Whether we engage with youth in classrooms, on the basketball court or on the school bus, research and best practices suggest that students’ relationships with peers and caring adults are a key vehicle for learning critical life skills, like teamwork, communication, and coping with and expressing feelings.

MENTOR’s recently released guide, *Social and Emotional Development in Early Adolescence*, shares specific information about the relationship-based strategies, including mentoring, that show promise for cultivating social and emotional learning for young adolescents, both in school and out-of-school time settings. Identifying specific relationship-based strategies that promote social and emotional learning for students in the middle grades will ensure that students receive the necessary supports to maximize their social and emotional learning potential and lay the foundation for healthy development and relationships as they grow, increasing their chances of future academic, career, and life success.

This guide summarizes the existing research findings about how relationships can help foster social and emotional development for young adolescents, and provides examples from the field that illustrate relationship-based practices that can be applied and scaled in schools, after-school programs, and community-based settings to enhance opportunities for social and emotional learning. Finally, it concludes with recommendations for school, district and youth development practitioners, researchers, funders and policy-makers, to help them identify solutions that can be customized in their communities. Ultimately, this guide seeks to help youth development professionals across settings understand the power of relationships to support students socially and emotionally, identify promising practices that can be scaled, and increase access to
these supports for young adolescents in communities across the United States. The full text of the MENTOR Guide for SEL can be found at [web address].

REFERENCES


Schwartz, S. E. O., Kanchewa, S. S., Rhodes, J. E., Cutler, E. Cunningham, J.L. (2016). “I didn’t know you could just ask.” Empowering underrepresented college-bound students to recruit academic and career mentors. Children and youth services review. 64, 51-59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.001

ENDNOTES


2Núñez et al., 2013.

3Kanchewa, Yoviene, Schwartz, Herrera, & Rhodes, 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The following recommendations summarize some of the key insights from this research as they relate to the daily practice of professionals across school, after-school and community based settings:

- Get to know your students and their specific needs and assets.
- When developing programs, use models that harness the power of groups and peer identity for this developmental stage.
- Develop a program focused on leadership development.
- Develop programming that builds sense of belonging for students who may be vulnerable to isolation in school settings.
- Pair students with mentors or peer groups whose identities affirm their own, to help normalize and validate students’ cultural experiences and provide relatable role models.
- Provide tailored programming that affirms LGBTQI-GNC students.
- Support adult mental health, cultural competence, and ethnic identity in mentors, so they can adequately support youth.
- Provide mentors with specific coaching on how to offer unconditional positive regard, encouragement, consistent positive interactions, meaningful feedback, and fostering trust.
- Provide opportunities for small group interaction, and offer activities that foster understanding, belonging and connectedness.
- Partner with local corporations and employers to build your school, district or program’s capacity in these areas.