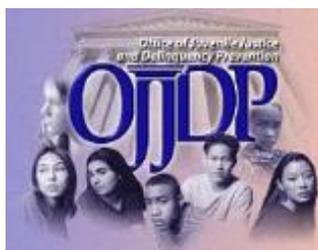


# Mentoring Gang Exposed or Involved Youth

Developed by YouthBuild USA through funding and support of  
The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention



## YouthBuild USA & YouthBuild Mentoring

[YouthBuild \(YB\)](#) programs across the nation and in 21 countries around the world, serve low-income students ages 16-24 by providing resources to help pave the way for educational attainment and job placement for young people who demonstrate a need. YouthBuild works with these individuals through the implementation and structure of five core components: leadership, construction, counseling, education, and graduate resources, all of which are paramount for success. Mentoring, a timeless concept and effective developmental tool, can help strengthen these elements when weaved into the overall fabric of a YouthBuild program.

YouthBuild Mentoring (YBM), a department within YouthBuild USA (YBUSA) currently receives funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to provide mentoring services to YouthBuild students ages 16-17. The YBM models focus on three months of group mentoring, followed by 9 months to 12 months of 1-1 mentoring; the last three months focus on the mentee's transition out of the YB program. YBM also has a 12 month group mentoring model supplemented by a curriculum focused on issues surrounding young men of color (stemming from the [My Brother's Keeper Initiative](#)). Although the match length ranges in length from 12-15 months, we encourage the match to continue beyond the match length requirement (based on the type of mentoring model you are implementing).

For more information on mentoring, check out our [Ready for Mentoring Guide](#) and our [Mentor Pre-Match Training Tool-Kit: A Guide for Staff](#) if you are new to the mentoring field.

## Mentoring Gang Exposed or Involved Youth

In some cases, the population of youth served within a YouthBuild program are part of, associated with, or exposed to gangs and/or gang related activity. This contact can occur with the young person directly, through friends and family or within their community. What does it mean to be gang exposed or gang involved? While there are many different levels and meanings in regards to gang involvement, for the purposes of this document, the definitions we will be using can be found in the [Step in to Working with Gang Exposed Youth Document](#). For your convenience, we have listed the definitions below to provide context as we use them throughout this document.

- ***Gang-involved youth*** are youth who have taken part in what constitutes as gang activity.
- ***Gang-exposed youth*** are young people that have been affected by gang activity within their immediate community or lives.

For more information on the various affiliation statuses and associated language, please check out the [Stages of Gang Involvement and Effective Engagement](#) document. (Please note: terminology and definitions can vary in different locations and among different gangs; this document is by no means an exhaustive list or representation of gang involvement and/or affiliation).

Mentoring a young person who is gang exposed or involved can pose unique challenges if program staff and/or mentors have not engaged with or mentored this population. The same can be said if there are preconceived notions from the mentor going into a match or from a staff person within the program. A common myth about gang exposed or involved youth is that they are "all criminals with felony records...that they are hard, withdrawn and dangerous. These types of young people may not be willing to share about all aspects of their lives and their gang affiliation. This will take time and in some cases, you

may never get that information. Building trust will be key.”<sup>1</sup> While it will take work, patience, and dedication, a mentor and staff engaging with or mentoring gang exposed or involved youth must be trustworthy. While the foundation, principles, and best practices for the mentoring process and match itself remain the same, there are things to be aware of and keep in mind when mentoring this special population. It is critical to remember “...our young people involved in gang activity or exposed, deserve a chance to be mentored. They deserve the option of mentorship as opposed to being marginalized”.<sup>2</sup>

Mentoring gang exposed or involved youth is not expected to solve all of a young person’s problems or end specific struggles. It provides the mentee with a stable, caring adult and a structured environment where a positive relationship can flourish. It can help the young person choose a different path than the one they are currently embarked on, help with confidence levels, and ultimately, lead them to the tools to make good decisions and have healthy relationships moving forward. That being said, it is important to keep in mind simply giving a young person who is gang involved or exposed “a job or just giving them something to do will [not necessarily] deter a gang member to [have them] do something positive”,<sup>3</sup> meaning a job or a positive activity may not be enough to keep the young person away from gang life or activity. While mentoring a young person can help mitigate factors that may have caused the young person to join a gang to begin with, other holistic interventions and services may be needed. This should be determined on an individual and case by case basis. Mentoring, a symbiotic relationship, proves beneficial to the mentee and mentor beyond what is initially expected or perceived; it is a truly rewarding and fulfilling experience for all involved at different levels to make the match succeed.

