

Enhanced Practice: Strength-Based Match Support

Overview

This details a strength-based approach to monitoring and supporting the relationships of mentoring pairs, commonly referred to as “match support”, with an intentional focus on strengths and assets. It is rooted in a Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework for providing services to youth and their families and outlines specific practices to guide your match support conversations. It is intended as an enhanced practice that is integrated with your agency’s standard operating approach to match support.

Strength-Based Approach to Match Support

What we hope to see for the children and youth in our programs is what we hope for all of children- that they have a positive view of their future and view themselves as having a purpose. We want them to have internal resources that allow them to cope with adversity, demonstrate an interest in pursuing education and career goals, and feel confident in their social literacy.

This tool guides an enhanced approach to match support that is strength-based and fosters an understanding of how to provide support to each individual match. Match support staff should address their agency’s standard questions for match support, including child safety, while integrating additional conversations related to this practice. This strength-based match support process begins with staff training that provides a depth of understanding about the unique circumstances that families of the incarcerated might face, the community resources that can provide needed services and supports beyond the mentoring, the impact of stress and trauma, the components of a PYD framework, and fostering social connections. The first match meeting ([Enhanced Practice: Initial Match Meeting](#)) starts match support sessions with an intentional conversation about the strengths and interests of the mentee, as well as the mentor’s interests and the parent’s interests and dreams for their child. This conversation works to frame goals for the match that will serve as a springboard for activities and experiences related to those goals. Examples could include:

Arts & Crafts	Playing Guitar	Being Outside
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn more about places to go where they do art projects Visit an art museum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities that feature music Meeting a musician Guitar lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try some new outdoor activities, like hiking or nature walks Visit parks

Key Components

Monthly phone or in-person meeting with parent, mentee, and mentor is done and includes specific questions and topics that integrate a strength-based approach, including:

- Match participates in a selection of community events ([Enhanced Practice: Community Events](#)) over the course of a year.
- Match participates in at least one community service project/event ([Enhanced Practice: Community Service](#)) over the course of a year.
- Match activities and conversations focus on the mentee’s positive attributes, interests, and aspirations.
- Match activities and conversations focus on developing the mentee’s social connections and exposure to new experiences.
- Mentor and family share positive insights about the child’s strengths, interests, and accomplishments.
- Family is linked with services and supports that address areas of need or interest.
- If consistent with family/child interests, mentor helps the youth to feel connected to the parent that is incarcerated and/or feel that they understand how to cope.

Enhanced Practice: Strength-Based Match Support

Coaching the Match

Strength-based match support is more than asking questions and capturing data. Match support staff is facilitating and supporting the development of the mentoring relationship. To do this, staff should consider how their conversations could provide motivation and encouragement. Here are some ways staff can work towards coaching the match in realizing the potential of their relationship.

Enhanced Practice: Strength-Based Match Support

Match Life Cycle

- Understanding the natural progression of a mentoring relationship can support staff and mentors in developing realistic expectations for their time together. Match support can also use this information to assess the quality of the relationship and whether it seems to be progressing as expected.

Probing Questions

- Staff must gain a unique understanding about the interests, activities, experiences, and impressions of those involved in the match in order to provide effective match support. This requires information gathered through conversations that go beyond answering questions with a simple “yes” or “no”. Ask questions that dig a bit deeper into understanding the unique qualities of that experience. For example, if a mentor indicates their mentee enjoyed swimming activity, one might ask “what are some of the ways you know that your mentee likes the activities you’re doing together?”

Active Listening

- If staff are asking probing questions, then they also need to do a lot of listening. This is where you will gain helpful insights to share, hear subtleties and nuances to explore, and capture ideas for suggestions. You can also help people gain their own insights by reflecting back what you have heard to check your understanding. This might include a check on feelings, reflecting on a positive aspect of what you’ve heard, recognizing growth, and providing positive feedback.

Encourage Boundaries

- Support mentors as they not only set boundaries but also explain to their mentee why the boundaries are in place. All of us can benefit from having healthy boundaries in our relationships. Exercising the ability to set and maintain boundaries with youth will help to develop a strong, positive mentoring relationship. This can be especially true for youth who have experienced trauma or may not have many examples of consistent and stable relationships.

