

Mentoring: A Key Resource for Promoting Positive Youth Development
Richard M. Lerner, Ph.D., Aerika S. Brittian, and Kristen E. Fay, Tufts University

*Excerpt from: [Research in Action](#)
[Mentoring: A Key Resource for Promoting Positive Youth Development](#)*

Mentoring clearly has the potential to constitute a set of relations between youth and their social world that enhances their life skills, provides opportunities for their making valued contributions to self and society, and that promotes Positive Youth Development. To foster both the characteristics of Positive Youth Development and Contribution, mentors must be certain that their interactions with protégés reflect the Big 3. Through the enactment of the features of effective Youth Development programs, mentors can assure that youth gain access to the four key ecological assets present in their communities and, as such, develop each of the Cs of Positive Youth Development. Based on research in the study of youth development (Lerner, 2005, in press), some specific actions that mentors may take to foster these Cs and, as well, Contribution include:

Competence

- Find things your protégé likes and support these passions and activities without taking over.
- Find things that your protégé does well and encourage him to pursue interests, activities, or hobbies that emphasize these skills.
- Help your protégé see that the skills she has are portable, that they can be transferred into other areas where she feels not-so-skilled.
- Actively involve your protégé in making decisions that impact the completion of family tasks.
- Turn mistakes—whether trivial or serious—into teachable moments.

Confidence

- Make sure your protégé has a convoy of support so he feels loved and valued everyday and everywhere.
- Share your own life woes and lapses in confidence and ask your protégé for help when you can.
- Be especially attentive to obstacles that may challenge your female protégé's confidence: Confidence is likely to dip more for girls than for boys during early and middle adolescence.
- Increase youth social capital by connecting her to institutions and people to whom she might not otherwise have access.

Connection

- Respect your protégé's privacy but appreciate that privacy can be perilous. Be respectful but vigilant.
- Create opportunities in your community so your protégé feels her voice is being heard. All youth want to feel that they matter.

Character

- If you don't approve of a friend, relationship or activity, speak out! Let your protégé know your values and explain why some behaviors aren't acceptable.
- Make sure your actions align with your words—you are, after all, a key model for your protégé.
- Keep a sense of perspective—and sometimes a sense of humor—about minor infractions in character.
- Provide opportunities for your protégé to make his own decisions—and, when you give him this opportunity, live with the decisions he makes.

Caring

- The times when our protégés treat us as if we're disposable may be when they need us the most. Hang back, wait for an opening to talk, and respond.
- Caring is contagious: caring mentors help develop caring teens. Model caring in your interactions with your protégé and in your community.
- Encourage protégés to join school boards, civic organizations, or faith-based institutions to promote caring and social justice in the world around them.

Contribution

- Encourage your protégé to participate in causes that align with her interests.
- Encourage people and institutions to welcome youth participation.
- Help youth marshal the resources they need so their contributing efforts have a good chance of succeeding.
- Don't overprotect your protégés from failure; they need to understand that even the most worthwhile efforts sometimes meet with disappointment.