

Should My Program Switch to E-Mentoring?

...Questions to Consider Before Making the Switch

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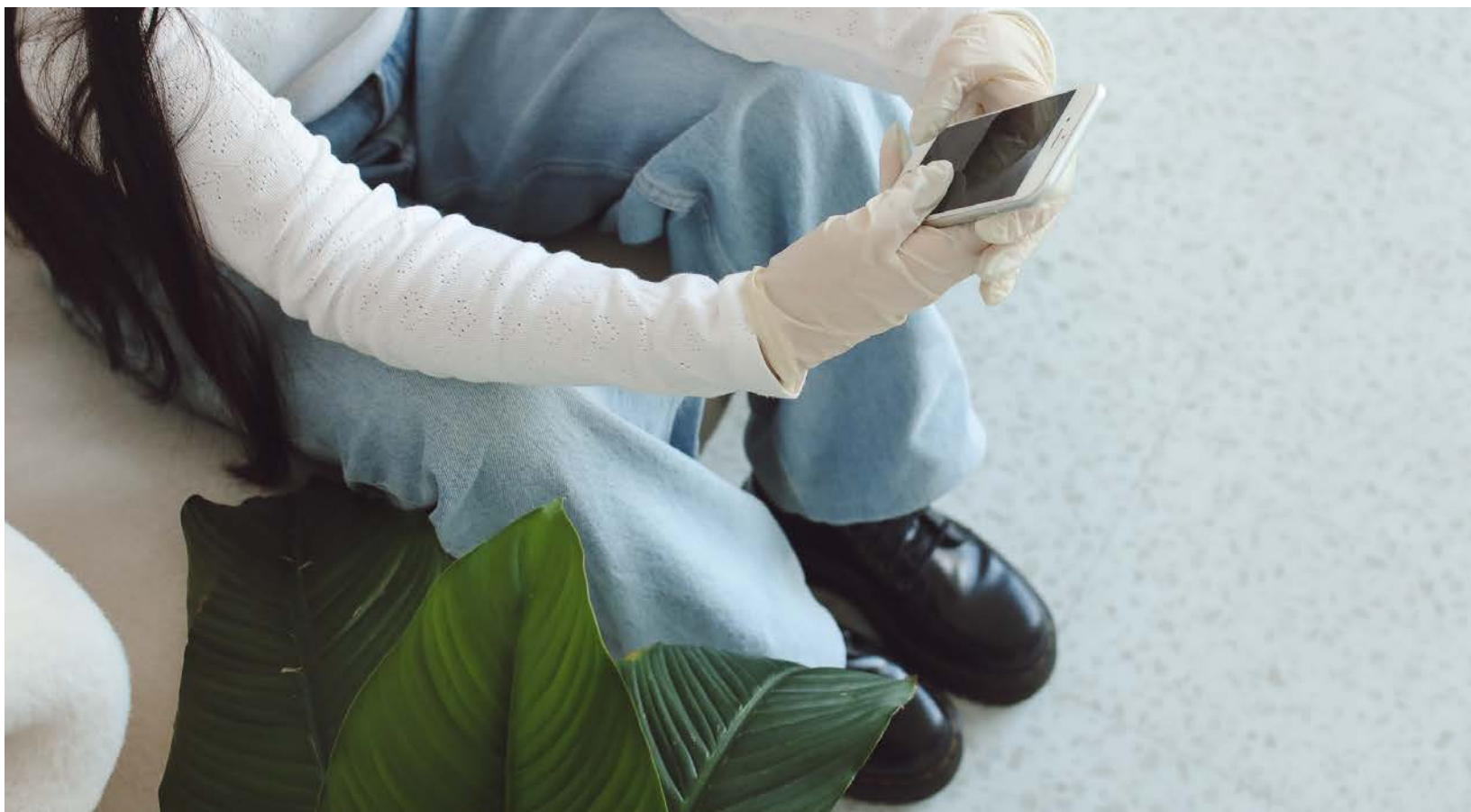
Working With These Questions

We recommend using these questions as a starting point for reflecting individually and as a team within your organization as you consider whether shifting to e-mentoring is right for you, your mentors, and your mentees.

While this tool was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, these questions can also be helpful in non-pandemic times, as they get at many of the capacities and rationales for doing e-mentoring, rather than in-person mentoring.

The questions will help your organization consider some important factors in building strong e-mentoring services.

And don't forget that you can request No-Cost Technical Assistance from our OJJDP NMRC, the National Mentoring Resource Center!



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Your Program Model

- Does your program have a theory of change that explains how your mentoring services/relationships and other program components (e.g., a curriculum) work to **influence mentee development** and the **pathways of change toward the ultimate outcomes or goals of the program?**



- If your program does have a theory of change, have you considered:
 - Whether your goals and outcomes are dependent on in-person interactions that might facilitate role modeling, learning or practicing a new skill (e.g., engagement in sports or a science experiment), or building or changing relationships among groups of youth within a program setting (e.g., a group mentoring program trying to improve peer relations and connectedness in a school)?
 - To what extent program activities can be delivered remotely? Do they require special equipment or physical space?
 - The degree to which mentors and youth can build trust and form a strong bond when communicating via technology?

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- Does the work of the program seem like it would be relevant to youth during the time of a pandemic?
 - Would the program need to shift its focus to be more relevant to the needs that have cropped up as a result of this circumstance?
 - Have issues of trauma, grief, or family struggle transplanted the original needs of the youth you are serving?



