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,
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

Here are some steps researches can take to develop a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the social and emotional needs of young adolescents:

- **Study the social and emotional competencies most relevant to early adolescence.**
- **Specifically study the impact of pairing strong, intentional mentoring with structured social and emotional skill-building opportunities.**
- **Expand traditional research definitions of social and emotional learning to emphasize the impact of culture, power, privilege, and discrimination on identity development and social and emotional development.**
- **Study the impacts of culturally relevant mentoring programs and relationships on students’ racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, as well as skills and competencies for dealing with racial trauma.**
- **Include research measures related to less-studied aspects of identity such as LGBTQI-GNC identity and gender identity in future studies on the effectiveness of mentoring and social and emotional learning programs.**
- **Develop studies that identify the relationship between mentors’ qualities, activities and practices, students’ ratings of relationship quality, and students’ social and emotional outcomes.**
- **Partner with schools, programs, funders and policymakers on projects that provide schools, districts and programs with quality measurement tools to assess students’ perspectives on their experiences and ensure that the availability and quality of supportive relationships is included in these assessments.**