Ending on a High Note: Effective Closure of Mentoring Relationships
Our Presenters

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MENTOR

Dr. Tom Keller
Portland State University

Meghan Perry
Institute for Youth Success
• All attendees muted for best sound
• Type questions and comments in the question box
• Who is with us today?
Objectives

• Review the latest research on mentoring relationship transitions
• Review principles of closure and examples of healthy and dysfunctional closure
• Learn practical strategies to support healthy closure of matches in your care
• Share a great tool for assessing and planning closures in your program (post-webinar)
Personal Reflection

Think about a relationship ending you experienced…

• How was the ending (the relationship transition) handled by you and other person?
• How did it make you feel?
• What if anything could have made it more positive?
Why Closure Matters

• Most, if not all, mentoring relationships end – 1/3 to 1/2 matches end prematurely

• **How** they end matters, according to research

• Most of us are pretty bad at saying goodbye!

• Programs need to help mentors and youth end relationships well
What you said about closure...

• 65% of you had a closure policy and process that outlines how to transition relationships

• Core challenges:
  – Funding cycles forcing sudden closures
  – Scheduling final meetings/iffy participation
  – Parent engagement in process
  – Subverting future contact policies
  – Transition into other relationships
  – Hurt feelings
  – Consistency in process across multiple sites
A Brief History of Research on Closure

Test of Time study (2002)
- Youth matched less than three months showed significant decreases in self-worth and feelings of scholastic competence.
- Match duration’s biggest predictor was relationship quality

It’s Not What I Expected (2007)
- Mentor or mentee abandonment
- Perceived lack of mentee motivation
- Unfulfilled expectations
- Deficiencies in mentor’s relational skills including cultural competency
- Family interference
- Inadequate agency support
More research on closure

Test of Time in SBM (2011)
- Youth with high levels of baseline stress and those matched with college student mentors were more likely to be in matches that terminated prematurely
- Rejection-sensitive youth and mentors who had previous mentoring experience were more likely to be in intact relationships
- Rematching was harmful, in spite of increased “dosage”

Mentoring At Risk Youth study (2013)
- 40% of matches ended early, half were closed by mentor
- 33% because the youth did not show enough interest
- 17% cited terminating the relationship early because of the impression that the youth did not need a mentor
- In only 10% of the cases did mentors reported closing prematurely because the youth’s needs were too severe
Impact of Poor Match Endings

**Youth**
- Disappointment, sadness for lost opportunities, activities
- Reticence about re-matching
- Confusion
  - Left open-ended by mentor in attempt to minimize negative feelings
- Wanted chance to say goodbye

**Parents/Guardians**
- Dissatisfaction, anger
  - Unfulfilled commitment
- Wanted chance to say good-bye
- Longed for clarity for child about ending
- Concern about failed relationship for child

**Mentors**
- Disappointment, guilt, relief

(Spencer, 2007; Spencer et al, in press)
Study To Analyze Relationships (STAR)

Thomas Keller, Principal Investigator
Renée Spencer, Co-Principal Investigator
Emily Abrams, Research Assistant
Jeffrey Asprocolas, Graduate Research Assistant
Meg Crowley, Research Assistant
Alison Drew, Graduate Research Assistant
Grace Gowdy, Graduate Research Assistant
Emily Lott, Graduate Research Assistant
Miriam Miranda-Diaz, Graduate Research Assistant
Martha McCormack, Graduate Research Assistant

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
BBBS of Central Arizona (Phoenix)
BBBS of Colorado (Denver)
BBBS of Columbia Northwest (Portland)
BBBS of San Diego County (San Diego)

Funding
Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention

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Goal: To understand how individual participant characteristics, relationship processes, and program practices are associated with match duration and premature match endings

Design: Predictive data on all match participants (surveys prior to match), retrospective data on relationship/program experiences (surveys and interviews following closure)
Match Closures

• STAR matches = 356
• Closures to date = 175 (49%)
• Closed in 12 months or less = 108 (30%)
• Of these, official reasons for closure indicate
  – 58% due to volunteer
  – 42% due to child
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Child/Family</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost contact w/ agency (not responding)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feels incompatible with match</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lost interest</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family structure changed</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infraction of rules/policies</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Severity of challenges</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1%</td>
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Early Themes

Based on analysis of qualitative interviews from early-ending matches (0-6 months)

- Unrealistic expectations
- Mentor preparation and support
  - What role requires
  - Recognizing and bridging cultural differences
  - Child development issues
- Communication and scheduling
- Long wait for match
- Mentor commitment
Case Example 1

(11 year old boy; after one outing, youth refused to participate)
Case Example 2
(10 year old boy; after 3 outings, mentor said he was done)
Preventing early endings: Implications for program practices
Importance of Closure: First Do No Harm

1. Promote the welfare and safety of the young person
2. Be trustworthy and responsible
3. Act with integrity
4. Promote justice for young people
5. Respect the young person’s rights and dignity
Closure Goals

Aim for
• Clear program goals/ expectations around relationship commitment (duration & frequency)
• Regular communication with participants to learn if/when goals are reached, celebrate achievement, and if desired establish new goals/expectations

Avoid
• Early terminations/ unmet program expectations
• Letting matches carry on until they eventually drift apart
Considerations for Closure

• How relevant is the relationship to both parties?