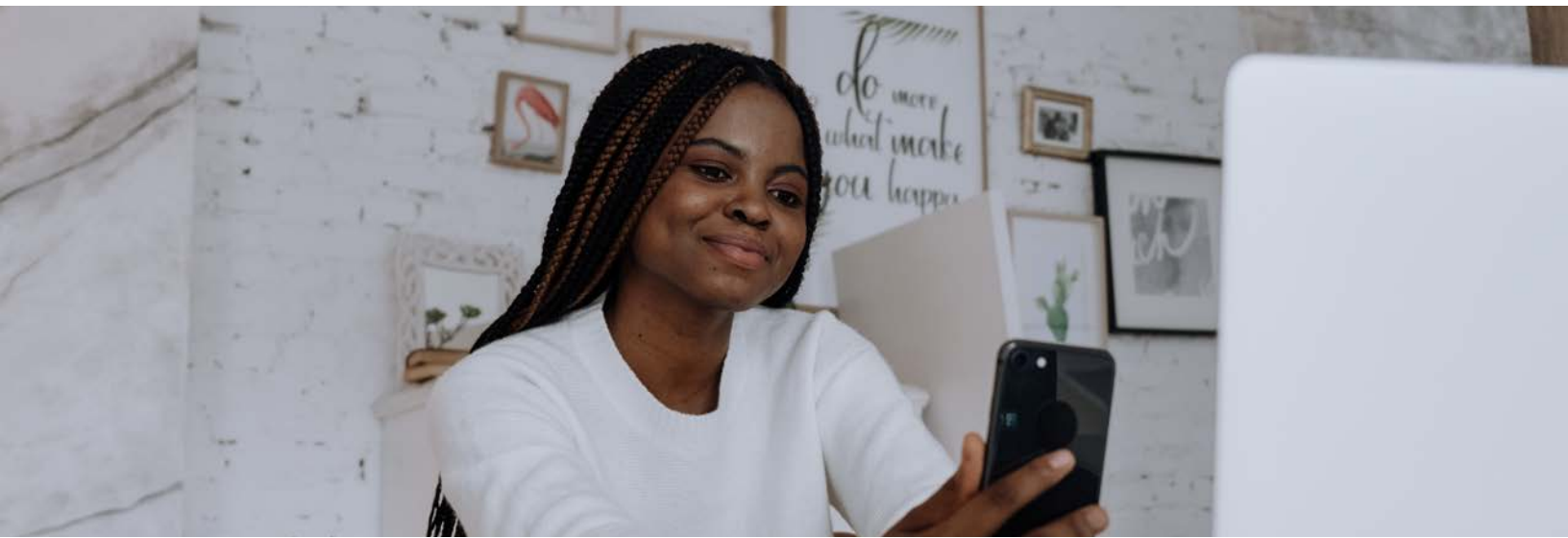
- Does the program work within systems or institutions (e.g., a school) whose policies would need to be adhered to to deliver the program virtually?
 - Are there laws or other liability/risk management considerations for shifting to a virtual environment (such as technology accommodations for youth with disabilities)?
- Are you considering making this shift to e-mentoring as a permanent addition/replacement to your usual services or just as a temporary shift?
 - If permanent, what are your motivations for doing so?
 - The risks? The rewards?
 - If temporary, what benchmarks will need to be met to move back to in-person activities?

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- If you are working in multiple municipalities, will the shift to e-mentoring be done for all sites or only those where in-person activities are not possible?
 - If it will vary by site, do you think this will have differential effects on the youth outcomes?



Technology & Your Participants

- Do your mentors and mentees already communicate via any technology tools (e.g., phone, text, email, social media, video chat, online message board/forum, proprietary platform)?
- If not, do you have a clear understanding of the technology access of your mentors, mentees, and families? Is there sufficient access to WiFi, data, mobile devices for every youth and mentor with whom you work?
 - What would it take to gain that understanding so that you might pick an “easier to implement” technology solution?
- Are there language or disability-related considerations that might influence the technology you choose?

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- Revisiting that theory of change, what type of technology seems like it would be a good fit for the program?
- What technology would allow the work mentors and mentees do to function well? Or function even better than before?
- If you could build the perfect technology system for your program from scratch, what would that look like? And can you get similar performance from existing tools?



- What do you know about how the pandemic has impacted your youth and mentors? Do you have reason to believe they would want to do virtual mentoring?
 - What would they want to focus on now (compared to before)?
 - How do you meet the youth where they are right now emotionally, with their families, academically, and their physical health and well-being?
- How will you communicate any changes in expectations for what virtual mentoring will look like to youth, their families, and mentors?

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Technology & Your Participants

- How similar would an online mentoring experience be to what mentors and youth signed up for in the first place? Would this be a radical shift, or does it seem like this is just using a different meeting approach to do the same work?
 - Might you lose mentors or youth if they feel this has veered too far from what they intended to do?



Your Staff

- What kind of staff support would be needed to run the program using technology? Would this increase or decrease the involvement and time commitment of staff in the short and long term?
- What kind of technology familiarity does your staff have? Are they comfortable doing more of their work in virtual environments? Do they have strong internet access and technology skills?
 - What kind of training might they need?
 - What kind of on-going technical support might they need?
- How stable is your staffing?
 - Will you need to let staff go as a result of the pandemic and resulting financial crisis? If so, how might that impact the shift to e-mentoring?