

# HOW TO SELECT A SURVEY TO ASSESS YOUR ADULT-YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM<sup>1</sup>

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The assessment of mentoring relationship quality (MRQ) is fundamentally important to your mentoring program. In addition to helping you demonstrate the efficacy of your services, assessments of MRQ can help you identify and maintain best practices for the youth you serve and the mentors you support. Timely and appropriate assessment can inform match supervision and ongoing mentor training, assist with the detection of problems in a match or simply provide evidence of success to funders and mentors (who frequently fail to appreciate the difference they make). Effective use of assessments may facilitate the development and maintenance of more durable and high-quality matches.

Match advisors in many programs conduct regular check-ins with participants to informally assess MRQ, and this personal supervision is critical to the maintenance of successful matches. However, a survey can be a useful addition to such check-ins (e.g., to satisfy a formal evaluation requirement). It also may be integrated into programming processes in ways that augment match supervision. To be a useful addition, a survey must generate (at a minimum) meaningful, accurate data that touches on important aspects of the match, such as closeness or instrumentality (the degree to which a match fosters growth for the served youth). To yield more meaningful insight, a survey should assess a broader array of perspectives on MRQ. If you want to integrate a survey more fully into your program's processes, you should choose a survey that conforms particularly closely to your program's goals and assesses the broadest variety of perspectives on MRQ.

So, what should you look for in a survey that measures MRQ? First and foremost, it should be supported by scientific proof of its usefulness or *validity evidence*—evidence that it really measures what it says it measures. The best test of this criterion is whether an instrument has been incorporated into a study that was published in a peer-reviewed journal. Only a handful of existing instruments meet this criterion, and we have provided brief notes about them below. A survey can have strong validity evidence without being published, but if you consider an unpublished instrument, you will need to contact the author to find out about its validity evidence. The fact that a survey is used widely does not mean it was designed with sufficient scientific rigor.

If an instrument has sufficient validity evidence, you need to determine whether it assesses a useful range of MRQ indicators and whether the ones it assesses are important to your program. Existing research and our own experience have convinced us that to fully understand MRQ in a given relationship it is important to consider three categories of indicators: those that pertain only to what goes on between a mentor and a child, including *relational/experiential* indicators (e.g., compatibility, closeness); *instrumental/goal-oriented* indicators (e.g., degree of focus on personal and academic growth, satisfaction with received support); and external, *environmental* indicators (e.g., programmatic influence, parental influence). Surveys can assess these indicators

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This is a synopsis (with some verbatim passages) of sections from Nakkula, M. J., & Harris, J. T. (in press). Assessment of Mentoring Relationships. In DuBois, D. L., & Karcher, M. J. (Eds.), *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (pp. 100–117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Space limitations preclude a more in-depth consideration of some points, but these are covered in detail within the chapter.

from a variety of perspectives: *subjective* indicators that reflect how participants feel about their match; *objective* indicators that reflect actual match activities; *positive* reflections of MRQ (e.g., youth is satisfied with the match); or *negative* reflections of MRQ (e.g., youth is dissatisfied).

Finally, the survey you choose should feel useful to you. It should ask questions that seem important to you and match your program's mentoring model (e.g., community-based, school-based), its goals (e.g., academically focused, career focused, or purely relationship focused) and its constituents (e.g., age, gender, and literacy level). Other things to consider include the survey's use of clear and age-appropriate language, the amount of time needed to administer it and the amount of insight it yields after it has been administered.

#### Notes on Instruments with Readily Available Validity Evidence

The following surveys are among those with the strongest available validity evidence. We provide only a few notes about each to help you begin your consideration of which survey to use. If you would like more information about any of them, you can read about them in the cited articles or contact the authors directly. Also, each is reviewed in detail in the chapter of the *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* cited above.

