
- A post-survey for the mentee to measure the impact of the mentoring relationship, to be conducted at the end of twelve months;
- A post-survey for mentor to assess the mentor’s view of any changes the mentee may have undergone, to be conducted at the end of twelve months; and
- A survey for the mentoring program coordinator to determine satisfaction level with Caregiver’s Choice, to be conducted at the end of twelve months.

The date of the parent/caregiver’s signature on the consent form and the date that the child completed the baseline survey MUST precede the match start date. If the date occurs after the match start date, Milestone 1 payment will NOT be rendered.

Mentoring programs will be required to collect consent forms from caregivers in order to collect information from mentees.

### 4. Payment of Funds

#### 4.1 Mentoring Relationship Milestones

To ensure that mentoring programs explicitly understand the expectations for facilitating Caregiver’s Choice mentoring matches, MENTOR has created “mentoring relationship milestones.” All mentoring relationship requirements detailed in
section three will be monitored throughout the relationship as part of the milestones. Payment for the mentoring relationship will be issued in installments, directly linked to the completion of all items within a milestone.

There are four installments over the course of the twelve-month mentoring relationship:

- The first milestone ($600) is focused on the initial screening and training of the mentor and mentee, and the first meeting of the pair.
- The second milestone ($100) occurs at the three-month mark, and is linked to the frequency and dosage of match meetings and required case management.
- The third milestone ($100) occurs at the six-month mark, and is linked to the frequency and dosage of match meetings and required case management.
- The fourth and final milestone ($200) occurs at the twelve-month mark, and is linked to the frequency and dosage of match meetings, required case management and required surveys.

A complete list of the components of each mentoring relationship milestone and their related payments is:

Milestone 1
- Mentor has completed screening process.
- Mentor has attended initial mentor training.
- Mentee has attended orientation/training.
- Mentee has completed baseline survey.
- Mentee has been matched with mentor.
- Mentor and mentee have met at least once.
- Mentor cannot be matched with more than 3 mentees simultaneously.

Milestone 2
- Milestone 1 has been met.
- Mentor and mentee have been matched for a minimum of 3 months.
- In the last 3 month period the following activities have taken place at regular intervals:
o Program coordinator has provided case management (in person or by phone) through at least 6 total contacts with the mentor, mentee and/or caregiver;

o Mentor and mentee have spent a minimum of 10 hours together; and

o Mentor and mentee have met in person a minimum of 3 times.

Milestone 3

• Milestone 2 has been met.

• Mentor and mentee have been matched for a minimum of 6 months.

• In the last 6 month period the following activities have taken place at regular intervals:

  o Program coordinator has provided case management (in person or by phone) through at least 10 total contacts with the mentor, mentee and/or caregiver;

  o Mentor and mentee have spent a minimum of 20 hours together; and

  o Mentor and mentee have met in person a minimum of 6 times.

Milestone 4

• Milestone 3 has been met.

• Mentor and mentee have been matched for a minimum of 12 months.

• Mentee completed the Relationship Quality Survey after being matched for 9 months.

• Mentee has completed the post survey.

• Mentor has completed the post survey.

• Mentoring program has completed the satisfaction survey.

With regards to mentor screening and rendering payment for the first milestone, MENTOR will abide by the following guidelines as dictated by best practices:
a. Programs conduct a full background check, including an FBI fingerprint background check every 12 months.

b. Background checks be conducted by your agency (regardless of whether a mentor has had a background check conducted for place of employment or other volunteer organization) and be done no more than six months prior to being matched with a newly enrolled Caregiver’s Choice child.

In addition, milestone payment will not be rendered for matches where a mentor is paired with more than three children simultaneously.

4.2 Tracking Milestones in MentorPRO™ Basic

MENTOR has created a special on-line application, called MentorPRO® Basic, specifically for Caregiver’s Choice. MentorPRO® Basic allows approved mentoring programs to track their progress toward completion of mentoring relationship milestones.

Use of MentorPRO® Basic is required in order to participate in Caregiver’s Choice. As MentorPRO® Basic is a web-based program; mentoring programs must have Internet access to use it. Mentoring programs will receive training on MentorPRO® Basic before receiving final approval to participate in Caregiver’s Choice.

MentorPRO® Basic will track the following items for each Caregiver’s Choice child who has redeemed a voucher:

- Child characteristics;
- Mentor characteristics and screening process;
- Mentor and mentee training/orientation;
- Match contacts, including the date, length, and focus of in-person meetings and frequency of phone/e-mail contacts; and
- Match support/case management contacts, including the date of calls, who was contacted, and what issues, if any, were raised.

Program coordinators should have a mechanism in place to collect information about match contacts, whether as a part of regular match support or through a form that mentors submit each month. Program coordinators should also regularly record information about their match support contacts.

To ensure accurate and complete data, program coordinators are encouraged to record mentoring relationship milestone information in MentorPRO® Basic as it happens, rather than waiting until the end of a milestone period to enter all of the required information. Keeping accurate and current data will also ensure that program coordinators have an up-to-date assessment of which requirements are yet to be completed before a milestone is reached, or if a match is not meeting frequently enough to meet Caregiver’s Choice requirements.
MentorPRO® Basic includes all required surveys for Caregiver’s Choice. Program coordinators will receive online notification when a survey should be administered and must then enter the survey responses.

4.3 Issuance of Payments

MENTOR will use MentorPRO® Basic to track the progress of each Caregiver’s Choice mentoring relationship. When all of the elements for a milestone have been completed, MENTOR staff will review the milestone information for accuracy. If the milestone has been completed and meets all requirements and follows best practices, it will be verified and approved for payment. Only those milestones that are verified as meeting all of the particular milestone criteria will be eligible for payment.