### *What is this Document and How Can It Help?*

\*Note: The information in this document is not specific to a certain region, location in the United States or gang affiliation. Some of the concepts, principles, and language presented here may differ based on your city or state and by the gangs in your local community. This document is also not exhaustive of all the information to keep in mind when mentoring gang exposed or involved young people; you should make an assessment based on your knowledge, program, and capabilities.\*

This document is a basic guide of information on best practices in the field for mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. This information is not meant to answer all of your questions about mentoring this population nor is it intended to make you an expert on the topic. It is a starting block, a stepping stone, and a tool, to be used to help build a solid foundation for mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. You should read, review, and discuss this material. Make sure to analyze your program’s readiness to mentor gang exposed or involved youth, and your readiness to create and/or sustain a quality based mentoring program, with the leadership at your organization. Keep in mind, you should be honest with yourself about your capacity and knowledge in working with gang exposed or involved youth. You and the leadership at your program can also look to consult with a gang expert in your area for more information on resources, trainings, and local gang culture within your community. To help facilitate some of these conversations, you can use the tools and resources which are outlined in the table of contents below.

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<sup>1</sup> Ely Flores, LEAD YouthBuild

<sup>2</sup> Nathaniel Almeida, New Directions YouthBuild

<sup>3</sup> Ely Flores, LEAD YouthBuild

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1. <a href="#">Organization and Self-Assessment Tools</a>	Use these tools to gauge readiness to work with, engage or serve gang exposed or involved youth.
2. <a href="#">Quick Reference Guide</a>	Robust and easy-to-use guide on mentoring located on the <a href="#">YBM Community of Practice</a> .
3. <a href="#">MENTOR’S Elements of Effective Practice (Recruitment, Screening, Training, Matching/Initiation, Monitoring/Support, Closure)</a>	Six best practices in the mentoring field. For a more complete understanding, check out the elements on MENTOR’s website <a href="#">here</a> .
4. <a href="#">Videos</a>	Video Modules from Gang Summit.

1. ***Organization and Self-Assessment Tools and Related Documents:*** The first thing you want to consider is whether or not you and your organization are ready and equipped to work with gang exposed or involved youth. The tools below (developed by YouthBuild USA and funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development) can help guide you and your program in the right direction to determine your readiness to work with or mentor this population.
  - a. [Working with Gang-Exposed Youth: Organizational and Program Assessment Tool](#)
  - b. [Organizational Framework: Fundamentals of Assessing your Program when Working with Gang-Exposed Youth](#)
  - c. [Organizational Framework: Providing a Safe Environment](#)
  - d. [Working with Gang-Exposed Youth: Individual Staff Assessment Tool](#)
  - e. [Stepping In to work with Gang Exposed Youth](#)

2. ***YouthBuild Mentoring Made Easier: A Quick Reference Guide:*** The Quick Reference Guide is a document containing a plethora of resources and valuable information for starting a mentoring program, all in one convenient location. The point and click format of the guide makes it easy to navigate. Click on the link to access the [Quick Reference Guide](#), or head to the [YouthBuild Mentoring Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#), YBM’s online tool, which contains hundreds of resources and information on best practices and helpful how-tos for mentoring. If you have specific questions about mentoring, click on a chapter within the table of contents of the guide to bring you instantly to the desired location.

For the purposes of this document, Chapters 5 and 7 from the Quick Reference Guide are highlighted, as they relate directly to working with and mentoring gang exposed or involved youth and best practices in the mentoring field, respectively.

- a. **Chapter 5, Mentoring Youth Impacted by Special Circumstances**, contains specific information and resources pertaining to working with gang exposed or involved youth. Within this chapter, you will also find a link to a series of videos of which we will discuss in section four of this document.
- b. **Chapter 7, The Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring**, are best practices one should employ when running a mentoring program; the Elements of Effective Practice will serve as the cornerstone of this document.

