**Self-Advocacy Activity: Mentorships Transcript**

**Introduction:**

Welcome to our activity on mentorships. Mentoring relationships can have powerful effects on young people. Mentorship is designed to build confidence and support the mentee so that they can take control of their lives.  Adolescents can benefit from having a relationship with someone who they admire or with whom they share things in common. For students with disabilities, mentorships can be especially helpful in strengthening self-advocacy skills and for preparing students for the future

**Relationships:**

Mentorship is a relationship that exists between a person that is talented in their areas of discipline (mentor) and a person who is looking to improve in these areas (mentee).  A mentor is a person who, through support, counseling, and friendship, helps another person to reach his or her goals. The relationships can be formal or informal, often with a combination of role modeling, teaching, and advising. Mentoring experiences have proven to help students improve their relationships with family and friends and to enhance school performance.

**National Disability Mentoring Day:**

[Video B-roll footage begins playing. Students are sitting at a table discussing disability mentorship with an elected official. Video cuts to someone pointing at a list of accommodations written down on a piece of paper. Video cuts to two people talking at a school.

The federal government highlighted the importance of mentorships for an individual with a disability by establishing the National Disability Mentoring Day in 1999. Every October, supporters and self-advocates host events that connect students with disabilities to employers. On National Disability Mentoring Day, students can participate in career readiness opportunities like resume workshops, mock interviews, job shadowing, and occupational tours. Although National Disability Mentoring Day only officially takes place yearly, mentoring is an activity that can be facilitated throughout the year.

**Benefits of Mentorships:**

Mentorships are especially valuable for students with disabilities during times of transition. As they prepare for life after high school, mentorships can ease the anxiety students might feel about transitioning into adulthood. For students, some of the most common benefits of having a mentor include:

* Improved attitudes toward school and their future
* Developing career awareness
* Understanding the adult world
* Increased community involvement and participation in extracurricular activities
* and increased knowledge of disability rights

**Reasons of Mentorships:**

There are many reasons for students to be interested in having a mentor.  Perhaps the students want someone to offer guidance in academics or are looking for a role model. Maybe the student seeks to discover new interests or develop a specific talent. Let’s listen to someone who began their own mentorship program talk about the benefits that they have seen for both mentors and mentees.

**Dr. Graves Interview:**

[Video B-roll footage begins to play. Students can be seen sewing and cooking in the classroom. Other students are painting or using their iPad. Video cuts to two students playing pool. Video cuts to two students in a radio recording studio. Video cuts to three people eating lunch in a cafeteria.]

Mentoring programs come in many different forms. One of the components of mentoring programs that they share is their design to surround students with a community of support that provides enriching and engaging experiences. Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, TN designed a mentoring program between students and their undergraduate special education department and high school students with disabilities in the Putnam County School District. Let’s hear from professor Laura Graves who started this mentorship program and Taylor Kollenberg, a mentor.

[Dr. Laura Graves, Special Education Professor, begins talking about mentorships.]

**Mentorship**

*Dr. Laura Graves, Special Education Professor:* The independence program is part of the K-12 school system within Putnam County. It draws from three different high schools, and the ages of students that attend are 18 through the age of 21. What we have done at Tennessee Tech is we’re partnering with the school system here on our campus.

[Video cuts to Dr. Laura Graves and Taylor Kollenberg. Video cuts to a female and male playing a xylophone. Video cuts to an overhead view of two people playing the xylophone. Video cuts to two males playing a xylophone. Video cuts to a female playing the xylophone with a peer providing instructions. Video cuts to three people looking at a laptop. Video cuts to students in a classroom building something on the floor. Video cuts back to Dr. Graves talking.]

**Creating a Meaningful Mentorship**

*Dr. Laura Graves, Special Education Professor:* Some of the um factors that we have found in putting this program together is pairing of students. All the fellow Eagles are partnered with somebody that they can develop that relationship with. Occasionally we move kids around. One with another. We also have to consider what kind of training that we have to do with the fellow Eagles because they are not aware necessarily that this is part of a P-12 school system. They may not be aware of the different disabilities that are in here within the classroom. And um I do not spend a lot of time with that because I try, we try, to focus on what are more similar um attributes than what how we are different. Um so those are two things that we would definitely look at. What we have found over time are that the students who were in this partnership the year before from the Independence Program are the ones that are actually making my students feel at ease. Now that is turnabout. And I don’t know how we can put that into words. It’s that powerful.

[Taylor Kollenberg, mentor, and Dr. Graves are pictured. Video cuts to Taylor walking with other students into a building. Video cuts back to Taylor and Dr. Graves. Video cuts to students eating lunch and talking together. Video cuts to two students eating lunch outside on a brick wall. Video cuts back to Taylor and Dr. Graves.]

**Mentoring Sessions**

*Taylor Kollenberg, Mentor:* So, a typical mentor session, I come in each Friday around 10:00 am. And we just kind of hang out in groups. We do some cooking as well. Like if my mentee was to cook, we would go in there and cook together. And we all sit down and just have lunch together and talk about what’s going on in their week and what is going on in mine. They always ask me what is going on with me. I definitely tell them what is going on with my school work. And we just we’re building that relationship every day I come in.

