Breaking Up is Hard to Do: What We Know about Match Endings and How Agencies Can Help

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Today’s Workshop

- Review what we know about endings in mentoring relationships
- Share findings from two qualitative studies of why and how mentoring relationships end
- Discuss what we can do to:
  - Prevent early endings
  - Help relationships end well
Most, if not all, mentoring relationships end
How they end matters
Most of us are pretty bad at saying goodbye
We need to help mentoring relationships end well
Lack of Attention to Endings

- Stage models of mentoring include closure (e.g., Keller, 2005)
- Little attention to closure in research or practice
  - Emphasis on matching, expansion, “narrowing the gap”
- Negative experiences - conflict, disappointment, regret - part of all interpersonal relationships
  - Wouldn’t the same be true of mentoring relationships?
What Do We Know about Mentoring Relationship Endings?
Early Endings

- Associated with decrements in youth functioning

(Grossman & Rhodes, 2002)
Youth and Mentor Characteristics

**YOUTH**
- Older youth (13-16 yrs)
- Referred due to psychological or educational problems
- More complex problems (e.g., history of abuse)
- Gender
  - Female matches tend to end earlier
  - Girls less satisfied than boys in short- and medium-length relationships

**MENTORS**
- Married and 26-30 yrs
- Female
- Lower income

*(Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Samp, & Litchfield, 2007)*
Relationship Factors

- Inconsistent mentor attendance
- Lack of attention to relationship development
- Prescriptive or instrumental as compared to developmental approach
- Absence of close personal connection

(Karcher et al., 2006; Karcher, 2005; Grossman & Rhodes, 2001; Herrera et al., 2007; Larose et al. 2010; Morrow & Styles, 1995)
Youth-Mentor Relationship Questionnaire

- **Satisfaction**
  - “My mentor makes fun of me in ways I don’t like”

- **Feelings**
  - “When I am with my mentor, I feel mad”
  - “When I am with my mentor, I feel disappointed”

- **Trust**
  - “I wish my mentor knew me better”

(Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman & Grossman, 2005)
Study 1: “It’s Not What I Expected”

- In-depth qualitative interview study with participants in early ending relationships (< 1 year)
  - 20 mentors, 11 youth

- BBBS community-based mentoring programs; expected minimum match length = 1 year

Some Reasons Why Relationships End Early

- Mentor or abandonment
- Perceived lack of mentee motivation
- Unfulfilled expectations
- Inadequate mentor relational skills
- Family interference
- Inadequate agency support

(Spencer, 2007)
Expectations

- Mentors
  - Perceived needs of the youth either more or less than expected
  - Own needs not met
    - Didn’t feel “good”
  - Previous mentoring experiences

- Youth
  - Not as close as had hoped
  - Lack of youth focus

(Spencer, 2007)
“it didn’t seem to me that he needed much help. He was very social, he had lots of friends ... I kind of had this ideal of what the kid was gonna be like .... It was a little disappointing that he was not like that ... I was kind of hoping for the poor kid ... with no dad, just him and his mom, struggling to get by”

John, a mentor

(Spencer, 2007)
“(I) didn’t know what I was gonna find. I was afraid.”

“I just I realized how very difficult it is to have any kind of intimate relationship. One-on-one relationships are hard and then with someone that is vulnerable like that …. it’s such a big responsibility.”

Joy, a mentor

(Spencer, 2007)
“he was the kind of kid who needed that attention, … someone to meet with him. In fact, not even once every two weeks -- that’s the minimum they recommend. He wanted to meet up … almost every day of the week, and I understand that. He’s a young kid, he wants to do something, and I can understand that. But, that’s just not me. And, I’m sure he’s found another mentor who takes much more interest, and who has more time to do these things, and … I hope he has.”

Joe, a mentor

(Spencer, 2007)
“Obviously, when you volunteer, you’re not expecting... the world back. ...But you want something ... you at least want to leave with a feeling... a good feeling.”

Meredith, a mentor

(Spencer, 2007)
“it was a huge accomplishment for me ... 8 years of wanting to do this to finally accomplish this goal.... get everything under way and be matched with someone who I was very excited about and thought we could have a lot of fun and ..., after I met her I went home, and I was thinking, ‘Oh, this is great. This will be long term.’ ... I was sort of fantasizing about going to her graduation and being there for her wedding ... just thinking in terms of a very long term relationship.”