- **Note:** Within Chapter 5, Mentoring Youth Impacted by Special Circumstances and each subsection of Chapter 7, Elements of Effective Practice, there are hyperlinked resources pertaining to the topic/specific element. Simply click the link and you will be directed to the resource!
3. ***MENTORS' Elements of Effective Practice:*** The [Elements of Effective Practice](#), put forth by [MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership](#), is a comprehensive document outlining best practices within the mentoring field. Reading these, along with agency support and buy in, **at a minimum**, is essential to start or run a successful mentoring program. In order to have an effective mentoring program for gang involved or gang exposed youth, you must first have a quality based mentoring program. Our intention of using the Elements of Effective Practice (EEP) throughout this document is to highlight concepts and ideas you will want to be aware of for each element when mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. The following excerpts as they relate to the Elements of Effective Practice have been taken directly from the Quick Reference Guide mentioned above in section two. If you are looking for the complete description or section on a particular element, please go directly to the [Elements of Effective Practice on MENTOR's website](#). Below the individual section on the specific element, you will find tips and things to keep in mind when mentoring gang exposed or involved youth under the heading “**Things to Remember**”. This information is based on knowledge from staff at YBUSA. “**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff**” is feedback from mentoring coordinators, program coordinators, directors, staff and alumni who work with or mentor this population at their program or have done so over the course of their careers. Lastly, you will find an online addendum to this document containing “**Tips from an Expert**” which is feedback from experts in the mentoring field who have experience working with or mentoring this population. This information will be available in a [recorded webinar](#) on the YBM CoP. The link can be found at the end of this document.

## ***Elements of Effective Practice and Mentoring Gang Exposed/Involved Youth***

### **Recruitment**

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Recruitment refers to the planning, identifying, going out and finding both mentors and mentees to participate in a mentoring program. Our advice for this first task is: Get help! It's best to develop a recruitment team to pitch in. Keeping mentors on-board for more than one mentoring cycle is considered part of “recruiting,” because if you can retain mentors, then you can save an incredible amount of time.

#### ***Things to Remember:***

- When mentoring gang exposed or involved youth, you may want to consider a volunteer who has previous experience working with or exposure to this population.
- Work with your recruitment team to come up with specific criteria that you are looking for in a volunteer if you want them to work with or mentor gang exposed or involved youth.
- Look to recruit volunteers from “unconventional places”. Network in places such as barbershops, salons, community-oriented organizations, employees at halfway-houses/shelters, employees at substance abuse prevention/intervention facilities etc.
- Use Youth Initiated Mentoring (YIM) which incorporates the practice of having the young person nominate a person in their life who may be able to fulfill the mentor role.
  - Click here to view the [YIM nomination form](#).

- Keep in mind, the individual will need to pass a screening and background check as any other mentor would.
- Think through the process of what will happen if a potential mentor a young person nominates cannot pass a background check. What are the repercussions on that young person? How can you engage the individual in a different capacity within your overall program or mentoring program?
- Use the [marketing tool-kit](#) located on the YBM CoP. It can help target a specific demographic, or someone with a particular background or set of experiences, to help ensure they are the best individuals to engage with or mentor gang exposed or involved youth.
- Look within your individual network and program’s network for potential volunteers.
- Reach out to a local expert who can give you information on the gang culture in your community.
  - Are there police who have good relationships with the program that can serve as mentors? This could help with the community relations aspect of your program (potentially, good public relations).
  - What about the “OGs”, recovering alcoholics and/or addicts in the neighborhood who have changed their lives around and are a positive influence in the community? See screening process for more information on safety.

**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff:** When looking for qualities in a potential mentor, look for an individual who “can relate to young people, can be empathetic, commitment...is currently doing something to improve themselves like going to college”<sup>4</sup> and look for “someone who has experienced the lifestyle...someone with a testimony of overcoming the lifestyle”.<sup>5</sup>

## Screening

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Refers to a set of activities undertaken to determine whether a volunteer has the time, commitment, and personal qualities to be a safe and effective mentor. It also refers to a similar set of activities to assess whether prospective mentees, and their parents or guardians, have the time, commitment, and desire to participate in the program. Typically, screening a mentor involves an in-person interview by staff, a criminal background check (and child abuse registries, etc.) and personal reference checks. If mentors are allowed to drive mentees, a DMV printout and proof of insurance are required. (Find more information on all these steps at [Screening Your Mentors](#).) Mentees are also screened to make sure they meet eligibility requirements, such as age and motivation based on program criteria and policy.