#### *Youth–Mentor Relationship Questionnaire (YMRQ; Roffman et al.)*<sup>2</sup>

- Designed for primary- and secondary school students (ages 9–16) (15 items in 4 subscales).
- Strengths: validity evidence published in peer-reviewed journal; correlates with length of match and academic performance; derived from sample of items used in Public/Private Ventures' landmark study of mentoring (Grossman & Tierney, 1998).
- Limitations: negativity tendency among the survey's items may limit its usefulness.
- Scope: assesses positive and negative subjective perspectives on relational–experiential and instrumental indicators; does not measure objective or environmental dimensions.

#### *The Youth Survey (Public/Private Ventures, 2002)*<sup>3</sup>

- Designed for primary and secondary school students (ages 9–16) (19 items in 3 subscales).
- Strengths: derived from the same sample of items as the YMRQ; comes closest to offering standardized norms.
- Limitations: no published information about validation efforts or reliability of subscales.
- Scope: measures positive and negative subjective aspects of relational–experiential dimensions of the match; does not assess objective, instrumental or environmental dimensions.

#### *Match Characteristics Questionnaire v2.0 (Harris & Nakkula, 2003a)*<sup>4</sup>

- Designed for mentors of primary and secondary school students (62 items, 15 subscales).

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<sup>2</sup> Roffman, J., Ranjini, R., Rhodes, J., & Grossman, J. B. (in press). Promoting successful youth mentoring relationships: A preliminary screening questionnaire. *Journal of Primary Prevention*.

<sup>3</sup> Public/Private Ventures. (2002). *Technical assistance packet #8: Measuring the quality of mentor-youth relationships: A tool for mentoring programs*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved April 23, 2003, from <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/packets.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, J. T., & Nakkula, M. J. (2003a). *Match Characteristics Questionnaire v2.0*. Unpublished measure, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA. Findings associated with the previous version (v1.1) may be found in Karcher, M. J., Nakkula, M. J., & Harris, J. T. (in press). Developmental mentoring match characteristics: The effects of mentors' efficacy and mentees' emotional support seeking on the perceived quality of mentoring relationships. *Journal of Primary Prevention*.

- Strengths: validity evidence of earlier version (v1.1) published in a peer-reviewed journal;<sup>5</sup> is completed by mentors; broad scope; has been successfully integrated into match supervision processes at the Yavapai (Arizona) Big Brothers Big Sisters agency; correlates with academic outcomes.
- Limitations: validity evidence supporting version 2.0 not yet published.
- Scope: assesses positive, negative, subjective and objective perspectives on relational–experiential, instrumental and environmental indicators.

*Youth Mentoring Survey (Harris & Nakkula, 2003b)*<sup>6</sup>

- Designed for mentors of primary and secondary school students (45 items, 9 subscales).
- Strengths: broad scope; complements, correlates with *Match Characteristics Questionnaire*; has been successfully integrated into match supervision processes at the Yavapai Big Brothers Big Sisters agency; correlates with academic outcomes.
- Limitations: validity evidence not yet published.
- Scope: assesses positive and negative, subjective and objective, relational–experiential and instrumental dimensions of MRQ; does not assess environmental indicators.

*Relational Health Indices–Mentoring Scale (RHI-M) (Liang et al., 2002)*<sup>7</sup>

- Designed for female college students (11 items in 3 subscales).<sup>8</sup>
- Strengths: validity evidence published in peer-reviewed journal; unique theoretical perspective; provides an assessment of natural mentoring relationships.
- Limitations: difficult to generalize findings from study involving female college students at liberal arts women’s college.
- Scope: assesses subjective relational–experiential dimensions with some items related to instrumentality; does not measure negative, objective or environmental dimensions.

*Unnamed Mentoring Scale (Darling et al., 2002)*<sup>9</sup>

- Designed for college students (4 items in 1 subscale).<sup>10</sup>
- Strengths: validity evidence published in peer-reviewed journal; demonstrated to be useful in two diverse cultures (U.S./Japan); provides an assessment of natural mentoring relationships.
- Limitations: narrow scope; use of dichotomous (yes or no) ratings.
- Scope: assesses subjective ratings of instrumentality; does not measure negative, objective, relational–experiential or environmental dimensions.

