THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Finding a Mentor Who Sticks

Educational & Scholarship Pathways · Transition-Age Youth

Where mentoring relationships actually form, and how to keep one going.

IN THIS GUIDE

- What a mentor is, and is not
- Formal programs: how to find one
- Informal mentoring is the more common path
- Keeping it, and keeping it safe
- Try it: a real example
- Scripts you can use
- Your checklist

A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

Finding a Mentor Who Sticks

Educational & Scholarship Pathways · Transition-Age Youth

> *Where mentoring relationships actually form, and how to keep one going.*

THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

The research on young people who do well after a disrupted childhood keeps landing on the same finding: at least one stable, caring adult outside the immediate family. Not a program, not a curriculum — a person who stayed.

Families often hear that and imagine a formal mentoring organization with a waitlist. Formal programs are genuinely valuable, but most real mentoring relationships form somewhere more ordinary: a coach, a teacher who kept in touch, a manager, a youth leader, a neighbor who taught a skill.

This lesson covers both routes — how to find a formal match and how to recognize and nurture an informal one — plus the part almost no one teaches, which is how a young person keeps a mentoring relationship alive over time.

WHAT A MENTOR IS, AND IS NOT

A mentor is an adult who knows the young person well enough to give specific advice and who is reliably reachable. That is the whole definition. They do not need to share a background, a career, or a life story.

A mentor is not a replacement parent, a therapist, or a source of money. Relationships get strained when those expectations creep in, on either side. Naming the scope early keeps it healthy.

One good mentor is enough, and different mentors can serve different purposes — one for school, one for a trade, one who is simply steady. A young person does not need a village to benefit from one person.

FORMAL PROGRAMS: HOW TO FIND ONE

Start with the places that already know the young person: the school counselor, a youth program, a faith community, a community center, or a workforce program for young adults. Many run or can refer to mentoring.

National mentoring networks maintain searchable directories of local programs. Youth-serving nonprofits, big-sibling style organizations, and career-focused mentoring programs all exist in most regions.

Expect screening. Reputable programs run background checks, train mentors, and supervise the match —

that structure is a feature, not a hassle, and its absence is a warning sign.

Waitlists are common, particularly for matches with men. Get on more than one list and keep looking informally in the meantime.

+ INFORMAL MENTORING IS THE MORE COMMON PATH

Ask the young person a better question than 'do you want a mentor': which adult do you actually like talking to? The answer is usually already someone in their life.

Then make one small, concrete ask of that adult rather than a large open-ended one. 'Would you be willing to look at my resume?' is answerable. 'Will you mentor me?' is a commitment most people hesitate to accept in the abstract.

Relationships deepen through repeated small contact. A young person who checks in monthly with something specific — a question, an update, a thank-you — will have a real mentor within a year without either party using the word.

Caregivers can help by making space for the relationship rather than managing it. A mentor whose every conversation is relayed to a parent stops being an outside adult, which was the entire point.

+ KEEPING IT, AND KEEPING IT SAFE

The most common failure is silence. Adults assume the young person is busy; the young person assumes the adult has moved on. Setting a rhythm — a message a month, a call each quarter — solves almost all of it.

Show up when you say you will, and say so when you cannot. Young people who have been let down often test relationships by disappearing; adults who respond to a reappearance without a lecture are the ones who last.

Basic safety expectations for any mentoring relationship: meetings in public or program-approved settings, communication a caregiver could see if asked, no secrets requested from a young person, and no money or gifts flowing in ways that create obligation. Any adult who asks a young person to keep the relationship hidden is a problem, full stop.

It is fine for a mentoring relationship to end. A relationship that served a year and closed well is a success, not a failure.

+ ONE QUESTION A MONTH

A sixteen-year-old had no interest in the mentoring program his counselor described. Asked instead which adult he actually liked talking to, he named the assistant coach who had shown him how to fix his bike chain.

The counselor helped him make one small ask: would the coach look at a job application with him. That took twenty minutes on a Thursday. The next month he texted a question about a work schedule. The month after, he sent a photo of the first paycheck.

Two years later that coach helped him prepare for an apprenticeship assessment, wrote him a reference, and sat in a truck outside the testing center while he took it. Neither of them ever used the word mentor. The relationship existed because a sixteen-year-old sent one specific message a month.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

The first small ask

Concrete beats open-ended.

"Hi [Name] — I've always appreciated how you [specific thing]. I'm working on [resume / an application / figuring out a trade] and I'd really value twenty minutes of your take on it. Would you be up for that sometime in the next couple of weeks?"

The monthly check-in

This is what turns a favor into a relationship.

"Hey [Name] — quick update: [one sentence on what's happened]. And one question if you have a minute: [specific question]. No rush. Thanks again for the last conversation, it helped."

Caregiver asking about a formal program

Ask the people who already know your young person.

"I'm looking for a mentoring program for my [child / grandchild], who is [age]. Do you run one, or can you refer me to local programs? I'd also like to know how long the waitlist is and how mentors are screened and supervised."

Reconnecting after going quiet

For the young person who disappeared for six months and feels awkward.

"Hi [Name] — I know I dropped off for a while. Things were rough for a bit and I let a lot of things slide. I'd like to catch up if you're open to it. No hard feelings either way."

+ BUILDING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

- [ ] Ask which adult the young person actually likes talking to.
- [ ] Make one small, specific ask rather than requesting a commitment.
- [ ] Get on at least one formal program waitlist while looking informally.
- [ ] Confirm any program screens, trains, and supervises its mentors.
- [ ] Set a rhythm: one message a month, a call each quarter.

- [ ] Caregivers: make space, don't manage the relationship.
- [ ] Keep meetings in public or program-approved settings.
- [ ] Treat any request for secrecy from an adult as a red flag.
- [ ] Say thank you and share outcomes — it keeps the door open.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Which adult outside my family already knows me well?

What is one small thing I could ask them for this month?

What rhythm can I realistically keep — monthly, quarterly?

+ YOUR NEXT STEP

> Name one adult the young person already trusts and one way to see them monthly.

+ WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Source: MENTOR — verified August 2026. Curated and summarized by MFGP.
https://www.mentoring.org/
This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.
For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.

You do not have to do this alone.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint