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THE YOUTH MENTORING SURVEY

Description of the Youth Mentoring Survey

The Youth Mentoring Survey (YMS) consists of two sections of rating questions. The first section measures *internal* relationship quality and the second section asks about the focus of match activities. Additional questions measure the frequency, duration, and location of meetings. Please see the survey description for more detailed consideration of each section. It usually takes 10-15 minutes for students to complete the YMS, though older students sometimes finish more quickly. However, additional time may be needed to transition mentees in and out of the survey environment.

Who Can Complete the Surveys?

The YMS has been validated thoroughly with students between the ages of 8 and 18. In some cases, the survey may be appropriate for younger students. However, mentees' capacity to do the survey on their own may be affected by age/maturity, literacy and language issues, behavior/attention, or environmental issues. Students may complete the survey on their own or with adult support, depending on their capacity and preference. Please contact ARC directly for versions of the YMS that may be administered to younger students.

When should Surveys Be Administered?

We recommend that the YMS be administered 3-4 months after the match begins meeting, again at 10-12 months into the match, and then at six- or twelve-month intervals thereafter. The first interval was chosen to avoid an early honeymoon period in which children may have an idealized perspective on the match. The second interval typically would be expected to fall within the early stages of a "mature" relationship. Subsequent intervals would be expected to reflect shifts in an increasingly mature relationship.

However, the surveys may be administered at any point in the relationship. The YMS has been used as a monthly basis to provide structure to match supervision (especially for new staff). Regardless of the timeline you select, try to administer surveys in as consistent a manner as possible. For instance, if you plan to use the YMS as a regular part of match supervision, to administer them to all matched youth at about the same point in their match (same interval after being matched) in order to facilitate accurate comparisons of quality across matches. When survey administrations are missed, administer the survey as soon as possible and resume administrations on the original schedule.

Permissions

The permission of a parent/guardian should be sought anytime a minor is asked to complete a survey that will be viewed outside of the organization serving the child. It should clearly and honestly state why the surveys are being administered, who will see them, how students' privacy will be protected, and what will be done with the data. It should be made clear that participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty for non-participation. Students' names should be replaced by ID numbers to protect their anonymity. In some cases, other permissions may be required. Permission typically is not required of adult mentors. Please call ARC at 703-272-7511 if you have questions about how to proceed.

For Practitioners: Analyzing and Interpreting Results

The YMS provides useful insight on how mentees experience and engage with their matches. Scale scores have been found to predict variations in match length and in mentees' academic outcomes. Scoring the survey is easy, and no expertise is needed to gain insight on individual matches or even to detect potential patterns across matches. However, it is very important to engage experts for meaningful analysis and interpretation. No responsible practitioner would let someone run their program if they had only evaluation expertise. It would be similarly irresponsible for a nonexpert to take on your program's data analysis and interpretation. ARC provides low-cost consultation, and free support for simple questions. Whether you engage ARC or another expert, please partner with an external consultant when appropriate.

Obtaining the Youth Mentoring Survey

The YMS and the complementary mentor-completed Match Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ) may be downloaded for free at www.mentoringevaluation.com. An appropriate citation for the survey is provided below:

Harris, JT, & Nakkula, MJ. (2010). Youth Mentoring Survey (YMS), v 1.23. Unpublished measure, Applied Research Consulting, Fairfax, VA.

Helping Bridge the Gap between Research and Practice

GENERAL TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ADMINISTRATION

Overview of Key Points

- *There are no right or wrong answers on the YMS and students' parents, teachers, and mentors should not see their answers.* Most children like to please adults and know how to tell adults what they want to hear. It is important to empower/encourage students to choose answers that say what they really think. The survey should be administered by someone with whom the student(s) feel comfortable providing honest answers.
- *It is important that students receive enough support to provide meaningful answers.* The survey may be completed with little or no assistance by students who prefer to complete the instrument on their own and demonstrate that they can read and comprehend the survey. For younger or lower functioning students, administrators should provide as much one-to-one support as possible. It is acceptable to read questions to a student and fill in answers for him/her. Students should always have their own copy of the measure to look at while participating.
- *Do not reword or paraphrase questions.* Great care was taken to word them specifically, and it is important for all students to answer the same question. If a student does not understand a question, re-read it for them. If it still is confusing or unclear, they can come back to it later. It is entirely acceptable to leave questions blank if they remain confusing, cause discomfort, or seem inapplicable.
- The administration environment should be as comfortable and free of distractions as possible.
- The YMS may be administered individually or in groups, in person, by phone, or online.