MENTOR will issue payments twice a month, and will “bundle” all payments owed to a mentoring program into one check. Each check stub will include the list of payments paired with their respective voucher numbers and milestones. This system will enable mentoring programs to ensure they have received all funds due. Checks will be issued no later than forty-five days after the date that the milestone has been completed, reviewed, and verified.

Since payments are directly linked to the completion of all elements in a milestone, payment for milestones will not be issued to mentoring programs that are not adhering to Caregiver’s Choice requirements. For example, if a mentoring pair is meeting regularly, but the program staff is not performing required case management calls, no payment will be issued. Or, if a mentoring relationship tapers off mid-way through the twelve month period and is no longer able to meet the minimum requirements for frequency and duration, the mentoring program can retain the payments it has already received, but would not receive any additional payments.

All milestone elements must be met to merit payment.

5. Meeting the Expectations of the Caregiver and Child

5.1 Meeting the Needs of Children of Prisoners

Before receiving final approval, Caregiver’s Choice mentoring programs will receive training from experts on fostering mentoring relationships that meet the unique needs of children of prisoners. This training will help ensure that mentoring programs understand how to train and support mentors that are matched with children of prisoners, and the special challenges and opportunities associated with serving this population.
Caregiver’s Choice mentoring programs are also required to adapt their policies and procedures manual to incorporate special policies for mentoring children of prisoners. Specifically:

- A policy that upon enrollment, caregivers are offered resources on how talk to children about parental incarceration, including the importance of telling them the truth about their parent’s whereabouts. If the child is not aware that their parent is incarcerated, it can present challenges during the mentoring relationship as the mentor, caregiver, and program coordinator must “keep the secret” from the child.
- A plan to engage the caregiver and, when appropriate, the incarcerated parent, in the mentoring relationship. Without the involvement of the incarcerated parent (if appropriate, depending on the child’s specific situation), the mentoring relationship can end prematurely when the incarcerated parent is released from prison and resumes custody.

These policies will be discussed during the initial training for Caregiver’s Choice mentoring programs.

### 5.2 Time Frame for Starting the Mentoring Relationship

It is important that the Caregiver’s Choice mentoring relationship begin within a reasonable amount of time. MENTOR has attempted to balance the time it takes to recruit and train a suitable mentor with the caregiver’s desire that a mentoring relationship begin soon after enrollment.

The mentoring program has three months from the date of voucher redemption to match the child with a mentor. After three months, the caregiver has two options:

1. Call the Caregiver’s Choice toll-free number and ask to have a new voucher issued. Once the new voucher is issued, the caregiver can choose a different mentoring program and redeem the voucher.

2. Stay with the original mentoring program and continue to wait for a mentor for the child. If the caregiver decides to stay with the original mentoring program there is no action required of the caregiver or mentoring provider.

Mentoring programs are encouraged to communicate regularly with the caregiver during the time period between voucher redemption and the beginning of the mentoring relationship to ensure that the caregiver stays engaged and interested in remaining with the mentoring program.
Even when mentoring programs follow best practices, some mentoring relationships will terminate before the twelve-month mark. If this unfortunate situation does occur for a Caregiver’s Choice child, a mentoring program must record the match termination in MentorPRO® Basic. There are several possibilities for what might occur next:

1. The mentoring program can try to find a new mentor for the child, with the caregiver’s permission. In this case, the existing voucher will remain valid. The program will not receive payments for any milestones reached in the initial relationship. Instead, payments will resume when the second mentoring relationship reaches a milestone that was not met in the first mentoring relationship.

   **Example:** Johnny is matched with a mentor for three months, and the mentoring program has received $700 total for milestones one and two. At four months, the mentor moves away and the relationship ends; then the mentoring program finds a new mentor for Johnny. Once Johnny and his new mentor make it to the six-month mark, the program is eligible to receive payment for milestone three (and milestone four at twelve months). The program would not receive payment for milestones one and two a second time, as each voucher is worth a maximum of $1,000.

2. The mentoring program ends its association with the child (for example, if the child moves out of the program’s service area). In this case the voucher will be invalidated. The mentoring program can retain the payments it has already collected, but may not receive future payments for that child.

3. The caregiver elects to take the voucher to a new mentoring program. In this case, the voucher will be invalidated, and a new voucher issued for the caregiver to redeem with a different mentoring program. The first mentoring program can retain the payments it has already collected, but cannot receive future payments for that child.

The purpose of Caregiver’s Choice is to give caregivers the ability to choose the mentoring program that best suits their needs. The caregiver also retains the right to remove their child from the mentoring program. In addition, if the caregiver is ever dissatisfied with the services provided by the mentoring program, they may contact the Caregiver’s Choice toll-free number to discuss their concerns.

MENTOR will first attempt to resolve the issue so the child can remain with the existing mentoring program. But, if the mentoring program is not fulfilling its obligations to the child or is not following appropriate best practices, the voucher
may be invalidated and a new voucher issued so the caregiver can select a different mentoring program.

6. Other Policies

6.1 Additional Years of Mentoring

Mentoring programs are required to continue to support mentoring matches beyond the initial twelve-month commitment should the mentors and mentees wish to remain matched.

6.2 Evaluations

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services may choose to evaluate the Caregiver’s Choice project in the future. Should this happen, MENTOR will share all data gathered throughout the course of the project with the evaluator. All confidential youth data will be shared in aggregate with personally identifiable data removed. HHS and its evaluator may require additional information to conduct the evaluation. In this case, mentoring programs who have received funds through Caregiver’s Choice will be required to cooperate with the evaluation requirements.