Susan, a mentor

(Spencer, 2007)
Before match:

“Um, I, I didn’t tell them I was looking for anything in particular. I would be, um... I’d be up for anything.”

After:

“I don’t have to worry, ‘Is everything going all right at home?’ .... While I’m already kind of dealing with that to some degree ... it’s not something I want to deal with right now. ... that’s probably the only part that ... I didn’t do before is think to myself like .... ‘this might be .... A problem at some point.’ .... I probably went into it with an Idea of, you know, ‘Oh, this will be great. This will be different, it’ll be fun.’”

(Michael, a mentor)
“he s[aid] that I can call him at any time. Well, to me, I’m ... kinda like a shy boy, so I don’t wanna, you know, call him? .... ‘cause, you know, he’s in college, and I don’t want to call him durin’ his college, durin’ his school, or, where ... he is, I don’t wanna call him so that, ... like, he was to get mad.”

Steven, a mentee

(Spencer, 2007)
Mentor Relational Skills: Bridging Social Class Differences

“I felt like I was almost making her feel worse in a way ... ‘Cause I live much differently from her ... When we go over to my .... apartment, with my balcony view, and my flat screen TV, and like I almost feel worse, like I’m making her ... ‘look what I have’ .... ‘Oh, I’m the rich White girl and you’re the poor Black girl’”

Meredith, a mentor

(Spencer, 2007)
## Different Worlds

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>68% &lt;$30,000</td>
<td>50% &gt;$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33% &gt; $90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>34% HS diploma or less</td>
<td>52% College degree or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>42% Single</td>
<td>66% Single</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6% Have children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Ethnic</td>
<td>68% People of Color</td>
<td>73% White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background</td>
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(Understanding the Mentoring Process project,)
“She never called... we got her number, so we kept calling her, but she never returned the calls.”

*Mother of a mentee*

He never called, he-- mostly like, he left.... we mostly made plans to see each other again, to go to the Museum of Science, but ... like he never called. And ... he never came or anything.

*Joe, a mentee*

(Spencer, 2007)
Group Reflection: Early Endings

- What is the time commitment matches make in your programs?
  - What is the average match length?

- What is the early closure rate in your program?
  - Do you track this? Why or why not?

- What are the most common reasons matches end early in your program?
  - What are you doing in your program to try to address these?

- What happens in your program when matches end early?
  - Are there any consequences for a volunteer quitting or ending a match early?
  - What is your policy on re-matching?
Study 2: Breaking Up is Hard to Do

- In-depth qualitative interview study with 48 matches
  - Mentors, youth, and parents interviewed at match end (total number of interviews = 123)
- BBBS community-based mentoring programs; expected minimum match length = 1 year
- Matches lasted 2-24 months ($M=11.97$, $SD=5.30$)

How Matches End

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ending</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned and Completed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Not Completed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Plan - Agency Ended</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I don’t think he likes me no more... Because he left without saying, he just left without calling.” (a youth)

“discouraged me from wanting to put him in a situation again not saying that another person would do the same thing.” (a parent)

(Spencer, et al., Under review)
Relationship Strength and Type of Ending

(Spencer, et al., Under review)
Relationship Strength and Reason for Ending

Number of Matches

- Strong
- Adequate
- Tenuous
- Out of Sync
- Weak

Life Circumstances
Mentor Dissatisfaction
Youth Dissatisfaction
Gradual Dissolution
Mentor Abandonment

(Spencer, et al., Under review)
Male match that lasted 13 months

- Strong emotional connection
  - “I love the little guy”
- Mentor moved out of state
- Planned, clear goodbye
  - Mentor tells parent about end; asked for advice about telling youth
  - Multiple planned meetings leading up to move

Continued phone contact after mentor moved

(Spencer, et al., Under review)
Female match that lasted 13 months

- Mentor decided to end it
  - “getting to be way more of ... an inconvenience than, than something good for me”
  - Wanted a closer connection, not sure youth was benefitting
  - Parent does not think connection ever made
- Youth thought the relationship was “fun”