### **Things to Remember:**

- The screening process for a volunteer looking to mentor gang involved or exposed youth should not be different than what your program already has in place, however, there are a few considerations you will want to be aware of such as:
  - How will your program handle a potential mentor who has a criminal background/offense?
    - Keep in mind, first and foremost, the safety of the young person and the organization you are serving is paramount. If there are reservations about working with a particular mentor, go with your gut and/or consult with leadership at your program or at YouthBuild USA. (Find more information at [Screening Your Mentors](#).)
    - Click [here](#) for information on permanent disqualifiers of a YouthBuild Mentor.
    - Could the person serve in another capacity within your program to keep them engaged? Could they work in a group mentoring model/setting? Would they be a good fit for a mentoring advisory board or a “friends of the mentoring program” position or role?

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<sup>4</sup> Ely Flores, LEAD YouthBuild

<sup>5</sup> Terry Green, YouthBuild Student Alumni

- These are questions for you and your management team to discuss.
- Consider creating a tool for mentor interview questions that will help get to screening issues for volunteers who have a past, but may be valuable to serve as mentors for this population.

**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff:** Red flags that indicate a person would not be a good fit to mentor gang exposed or involved youth include “someone who has inappropriate people skills, or is still affiliated or associated with a gang or crew themselves.”<sup>6</sup> When asked how did you or someone you know successfully handle a potential volunteer if they had a prior offense or their background check came back with offenses, program staff responded “there needs to be some clear lines around certain offenses, but their past may be the way they relate to some of the young people. We have to take the totality of the mentor and see what they are currently doing. If a person has some criminal past but is currently in college, this may be a great match for some of our mentees.”<sup>7</sup>

## Training

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Training prepares participants for mentoring and also makes them accountable. It is essential to train mentors before they are matched. A pre-match training is usually two to four hours long, and it covers subjects such as: what a mentor is and isn't, dos and don'ts, how to develop trusting relationships, program rules and guidelines, and communication skills. Mentees and parents/guardians (of minors) should also be provided orientations on these topics so that everyone will be on the same page. Ongoing training is also important, especially for mentors. Many programs hold three or four ongoing trainings yearly and require mentors to attend at least twice. In addition to gaining new information, ongoing trainings are a great way for mentors to open up about what's going on in their relationships, and to receive encouragement and suggestions. To facilitate discussion, ask each mentor to discuss one obstacle and one success they are having with their mentee(s) (while emphasizing that anything mentors hear about any mentee is confidential). Ongoing trainings are also a good time to work with mentors and mentees together on specific goals.

### **Things to Remember:**

- Mentors should receive two to four hours of training before they are matched with a young person. You should consider if additional training is needed specifically for the mentees and/or their mentors who will potentially be matched with gang exposed or involved youth.
- Parents/guardians of the mentees can benefit from training as well. Check out the [Supporting YouthBuild Students in Mentoring Relationships](#) resource for information on this.
  - Here is a [Guide for Staff](#) that can also help facilitate the discussion.
- Trainings should have a component to cover what a mentor is and is not, as it relates to mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. Be clear on the expectations of the mentors and mentees alike.
  - What happens when a mentee shares tough gang related information such as tattoos, clothing, activities or stories?
  - When does the Mentoring Coordinator or program staff need to be brought into the conversation if you sense something is not right with the young person you are mentoring?
  - What are your program's policies and procedures surrounding this?
- Go over “Beyond Resilience”, a trauma informed training. Many of the youth programs serve have experienced some form of trauma. Present this training to your mentors; feel free to customize it to your program's specificities and needs.
- The [Beyond Resilience Lesson Plan](#) contains all the materials you need to equip mentors to accurately identify and effectively respond to the symptoms of trauma in YouthBuild students. Click on the link to [download the accompanying PowerPoint slides](#) for training your mentors on trauma.