[Taylor Kollenberg, mentor, talking in a classroom. Video cuts to Taylor and a peer in the library talking and looking at a book. Video cuts to Taylor and another student looking at a different book. Video cuts to Taylor talking back in the classroom.

**Building Social Skills**

*Taylor Kollenberg, Mentor:* Those social skills that they are building um all of these students in the practicum setting have kind of grown up together, gone to school together from K to twelve. Now they’re here with us and they are socializing outside of their group with their same-age peers that they haven’t grown-up with and that they haven’t been familiar with. So, it is getting them out of their box and preparing them for what’s to come after.

**Supporting Life Goals**

Just helping students reach their fullest potential. Not giving them those that low goal and just saying that is all you have to hit. You know we are going to aim higher, we are going to do bigger, we are going to do better. So that one-day independent living, whatever that looks like for each student, can be reached and achieved.

**Mentoring:**

As Dr. Graves and Taylor explained, there are many benefits to mentorship programs. Think about the students you have, and find the style that works best for them. There are many different ways to provide mentoring experiences for students. The most common type of mentorship occurs one-on-one, between a younger person and an older person. However, mentoring can also take place through personal meetings, letters, telephone conversations, email exchanges, or any form of correspondence. Mentoring relationship styles may look or operate differently. Let’s look at the four main types of mentoring.

**Four Main Types of Mentoring:**

[Video B-roll footage begins playing. Two females are at a table looking at a computer. Video cuts to two male students in a gym. One student is putting on weightlifting gloves. Video cuts to two students sitting at a table drawing and building something. Video cuts to a group of four students sitting at a table and one teacher in the front of the room. The teacher writes something on the whiteboard. The video cuts to a male typing on a computer. Someone is looking over his shoulder pointing.]

* Peer mentoring is when the individuals are close in age, and the mentor acts as a sounding board, provides guidance, and facilitates problem-solving discussions in an informal setting.
* Disability mentoring occurs when an individual with a disability, mentors another person, usually with the same disability.  The mentor is a role model and provides guidance and expertise specific to the mentee’s needs.
* Group mentoring involves a person providing mentorship to a group of students.  They typically share common interests and leadership goals.
* E-mentoring is when the mentoring process occurs through Email, skype, or the internet.  E-mentoring can occur individually or with a group of individuals.

**E-Mentoring:**

E-mentoring has grown in popularity in recent years and can be a component of school-based mentorships. It typically focuses on career and academic achievement and improvement.  In this form of mentoring, communication occurs through Email.  It takes advantage of the ease, convenience, and availability of the internet.  For many mentors, having the flexibility to respond during non-work hours and not having to travel to meet is a significant benefit. Keep in mind that just like all other mentoring programs, guidelines and safeguards need to be in place to ensure participants' safety and privacy.

**Community Programs:**

You might be wondering; can I assist a student in finding a mentor without developing an entire program? The answer is yes.  You can begin by helping the students in learning about available mentorship programs in your community.  In the state of Tennessee, you can explore TN Achieves and Big Brothers Big Sisters, STARS, and United Way. Encourage the student to research the programs available in their community.  Next, spend some time discussing what the students want to get out of the experience.

**Commit to Mentorship:**

[Video b-roll footage begins playing. A male and female student are looking at a computer talking. Video cuts to two males in a gym. One male is walking on a treadmill and one male is on an elliptical. Video cuts to two people in an office looking at a document and talking.]

Before a student contacting a mentoring agency, there are a few factors they should understand. They will need to start the mentoring relationship with an open mind and a willingness to trust the mentor.  A mentoring relationship will only work if there is mutual trust.  Students also need to be willing to honor the commitment for meetings, complete any tasks assigned, and reflect on topics discussed with the mentor.  Students need to know that a mentor is not going to do the work for them; they are going to guide and support them.

**Developing a New Program:** Mentoring programs can be gratifying for everyone involved. If you plan to develop a new program, it is always a good idea to start small and build gradually.  Mentoring is a relationship that needs to develop, just like any other relationship.  Students need to give new relationships time to grow and flourish.

**Accessibility:**

[Video b-roll footage begins. A male can be seen playing documents on a projector. Video cuts to a keyboard. Video cuts to a student using a stop watch while looking at his computer.]

Whether you are starting a mentorship or facilitating one, the services must be accessible for students in both their design and delivery. Keep in mind disabilities vary widely among students.  What works for one student may not work for another student with the same disability. For example, designing a program around the needs of your students might include ensuring accessible environments or the availability of meeting spaces.

**Interest:**

It is also essential to design a mentoring program with students' interests and preferences in mind. A shared interest helps build skills toward a known passion or to try new activities and expand a students’ self-awareness. For example, if you have a student who is interested in technology, establishing a virtual mentorship might be a good fit for the student. Maybe you have three or four students interested in applying for admission to the local community college. In this situation, a group mentoring opportunity might work best.

