

# How to Be a Supportive Adult

**Emily Flinkstrom, MSW**

**Joi Rencher, LMSW**

**Brittany Bartkowiak, BSW**

# + Why Students from Care Deserve Support



- Less than 5% of students who have experienced foster care receive their bachelor's degree
- Students from foster care are much more likely than traditional students to experience:
  - Homelessness
  - Incarceration
  - Pregnancy they're not prepared for

# + Why Students from Care Deserve Support (cont.)



- According to the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, young people who have experienced foster care are more than twice as likely than U.S. war veterans to exhibit PTSD symptoms
- Trauma is characterized by three common elements:
  - The event was unexpected
  - The individual was unprepared
  - The individual could not prevent the event from happening
- Being placed in foster care in and of itself is a traumatic event

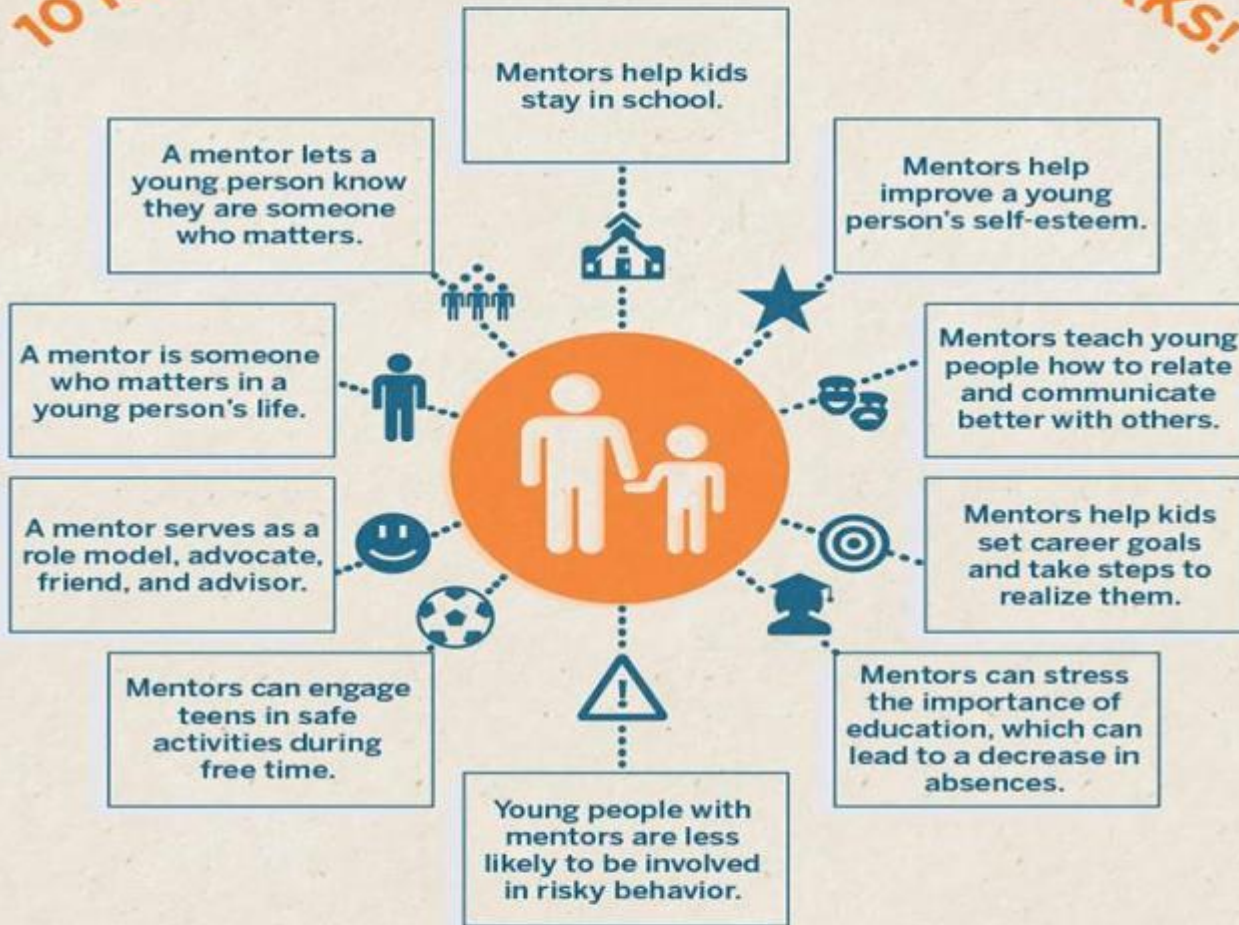
# Why Students from Care Deserve Support (cont.)