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<sup>6</sup> Melody Davis, RUTH YouthBuild

<sup>7</sup> Ely Flores, LEAD YouthBuild

- What are some things the mentor should be aware of when mentoring gang exposed youth?
  - How will the mentee try to “test” the mentor?
  - The mentor should be aware mentoring this population can be a bit more emotionally challenging.
  - The Mentoring Coordinator should go over **resources and policies at the program** that are at the mentor and mentees’ disposal.
  - The Mentoring Coordinator should discuss **resources within the community** that are at the mentor and mentee’s disposal.
  - How can the mentor be a resource broker for the young person they are mentoring? This should be discussed in the training for mentors.
  - Go over gang related terminology mentors could encounter or be unfamiliar with. This vocabulary may be part of everyday conversation for the mentee. Below are a few resources you can use to help familiarize yourself. Keep in mind, this information can vary based on gang affiliation and/or locations throughout the United States, and it can change often:
    - <http://nypost.com/2012/10/28/a-to-z-deadly-slang-by-gangs-of-new-york/>
    - <http://www.gangenforcement.com/gang-terminology.html>
  - Go over locations to host mentoring related activities and meetings (outside the program location). **It is important to know where neutral and safe areas are**, especially if your mentee is currently associated with or involved in a gang.
- Check out the Resources section on the Community of Practice for a variety of documents and tools on training.

**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff:** If you have a volunteer who is willing to mentor a young person who is gang involved or exposed, they need to know (up front) that “vicarious trauma may occur with the mentor”<sup>8</sup> and “they need to know some of the realities that the young people are living under and the responsibility to confidentiality they will have to keep. Also, the potential dangers that could come from being in the communities with the mentee”<sup>9</sup> are things a mentor needs to keep in mind when mentoring this population of young people. It is important to recognize mentoring this population of young people can be a challenge for some staff or mentors. One program staff says “working with this population of students is manageable, but can be a little difficult when trying to make a lasting impression when the youth’s environment is surrounded by the gang community”.<sup>10</sup>

## Matching and Initiation

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Matching is the process of pairing mentors and mentees in a one to-one match or in a group setting. Staff pairs a match on the basis of gender, common interests, time availability, and geographic location, among other things. Initiation is a term that has recently been added to matching, and it refers to kicking off the relationship, usually by setting up a three-way meeting—mentor, mentee, and Mentoring Coordinator. For information on matching within the group setting, see Page 13 of the [YouthBuild BRIDGE Mentoring Toolkit: Book I](#).

### **Things to Remember:**

- “Initiation” is often a common gang related term, you may want to refrain from using this word, as well as others that could be perceived as gang related, during trainings or mentoring sessions. It is listed here for educational purposes. Make sure to communicate this messaging to your mentors and staff as well.
- If you are already running a mentoring program, what does your mentoring model currently look like? What does mentoring gang exposed or involved youth look like with a traditional 1-1 model versus a group mentoring approach?