Role of the Administrator: Overview

Most generally, the administrator should strive to collect as much *high quality data* as possible—data that reflects students' honest perceptions about their matches. To collect high quality data, an administrator should:

- *Encourage students to be honest.* Avoid creating explicit or implicit pressure on students to answer in particular ways (e.g., to make the program look good or give polite/appreciative answers). Emphasize that they should *not* choose answers they think adults want to hear. Never suggest an answer, even when knowledge of a particular student makes an answer seem obvious.
- *Create a comfortable, positive surveying environment.* Convey a positive attitude about doing the survey. If the administrator seems to view the survey as an imposition, students will too.
- Ensure that assisting adults do not create a negative environment or influence students' answers.
- Help students focus and behave well, but avoid making the administration feel like a school test.
- Use a consistent approach across all sites and administrations, so that comparisons will be meaningful.

Behavior Management

Be proactive and positive when managing behavior in a survey administration. Avoid being too serious or strict and remember that the goal of any survey administration is to collect as much high-quality data as possible.

If a behavior is acceptable for the environment in which surveys are being administered and seems unlikely to interfere with the quality of data being collected, it may not be necessary to manage it.

Provide encouragement and support, but never press students to do the survey. Students should not feel that they are *required* to complete the surveys. Where behavior management is necessary, adopt a positive, multi-step approach: 1) friendly support/redirection; 2) a firmer, positive reminder; 3) if necessary, a quiet reminder of any incentive or reason to participate, and consider offering the student a chance to take the survey another time (or not at all). Negative administrators have negative effects on the quantity and quality of data that students provide. *It is better to get high-quality data from fewer students than lower-quality data from more students.*

ADMINISTRATION DIRECTIONS

Gather Demographics and Other Identifying Information

- [HARD COPY ONLY] *Make sure a name/ID number and the date are on every page of the survey.*

Introduce the Survey

- See detailed directions with optional script, below.

Explain How To Do the Survey

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- Tell the student(s), *“This section will ask how you how you feel about your match.”*
- Read the directions out loud. Go through the scale options (answer choices), pointing to each option and explaining how the numbers go with them. For each option, hold up the survey, point to the key at the top, and say, *“What does [Option 1, Option 2, etc.] mean?”* Wait for them to consider/answer, then say what it means. Repeat for each option, encouraging students to answer with you.
- Give a made-up example of a prompt. Say, *“How true would this sentence be for you: I like chocolate ice cream?”* Ask student(s) to answer. Try other flavors, to get different answers.
 - [ORAL ADMINISTRATION] Tell student(s) that you will be reading each prompt out loud, and they can tell you their answer (individual administration only) or mark it on the page themselves.
 - For group administrations, allow extra time in early questions for assistants to circulate and identify/help students who may need support.
 - [UNASSISTED COMPLETION] For student(s) who indicate a desire to complete the survey with little or no support, allow them to do so only if they demonstrate that they are capable of reading/comprehending well enough to do so. *Ask that all students wait to start each section until you have explained it.*
 - Allow student(s) to proceed at their own pace, but check to ensure they are doing it right.

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- Tell the student(s), *“This section will ask what you do in your match.”*
- Read the directions out loud. Go through the scale options (answer choices), pointing to each option and explaining how the numbers go with them. For each option, hold up the survey, point to the key at the top, and say, *“What does [Option 1, Option 2, etc.] mean?”* Wait for them to consider/answer, then say what it means. Repeat for each option, encouraging students to answer with you.
 - [ORAL ADMINISTRATION] Tell the student(s) that you will be reading each prompt out loud, and they can tell you their answer (individual administration only) or mark it on the page themselves.
 - When reading prompts, allow students time to consider answers.
 - Allow time for assistants to circulate and identify students who may need support.
 - [UNASSISTED ADMINISTRATION] For student(s) who indicate a desire to complete the survey with little or no support, allow them to do so only if they can do it correctly.
 - Allow student(s) to proceed at their own pace.

Managing/Supporting Students

- Throughout the survey, make sure student(s) understand it, are comfortable, and complete it correctly.
- For more information, see detailed directions (above and below in this guide).
- Leave a question blank if student does not understand it, does not wish to answer, or it does not apply.

OPTIONAL SCRIPT: INTRODUCING THE SURVEY

NOTES ON THIS SECTION:

1. [Bracketed text] indicates an embedded note about process, usually highlighting a key task or piece of information that should be conveyed but must be tailored by an individual administrator.
2. *Italicized text represents suggested wording.*
3. This “script” addresses important points that should be conveyed to students to ensure an ethical, successful administration. However, the order, style and wording are suggestions—not prescriptions. It is important for each administrator to convey the points presented below in a way that reflects their own style.