**TABLE 1. ADOLESCENTS' REACTIONS TO TRAUMA**

INTERNALIZING REACTIONS		EXTERNALIZING REACTIONS
Emotional numbing	Somatic complaints	Interpersonal conflicts
Avoidance of stimuli	Sleep disturbances	Aggressive responses
Flashbacks and nightmares	Academic or vocational decline	School refusal or avoidance
Confusion	Suicidal thoughts	Substance abuse
Depression	Guilt	Antisocial behavior
Withdrawal and isolation	Revenge fantasies	

Sources: Adapted from Perry, et al., 1995; Perry & Pollard, 1998; Perry, 2009.

# 10 REASONS WHY MENTORING WORKS!



BE Someone Who Matters TO Someone Who Matters





# Creating a Mentoring Program





# *Creating a Mentoring Program: Key Elements for Success*

- Recruiting and Selecting Mentors
- Training Mentors
- Preparing Mentees
- The Matching Process
- Supporting the Mentor Relationship
- Continuous Evaluation





# Prior to Forming a Bond



- **Check yourself**
  - **Have self awareness...**
    - **About your own values and biases.**
    - **About what your body language is saying? Is it welcoming?**
  - **Have an understanding of the child welfare system.**
  - **Be knowledgeable about the effects of trauma.**
  - **Students are not a case number.**
    - **Get to know the student, not the file.**
- **Prepare your space**
  - **Create a welcoming environment**
    - **what does your office say?**
    - **Be careful of displaying personal/religious views**
- **Respect confidentiality**



# + Forming the Bond

## ■ Understand potential concerns students may have regarding trust

(Removal from home)

- **Reactive attachment disorder (RAD):** is a condition found in children who have received grossly negligent care and do not form a healthy emotional attachment with their primary caregivers before age 5. (Troutman, 2011)

(While experiencing care)

- Once a youth is in foster care, they often experience additional changes in caregivers, undermining the potential to form a secure attachment with a primary caregiver and healthy emotional development. (Troutman, 2011)

(Upon Aging Out)

- Youth in care interact with as many as 11 different people when entering care: (CPS worker, foster care worker, judge, prosecutor, lawyer, foster parents, court appointed special advocate, permanency planning conference facilitator, MYOI coordinator, education planner, and youth advocate). All bonds or connections a youth makes with these people ends once they age out. ( Pecora et. Al, 2005)

### **Implications:**

Because of these negative experiences with early relationships, while experiencing care, and when exiting care, a person who has felt repeatedly abandoned, isolated, powerless, or uncared for has learned that they can't depend on others and the world is a dangerous place.



# Maintaining the Bond



## ■ Strengths-based

- “Strengths-based child welfare practices build on the belief that young people are doing their best given the challenges that they confront in the areas of support, stability, knowledge, and/or skills” (Trauma-Informed Practice Young People in Foster Care, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative).

## ■ Empowerment

- Students are **adults**
- Don't pity! **Empathize and validate**
- Ask students what **their goals** are
- Ask students what **success** means to them
- Ask students what **they need** from you
- Don't give **unsolicited advice**

# + Forms of Support

- Mentor a student
- Contribute resources, financial assistance, and/or time to mentoring and campus based support programs
- Offer to be a liaison
- Respect students who have experienced foster care
  - Use person-first language
  - Respect confidentiality
  - Be an advocate



# + References



- Troutman, B. (2011). The effects of foster care placement on young children's mental health: Risks and opportunities. <https://www.icmentalhealth.org>.
- Pecora, P.J., Kessler, R.K., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A.C., English, D., White, J., Hiripi, E., White, C.R., Wiggins, T. & Holmes, K. (2005) "Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. <http://www.casey.org>.
- <http://www.mentoring.org>
- <http://www.michigan.gov/mentormichigan/>