Instruments other than those reviewed above could be applied to MRQ assessment, but they lack sufficient validity evidence to support their widespread use. For instance, Information

<sup>5</sup> Karcher, M. J., Nakkula, M. J., & Harris, J. T. (in press). Developmental mentoring match characteristics: The effects of mentors’ efficacy and mentees’ emotional support seeking on the perceived quality of mentoring relationships. *Journal of Primary Prevention*.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, J. T., & Nakkula, M. J. (2003b). *Youth Mentoring Survey*. Unpublished measure, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>7</sup> Liang, B., Tracy, A., Taylor, C. A., Williams, L. M., Jordan, J. V., & Miller, J. B. (2002). The relational health indices: A study of women’s relationships. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 26, 25–35.

<sup>8</sup> The RHI has been adapted for school-aged students, though no validity evidence for that instrument is yet available.

<sup>9</sup> Darling, N., Hamilton, S., Toyokawa, T., & Matsuda, S. (2002). Naturally occurring mentoring in Japan and the United States: Roles and correlates. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2), 245–270.

<sup>10</sup> The RHI has been adapted for school-aged students, though no validity evidence for that instrument is yet available.

Technology International (Mertinko et al., 2000)<sup>11</sup> and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (Lyons & Curtis, 1998)<sup>12</sup> have developed brief youth and adult instruments that assess elements of relationship quality but are not supported by reliability and validity evidence. A handful of researchers have developed qualitative designs to augment or complement their quantitative work. DuBois et al. (2002)<sup>13</sup> and Keller, Pryce and Neugebauer (2003)<sup>14</sup> have made important contributions that could inform your decisions about qualitative data collection.

### Summary

Given the free and easily accessible nature of the instruments described here, it may not be necessary to use all of the subscales of specific instruments or even to use only one instrument. While longer instruments that assess more constructs can generate more complete insight on relationship quality, this comprehensiveness may come at a cost. Both youth and adults can become bored or frustrated by scales if they are too long, particularly if they require multiple administrations or appear to contain undue overlap between items in the subscales. Because the utility of MRQ assessments may be greatest when incorporated into regular programming infrastructure, it is important to encourage participants' buy-in. In such cases, participants should be made aware at the outset that they will be asked to complete surveys regularly and should be helped to understand why this process is important.

You will want to think carefully about when you administer the surveys. Although baseline data are prized in program evaluation, it does not make sense to assess match quality before a relationship has had a chance to develop. We believe it is most advantageous to administer MRQ assessments after the match has been meeting regularly for about four months, to allow the match to progress beyond the initial awkwardness or honeymoon stage. The interval between the initial and follow-up assessments should likewise allow sufficient time for the relationship to evolve, likely about six months for the second administration and another six months for the third. Thus, a typical administration schedule might be 4, 10 and 16 months after the match is made. For matches that are still meeting after 18 months, a longer interval is likely to suffice.

Finally, survey instruments such as those described here may be easily administered but require the summation and interpretation of scores, which will be enhanced by the involvement of trained researchers/evaluators. Such external support for analysis ensures accuracy and lends credibility to interpretations of the data. While professional evaluation support can be difficult for programs to afford, partnership with external evaluators is vital to ensure that the interpretations upon which programming decisions and funding may be based have been drawn accurately and responsibly from the data.

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<sup>11</sup> Mertinko, E., Novotney, L., Baker, T., & Lang, J. (2000). *Evaluating your program: A beginner's self-evaluation workbook for mentoring programs*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<sup>12</sup> Lyons, M., & Curtis, T. (1998). *Program Outcome-Based Evaluation (POE)*. Philadelphia, PA: BBBSA.

<sup>13</sup> DuBois, D. L., Neville, H. A., Parra, G. R., & Pugh-Lilly, A. O. (2002). Testing a new model of mentoring. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 93(Spring), 21–57.

<sup>14</sup> Keller, T. E., Pryce, J. M., & Neugebauer, A. (2003) *Observational methods for assessing the nature and course of mentor-child interactions*. Unpublished manual, University of Chicago.