**Resources:**

It is also important to keep in mind your available resources. Consider the open space in the school setting, access to technology, and the availability of transportation. If the school is located in a remote area, school-based or E-mentorships might be the best option. Or, if you have access to student transportation, facilitating community-based or employer-based mentorships is something you can consider. Creating a mentoring program that meets the needs of your students and uses the resources available to you will be vital in supporting successful mentoring experiences.

**Establish Regular Communication:**

Mentoring programs need to be designed to support and encourage regular and ongoing communication between mentors and mentees. Regular contact helps to build a solid relationship and reinforces the concept that mentors are available for consistent support. A lapse in communication can cause frustration, and the student to lose trust, even if the failure was due to miscommunication.

**Recruiting Mentors:**

The next step is to recruit mentors. Collaborating with others in the school and community is a good starting point in finding participants for your mentoring program. Think about who among the staff, volunteers, older students, and local businesses might be mentor candidates. Have program materials ready that you can share with potential mentors.  This could include materials about your program, a mentor's responsibility, an explanation of the screening process, and an application form. Make sure to follow up promptly to individuals that are ready to take on the challenge of being a mentor. Recruiting mentors is a continual process for most programs.

**Begin Recruitment Early:**

[Video b-roll footage begins showing two females dancing together outside. Video cuts to two students eating lunch outside. Video cuts to a female teaching a male how to sow using a machine.]

Make mentor and mentee pairings or matches as early in the school year as possible. Research indicates that school-based mentoring relationships find more success the longer they are matched and the more time spent together.  (Herrera et al. 2007). When possible, begin mentoring recruitment early in the school year or even over the summer.

**Mentor and Mentee Pairing:**

As a Pre-ETS provider, you can assist with facilitating this pairing.  Mentoring programs typically pair people together for a set amount of time, such as a semester or one year. However, some mentoring relationships can last for extended amounts of time. Pairing mentors and mentees is partially instinctive. A thoughtful matching process will increase the chances that the mentor and student will develop a healthy and rewarding relationship.

Here are a few steps to consider when making pairs.

* Focus on the needs of the mentee
* Take into account the mentors’ skills, interests, and preferences
* Help mentor and mentee find common availability to meet

**Relationship Roles:**

Consider having a “get-acquainted” event for paired mentors and mentees

Have the pair begin to discuss and compare expectations for their relationship roles.  Clarify each person's responsibility and the type of communication that is acceptable.  For example, can the mentor and mentee email one another outside of the regular meeting? Discuss guidelines for mentoring sessions and accommodations.  Make sure to agree on the time and place of the meeting, as well as the frequency.

**Mentor Training:**

[Video b-roll footage begins playing. A woman is standing at the front of a room using a microphone to speak. Video cuts to a woman standing up from her seat talking in the microphone. Participants are seated at their tables. Video cuts to three women talking. Video cuts to two women taking notes. Video cuts to a woman presenting to a room of educators. Video cuts to three people talking. Video cuts to a group of people sitting at a long, rectangular table.]

Training is essential for mentors to succeed in their roles.  While you don't want to make too many additional requirements for the mentor, you will need to offer some training sessions. Most programs provide introductory training for mentors.  Additionally, engaging activities are shared to give mentors the skills to successfully developing a relationship with their mentee.  Make sure you provide practical information about the school.  This includes the student’s schedule, school holidays, parking options, and where the mentorship meeting will be taking place. Mentors will be more likely to succeed if they participate in training sessions.

Remind mentors that their goal is not to transform youth, but to help them grow.  They can accomplish this by helping the mentee discover their strengths and develop self-confidence. The primary mentor’s objective is to help a student understand they have a place in the world and a meaningful future.

**Follow Up:**

Follow up with the student is just as important as training is for the mentor. When you follow up with the student about their mentor meetings here are a few questions you can ask:

Do you regularly attend your mentoring sessions?

What topics have you been discussing?

Do you enjoy talking to your mentor?

What is one of the strengths of your mentor?

Is there anything you would like to change about your meetings?

**Leadership Roles:**

When completing self-advocacy activities, it is important to provide students with multiple opportunities to take on leadership roles. This will help them to build confidence with problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. As a mentee, students benefit from seeing a positive model of leadership. To help students increase awareness of strong leadership qualities, have them participate in mentorships with people who are involved in supportive organizations that serve their community, such as boards, neighborhood associations, or planning committees.

**Leadership Skills:**

Students can also develop leadership skills by being a mentor. Being a mentor requires strong communication, consideration of others’ perspectives, and relationship building skills. Schedule some time to regularly meet with the student so that they can self-reflect on what leadership skills they have demonstrated and if they are in need of any coaching or support. By establishing a successful mentorship model, collaborating with local organizations and employers, and providing comprehensive training, your mentoring program is more likely to have a positive impact on students.

**Wrap-Up:**

We hope you enjoyed this activity on Mentorships. Discover additional activities and supplemental materials found in our self-advocacy course.