

# Dropout Prevention and Youth with Disabilities: The Role of Mentors

Children with disabilities are statistically more likely to drop out of school. According to research, mentorship and mentoring programs are successful at keeping students with disabilities from dropping out of high school. Statistics show that when students feel they are part of a community and receive guidance and support for their future dreams, they are more likely to stay in school.

“My two years with the mentoring program showed me the great possibilities that exist beyond the classroom in the real world. It introduced me to the different career paths.... Mentoring showed me the path to success in my future as a leader.” (Mentoring.org).

## What is a mentor?

Mentors are positive role models and trusted advisors. Mentors are usually adults, but older students can also be mentors.

## What does a mentor do?

Mentors show a personal interest in an individual student that develops into a caring, dependable relationship. They provide guidance for a student, teach students how thinking impacts choices, and share life skills. Typically mentors are asked to commit at least one year to a student. Some mentoring relationships turn into lifelong connections for students, mentors, and families.

## How could a mentor help my child?

Mentoring offers high school students the chance to develop a relationship with one or more positive adults. Through these relationships, students learn new ways

to overcome difficult life circumstances and build stronger connections to their families, schools, and communities. Mentors are able to give a student hope for the future.

## Mentoring Programs:

Formal mentoring programs in schools and communities usually focus on academics, career exploration, or role modeling positive behaviors. Mentoring programs do vary from community to community.

## How do I find a mentor for my child?

Parents can find a mentor for their child in formal or informal ways. Formal mentors are assigned to students through a formal process that often includes applications, background checks, and matching of interests. An informal mentorship example would be the parent simply asking an educator or person in the community to work with the student in a mentorship role.

Whether formal or informal, consider choosing a mentor who is able to help your student’s academic skills, social skills, or career interests. Mentors should also understand what information and skills your student will need to pursue his or her future goals.

Find a **formal mentor** by working with others through established organizations or institutions. You might talk to:

- Your child’s teacher
- School counselor
- School administrator
- School social worker
- Members of community organizations

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- Members of volunteer organizations
  - Members of online and e-mentoring sites

**Informal Mentors:** Find an informal mentor by exploring your community networks and asking an individual to mentor your child. Talk to people at schools, businesses, or in areas of your student's career interest or hobby. Parents and students can also find informal mentors by talking to:

- Family members
- Family friends
- Older students or college students
- Members of your faith community
- Neighbors

There are many possible ways to find a mentor in your community and provide a role model for your child. When youth with disabilities have a relationship with an appropriate mentor, they can benefit from the extra guidance and support needed to keep them motivated

and in school.

### **References:**

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[www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)

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