Notes & Script for Orienting Students (Administrations in Person or over Phone)

Introduce yourself and explain what you will be doing. Consider saying something like the following:

- [INTRODUCE YOURSELF.] *Hi, my name is (____). I am [BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR ROLE/AFFILIATION].*
- [WHAT ARE YOU DOING?] *I’m going to give you a survey that asks questions about how your match is going. Your answers will help the program make your match as good as it can be.*
- [EMPOWER STUDENTS TO BE HONEST.] *I/we really want to know what you think about your match. Who knows the most about what you think about your match? [PAUSE] That’s right! You are the expert(s) on what you think about your match. That means it’s really important for you to say what you really think about your match. Don’t try to give answers you think will make us happy. If you give answers you don’t really believe, we will learn the wrong things. So, are there right or wrong answers? [PAUSE] No! There are no right or wrong answers! You don’t have to answer any question you don’t want to answer.*
- [ADDRESS PRIVACY ISSUES.] *Will your parents see your answers? [PAUSE] No! Will your teachers see your answers? [PAUSE] No! How about your mentors? [PAUSE] No! The only people who will see your answers are [DESCRIBE CLEARLY—USUALLY PROGRAM STAFF AND/OR AN EXTERNAL EVALUATOR].*
- [IF WORKING WITH EXTERNAL EVALUATOR, EXPLAIN WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY WILL DO.] *The program is working with someone who will help us learn from all the surveys students do. [NAME EVALUATOR, DEFINE ROLE.] If your parents give permission, we will ask that person to help us learn from your survey(s) so we can help make the mentoring better and better for you guys.*
- [IF SURVEYS WILL BE RENDERED ANONYMOUS, EXPLAIN BRIEFLY/SIMPLY.] *We will take your name off your survey before we send it to [EVALUATOR]. Only [SAY WHO] will know see your name on your survey.*
- [DESCRIBE AVAILABLE SUPPORT. IF APPLICABLE, INTRODUCE ASSISTANTS.] *Just let me/us know if you are confused about a question—if you are confused, other students will be too. I/we will be happy help you.*
- [FOR GROUP ADMINISTRATIONS] *These surveys are about what you think, so please be very honest and do not share answers with other students until everybody is done. It’s not like you can cheat, because there are no right or wrong answers. But do I want to know what all of you think, together? No! I want to know what you, and you, and you think [POINTING AT INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS].*

STUDENT SUPPORT, BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT, & WRAPPING UP

Student Support

- *Avoid interpreting or paraphrasing questions.* Where students require clarification, read a question aloud to them and define any words they do not know. The wording has been carefully selected and it is important for all students to be answering the same questions.
- *Never press, discomfort, or embarrass a student during an administration.* The positive connection students have with their match or the program outweighs the value of any data they provide. Students should feel as good about themselves after taking the survey as they did beforehand.
- See notes specific to group administration for further information.

Behavior Management (Mainly for Group Administrations)

- Be prepared for unruly students, especially in less structured or unfortunately timed administrations (e.g., before/after special events, at times when students might be particularly hungry/tired/antsy).
- For students who are disengaged but not disruptive, provide encouragement but if they do not respond and do not distract other students allow them to sit quietly.
- If there is disruption, make a positive, proactive request for focus. Point out that the surveys are important because they help the program improve. If applicable, remind them of any available incentive.
- [GROUP ADMINISTRATION] If student(s) do not respond to gentle prods, focus on the most disruptive students. If they simply cannot focus give them the option to do the survey another time or not at all.
- Avoid control battles and “scenes” that will be distracting or create a negative environment. Allow disengaged students to stay in a group administration unless they are disrupting it.

Wrapping up:

Before releasing students, please check the following:

- Did you receive a survey from every participant?
- Is there a name or identifying number on each survey/sheet? Is written information legible?
- Are there any blanks in the demographic information or questions? If so, please check to see whether the student understands the question. If the student cannot be helped to understand a question or does not want to answer it, it should be left blank.
- Award any incentives that were promised to follow the administration.

PREPARING FOR A GROUP ADMINISTRATION

Arranging the Site

Arrive at the site 30 minutes prior to first administration, to coordinate with site staff, orient assistants, and address last-minute issues. Surveying at public schools can be efficient but can require more types of permission and coordination than at non-profit agencies or other private sites. A survey administration should be:

- Booked in advance and confirmed both several days before the administration and the day of the administration.
- Convenient to participants and capable of accommodating the largest number that might show up;
- In a quiet space with enough chairs and tables; and
- Scheduled to avoid major events or other circumstances that could distract participants.