• What is the *quality* of youth and adult interactions?

• What’s the youth and adult’s commitment to your program expectations?
## Timing & Impact of Closure

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early Ending</th>
<th>Well-Timed Ending</th>
<th>Overdue Ending</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional</strong></td>
<td>Unexpected but Structured (unplanned, but completed ending) <em>sadness, pensiveness</em></td>
<td>Expected and Structured (planned and completed ending) <em>satisfaction, admiration</em></td>
<td>Delayed but Structured (unplanned, but agency competed ending) <em>frustration, acceptance</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dysfunctional</strong></td>
<td>Unexpected and Unstructured (unplanned and not completed ending) <em>abandonment, fear, anger</em></td>
<td>Expected and Unstructured (planned and not completed ending) <em>anticipation, confusion</em></td>
<td>Delayed and Unstructured (unplanned, and no agency completed ending) <em>resentment, dissatisfaction</em></td>
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Questions?
The *Elements* on Closure

- **Standard:** Facilitate bringing the match to closure in a way that affirms the contributions of the mentor and mentee, and offers them the opportunity to prepare for the closure and assess the experience.
Benchmarks on Closure

• Procedures for anticipated, unanticipated closures
• Procedures for when participants won’t/can’t participate
• Documented exit interviews and meetings
  – Topics to discuss (reasons, positive takeaways, future mentors)
  – Confirmation of future contact policy
When to talk about closure...

• Orientation
• Pre-match Training
• On-going Match Support
• Periods of Transition
• On-Going Trainings
Managing Healthy Closure

1. Anticipated and Unanticipated Closures
2. Re-matching
3. Exit Interviews/Closure Meetings
4. Formal Closure Agreements
5. Continued Contact
Anticipated Closure

• **Scenario 1:** Desiree and Shannon have been matched for three years in a community-based program, since Shannon was 7 years old. They bonded almost immediately and have had a strong healthy relationship the whole time and have focused on helping Shannon overcome some mild disabilities and gain some self-confidence.

Desiree just found out that her husband is being moved by his company to a new city several states away and that they will be leaving town in less than a month. She immediately tells the match coordinator but is distraught about the impact this will have on Shannon. She thinks there may be time for one last meeting, but is not sure.
Unanticipated Closure

• **Scenario 2:** Alicia and Torie have been matched for 7 months in a community-based program. Torie is 12 and has really liked her time with Alicia, but the match has struggled to get going and meet frequently because of Alicia’s busy work schedule. Alicia has also been late checking in with program staff and seems to have trouble following through on commitments.

One day, Torie is waiting for Alicia to pick her up for a big planned trip to a concert. Alicia never shows up, never calls, won’t communicate with the program, and is never heard from again. Torie is devastated by the abandonment.
What about possible rematching in these scenarios?

• Some evidence that rematching can be ineffective or even harmful

• “Intact” long-term “dosage” remains the gold standard

• Some hints (Bayer, 2015) that rematching can be effective but that relationship closeness is the driver, even quite early in the match
Factors in Rematching

1. What are the reasons for the relationship’s end?
2. Does the youth require a mentor with specific skills or experience?
3. Are the youth and parent receptive to your program and interested in re-matching?
4. Is this youth experiencing significant environmental and individual/behavioral issues?
Formal Closure Meetings

• A chance for one final fun outing if possible

• Exchange of gifts or meaningful sentiments

• Opportunity to express feelings (both good and bad)

• May be facilitated by staff if needed
  – Can be helpful in finding positives in a negative circumstance
Exit Interviews

An exit interview gives each participant in the relationship

• An opportunity to express feelings and reflections
• Space to comment on an aspect of the relationship that may have been missed during the closure meeting
• Gathers information that can be used to improve the program
Closure Agreement/
Continued Contact Form

• Demonstrate program accountability around closure
• Help participates understand and commit to changed level of support
• Clearly articulate program liability regarding continued match interactions
• Help programs track match closure trends
• Are confirmed/ signed by all parties
Innovations in Closure Practices

- **Intentional closure** – Purposefully closing matches at known transition points; removes ambiguity and angst; allows for rematch

- **Youth-initiated mentoring** – Transition youth into self-identified mentors in their mapped network

- **Partner handoff** – Especially popular for transitions to new schools or “post-treatment” ongoing support; MOUs guide processing of mentors and youth

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Questions?
Reflection

Type one word or idea to describe what resonated with you from today’s session.
Additional Resources

• Closure packet coming via email later in the week!

• Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring tackling this topic next month – look for NMRC blog post!

• Request TA from the NMRC to help flesh out closure policies and procedures
Thank you for joining us!