Goal Focused

- Explore conversations about what the match would consider to be “going well” – what are the goals for the relationship and what are some ways you would see progress. As the match identifies and accomplishes goals, even the smallest steps, give space for reflection. This reflection fosters self-awareness for the youth and the opportunity to celebrate the milestones.

Documentation

- Match support staff have many conversations with many people. For each match, they have a conversation with three people each month: the child, the mentor, and the parent/caregiver. In addition to the simple reality of remembering the details of past conversations and being able to document the activities of the match, there will be points from one conversation that will be helpful to reference in future contacts. You may also want to compare the perceptions of each party to better understand the relationship.

Enhanced Practice: Strength-Based Match Support

Specific Points to Address in Monthly Contacts

This section provides some specific points to integrate into your conversations with the parent, mentor, and mentee during your monthly match support contacts. They serve to bring an intentional focus on the strengths in the relationship and any enhanced activities you are offering.

Points to Address with Mentor

What have you learned about your mentee?

- Interests and talents?
- Aspirations?
- How they spend their time?
- What kinds of things they'd like to do with their mentor?

Have you had the opportunity to talk with your mentee's parent/caregiver?

- Have you had a chance to talk with the parent about the child? What did you talk about?
- How do you think the parent feels about the activities you've done with their child?
- Did you share any positive impressions about their child?

What activities have you and your mentee done? Plan to do?

- Share information about upcoming events that might be of interest.
- What types of activities might you do with your mentee that are related to their interests, talents, and aspirations?
- What are ways to explore new things in your mentee's neighborhood?
- Have you discussed activities with your mentee that are related to their interests, talents, and aspirations?
- Have any highlights or concerns emerged for you regarding your mentee and/or his/her family?

Plan to follow-up on highlights or concerns shared in past conversations with the mentor about their mentoring experience or in your conversations with the parent and the mentee.

Points to Address with Parent

Families should be recognized as a primary support for the mentoring relationship and are recognized for their role in the relationship by staff. Families are also provided with support in accessing resources that they indicate are of interest or need.

- Have you had the opportunity to talk with your child's mentor? What did you talk about?
- How do you think your child feels about the mentor?
- Do you think your child has enjoyed the activities they've done together?
- Do you have any suggestions for the mentor that would help them get to know your child? Have you had a chance to share them with the mentor?

Are there any support services that might be helpful?

- Does the parent know about these services?
- Would they like more information or help accessing them?

Plan to follow-up on any highlights or concerns shared in past conversations with the parent, the mentee and the mentor.

Points to Address with Mentee

- What have you learned about your mentor?
- What types of activities have you done?
 - What did you enjoy about doing that?
 - What else might you enjoy doing?

Enhanced Practice: Strength-Based Match Support

- *Share a few examples to learn more about the child's interests*
- Do you like spending time with your mentor? Tell me more about why you feel that way.
- What goals have you and your mentor discussed?
- Did you meet any new people? Go someplace or do something new?
- Have you talked about your mentor with your parent?

Plan to follow-up on any highlights or concerns shared in past conversations with the mentee about the mentoring experience, or in your conversations with the parent and the mentor.

Positive Youth Development Primer

Match support should be listening for examples of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework in action. Consider how match support could facilitate these opportunities in your conversations. Listen for examples of these being shared and recognize them with the mentor. Below is a summary of points research notes as inherent in a PYD approach:

- Physical and psychological safety and security
- Structure that is developmentally appropriate, with clear expectations for behavior as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, to participate in governance and rule-making, and to take on leadership roles as one matures and gains more expertise
- Emotional and moral support
- Opportunities to experience supportive adult relationships
- Opportunities to learn how to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors
- Opportunities to feel a sense of belonging and being valued
- Opportunities to develop positive social values and norms
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery
- Opportunities to develop confidence in abilities to master their environment
- Opportunities to contribute to their community and to develop a sense of mattering
- Strong links between families, schools, and broader community resources

As you engage in conversations each month, look for openings where you can reinforce these PYD concepts with the mentor, introduce and note these concepts with the parent, and celebrate with the mentee as they share their related experiences.