Roles

All adults at a group administration should be comfortable working with youth and be clear about their responsibilities.

- **Lead Administrators**. Where possible, lead administrators should have been supervised in their leadership of a prior group administration. The lead administrator has ultimate responsibility for the following:
 - Assuring that all pre-administration arrangements have been made and double-checked;
 - Meeting with administration assistants immediately prior to the administration to reinforce important points, address unexpected challenges, and address any points of confusion;
 - Addressing participants at the administration (e.g., giving the orienting spiel);
 - Setting a positive tone for the administration and ensuring that no adults influence students' answers;
 - Negotiating (e.g., about roles) with any other non-involved adults at the site;
 - Circulating to support individual students while they are taking the survey; and,
 - Supervising assistants who wish to lead aspects of an administration in preparation for leading their own.
- **Assistants**. Assistants should be trained to have a clear understanding of their roles and what the lead administrator wants them to do. Typical responsibilities include:
 - Circulating to support individual students;
 - Bringing any noteworthy issues to the lead administrator's attention, and
 - Performing tasks that require someone to leave the administration.
- **Program staff**. It is important to involve program staff in any administration, especially to provide support for logistical and other preparations and to help students feel more comfortable with administrators. When staff have access to students answers during an administration, it can create implicit pressure on students and reduce their candor. Therefore, it is ideal for staff to have a peripheral role. However, this is often not feasible. Where program staff lead/assist an administration that is part of an external evaluation, they should take particular care to create an environment in which students feel comfortable answering honestly.

Materials

If possible, bring enough materials for the maximum number of youth who could participate. Bring at least half again as many surveys as you expect to need to cover unexpected attendees, redo's, etc. Be sure to account for:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveys | <input type="checkbox"/> Extra permission slips | <input type="checkbox"/> Any incentive that was promised |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administration guides | <input type="checkbox"/> Snacks and drinks (especially if students will be coming directly from school) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pens or pencils | <input type="checkbox"/> Important phone numbers (assistants, site and program staff, pizza shop, etc.) | |

Managing Adults at a Group Administration

Data can be tainted or lost if well-meaning adults "hijack" an administration.

- Try to have an assistant for every 10 students (one for every 5-7 is better). Consider age and factors such as behavior or experience when assigning assistants. Attend closely to advice from adults who know the students.

Be careful about involving parents, teachers, or program staff. They can take roles as cheerleaders or disciplinarians in ways that either steer kids towards particular answers or create a negative or high-expectations "testing" environment. Be appreciative but also proactive and clear with adults before the administration. Ask them to be a low-level presence and positive but emphasize that they should not suggest answers or be too strict. Let them know that are comfortable working with kids and that you'll clearly ask them for help if you need it.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

It frequently is necessary to offer incentives to recruit sufficient student participation. One approach is to offer an incentive to each student who participates. These incentives could be monetary (cash), prizes, or even something like a pizza party. However, offering a sufficiently large automatic incentive to motivate participation can be costly. Lotteries can be useful ways of offering attractive incentives within a feasible budget. Each student who completes a survey earns an entry into the lottery. There even can be multiple prizes and multiple ways to earn entries. For instance, you can offer one entry for a completed youth survey, another for a completed adult survey, and a third for matches with both youth and adult surveys completed.

Notes and Script for Describing Incentives

- When considering incentives, account for potential effects on non-participating students (e.g., non-served students who may become aware of the incentives).
- A lottery or promise of prizes may be used to encourage students to focus, but should not be over-emphasized. Avoid creating so much hype that students feel coerced to complete the surveys or motivated to say anything just to gain eligibility for prizes. Consider saying:
 - [EXPLAIN THAT THERE IS AN INCENTIVE.] *To show our appreciation for your help with these surveys, everyone who completes a survey will be entered into a lottery to win [list prizes].*
 - [EXPLAIN WHAT WILL BE WON.] *One student will win [describe top prize], two students will win [describe second prizes], and four students will win [describe third prizes]. We think that your chance of winning a prize will be one out of [number of entries into the lottery].*
- At any time or for any reason, a student should be allowed to stop taking the survey if he/she truly wishes to stop or feels uncomfortable doing them. The reason offered need not seem “reasonable,” as the student may not be comfortable or capable of offering the real reason.
- Decisions about eligibility for incentives should be based on whether the student made a good-faith effort to participate. Students should be warned repeatedly before losing eligibility. Eligibility should be denied only under extreme circumstances (e.g., willful, repeated disruption).
- Remember, this is not a school test and should not feel like one. Administrator negativity or harsh behavior management can diminish data quality and reduce participation in future administrations.