Ending

- Mentor ended match on what became last outing
- Mentor told youth they would still talk but at follow-up had not
- Parent said mentor “sort of said goodbye,” but youth wasn’t really clear it was all over – wondered if just official relationship ended
Male match that lasted about 24 months

- Strong connection but frequency of meetings less consistent due to youth’s schedule/interests
- Mentor assumed youth no longer interested
- No direct mentor-youth communication about ending
- Parent surprised by ending; thought they could have made it work
  - Relationship unique in youth’s life

"Communication is always difficult in an awkward time"

(Spencer, et al., Under review)
Impact of Poor Match Endings

- **Youth**
  - Disappointment/sadness for lost opportunities, activities
  - Reticence about getting matched again
  - Confusion
    - Left open-ended by mentor in attempt to minimize negative feelings
  - Wanted chance to say goodbye

- **Caregivers**
  - Dissatisfaction/anger
  - Unfulfilled commitment
  - No opportunity to say good-bye
  - Longing for clarity for child about match ending
  - Concern about yet another failed relationship for child

- **Mentors**
  - Disappointment
  - Guilt
  - Relief

(Spencer, et al., Under review)
How do matches end in your program?
- What supports are in place to help participants end well?
- To help participants experience clear and positive closure?
- What happens when one participant does not respond/will not participate in a closure process?

What practices for ending matches do you have in place that you think are working really well?

In what areas do you see room for improvement?
So What Can We Do?
Achieving Closure

- Finish what was started!

- Need to address both:
  - How relationships end (procedural endings)
  - Impact of endings – how people are left feeling about the ending

- Can influence how people feel about their overall experience participating in the program
Fostering Good Endings

- Intentional focus on endings and ending well
  - Provide clear structure and support for good endings
  - Provide closure when participants do not
- Regularly monitor and support matches
  - Identify matches that need to end
  - Help participants end well
- Fully integrate closure into program model
  - Start ending from the beginning
- Exit interviews with mentors, mentees, parents
Help Mentors and Youth Say Good Bye

- Clarify reasons for ending with all parties
- Provide clear structure and support for closure
  - Coach mentors, youth, and families in positive closure
  - Provide closure activities
  - Support participants through closure process
    - Discuss what they liked, learned, what worked, what didn’t
- Plan next steps
  - Assess interest and re-match?

Lakes & Karcher, 2005, In *How to build a successful mentoring program using the Elements of Effective Practice*. MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership

//www.mentoring.org/program_resources/elements_and_toolkits/
Monitor relationships

- E.g., mentors document each contact
- Assess on-going relationship quality

Provide proactive support

- Information and advice from expert staff
- Problem-solving
- Anticipate and help negotiate challenges as they arise

Parent engagement

- Offer continued training, supervision
- Identify relationships that need to end and facilitate good endings
Planning Good Endings from the Beginning: Recruitment

- Recruit appropriate mentors
  - Describe program aims and expected outcomes
  - Realistically portray benefits, practices and challenges of mentoring
  - Realistically portray what it means to spend time with youth
- Recruit appropriate mentees
  - Youth whose needs best match services offered
Planning Good Endings from the Beginning: Screening

- Mentors
  - Time, commitment and personal qualities to be effective mentor
  - Can meet program expectations for duration of relationship and frequency of meetings

- Mentees
  - Appropriate for program offered
  - Interested in participating
  - Agree to meet expectations for duration of relationship and frequency of meetings
Planning Good Endings from the Beginning: Matching

- Careful matching to increase odds relationships will endure
  - Shared interests, geography
  - Preferences of mentors, mentees and caregivers
  - In groups, mentors that can complement one another, work together
Planning Good Endings from the Beginning: Preparing

- Communicate clear expectations for mentors
- Manage mentor expectations
- Train mentors in basic knowledge and skills needed to mentor well
  - Ethical guidelines
- Train mentees and caregivers

Closing Thoughts

- Reduce early endings by ensuring that mentors, youth, caregivers have what they need to be successful in your program
  - Provide proactive program support
- Be intentional about endings
  - When we do not pay attention to endings:
    - Contribute to negative experiences – mentors, youth, families
    - Miss important opportunities for learning in relationships
Thank you!

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