<sup>8</sup> Melody Davis, RUTH YouthBuild

<sup>9</sup> Ely Flores, LEAD YouthBuild

<sup>10</sup> Samecia Dance, River City YouthBuild

- Take a look at the BRIDGE curriculum which is a model designed for group mentoring (ratio: 2 mentors for every 6-8 mentees). Although its original focus is on young men of color, this curriculum can be adapted to fit your Mentoring program's needs, including working with gang involved or exposed youth.
  - [YouthBuild BRIDGE Mentoring Toolkit: Book I](#) and [YouthBuild BRIDGE Mentoring Toolkit: Book II](#)
- Did you recruit a mentor who has prior experience engaging with or mentoring gang exposed youth or has been involved or exposed to gangs themselves?
  - What is the person's level of involvement, experience, or knowledge of gangs and related activities? Has the mentor been exposed to or involved with a rival gang, been a part of the same gang as the young person, or been gang exposed through friends and family?
- Is there commitment and buy-in from the family of the mentee? What does family engagement look like at your program? Think of ways the young person's family can play a role in the match/relationship.
- Make sure to reference the mentee's life plan; this is a valuable tool when looking to match him or her with a potential mentor.
- Have an agreed plan/contract for the monitoring of the match. You will want a more structured plan for mentoring the young person, as mentoring gang exposed or involved youth can pose difficulties which are not necessarily encountered in some matches. This will help to create a successful mentoring environment and set clear expectations for all involved in the mentoring relationship.
- Consider starting with a group mentoring model and transition to a 1-1 model:
  - **YouthBuild Mentoring models:**
    - *Three months of group mentoring, followed by 9 months of 1-1 mentoring.*
    - *Three months of group mentoring, followed by 12 months of 1-1 mentoring.*
    - *Twelve month BRIDGE group mentoring.*
  - Consider conducting an activity as a group to get a feel for which mentee is best suited for a specific mentor. Group activities are useful when mentoring gang exposed or involved youth as it helps to build rapport among the youth and adults, helps establish trust between mentee and mentor, and allows each party space to get comfortable with each other. Consider doing this multiple times a month especially as the relationship begins to evolve and grow (we encourage group activities to continue at least once a month during the 1-1 mentoring portion).
- Mentees may "test" their mentor so make sure your mentor knows what to look for during the matching phase; revisit the expectations of the mentor and mentee.
- Consider signing an agreement of accountability for the match. Be vigilant for behavior that would be considered a "test" (acting tough, threatening behavior, etc.).
- Use Youth Initiated Mentoring, which promotes the mentee to select a potential mentor from individuals already a part of the mentee's life (as discussed within the recruitment section).
- Host a match ceremony. The ceremony places emphasis and stresses the importance, legitimacy, value, and visibility of the match to the young person and mentor alike. Invite community members; this sends a message that mentoring is strong within your program and is a part of the culture both internally and externally. If you have mentors who were gang exposed or involved, have them share personal experiences of transitioning out of gangs and/or being formerly incarcerated. This may be compelling to gang involved or exposed youth in your mentoring program.

**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff:** Recommendations for things to do as a match activity for mentors and mentees when the mentee is gang exposed or involved includes “finding ways to get them out of the neighborhood safely to expose them to new environments.”<sup>11</sup>

## Monitoring and Support

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Monitoring involves a periodic (often monthly) check-in with both the mentor and mentee (and parents, if the mentee is a minor). Monitoring can be done face to-face, by phone, email, or written log. “Support” describes the actions that mentoring staff take when obstacles arise in the match, such as matches not meeting, one or both people not liking their counterpart, or someone breaking the rules. Support also involves thanking mentors for their service. Suggesting fun and productive strategies is also part of match support.

### **Things to Remember:**

- Does your monitoring and support approach look different than a traditional match? If so, what does it entail?
- Make sure there is close monitoring and support of the match; make it clear to both the mentees and mentors who their first point of contact should be if a problem occurs.
- Clear and consistent communication is key between staff and mentees, staff and mentors, and mentees with their mentors.
- Revisit resources that are available for mentors within the program as well as in the community; reinforce the idea of a mentor being a “resource broker” for the young person.
- Have ongoing (monthly) group activities, as a means to check in on how things are going with a match. Be sure they are in neutral areas and there are safe activities for the mentee and mentor in which they can partake. You do not want to put the young person or mentor in an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation.
- Think about what steps need to be taken if a mentee or mentor needs to be re-matched.
- Have constant and consistent check-ins.
- Think of ways to improve upon the match. This can include a pre/post survey or even gathering feedback throughout the course of the match.
- Consider the legal situation of the mentee as they could be a part of the juvenile justice/criminal justice system. Will there be court appearances the mentee has to attend? How, if at all, would a mentor play a role? Can/should (or how can) the mentor act as an advocate for the youth? Be upfront about this with the young person’s mentor.
  - NOTE: This should not be an expectation of the mentor, unless it is an understood agreement between your organization and the mentor.
- What resources does your organization have for coping with loss or bereavement? How can your mentor help the mentee through this? Does your program have counseling or a grief counselor on site? Check this site for some helpful information: <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/>.
- Begin to have conversations with the mentor on what their role may look like after the match is over (should it end). Be clear on expectations moving forward; make sure to include the mentee as appropriate.
- Engage the mentee’s family. Do they see progress in the young person as a result of mentoring? What is their input on the match and how it is going?
- Take a look at the mentee’s life plan and have discussions on progress and note items needing follow up or improvement. Mentoring Coordinators should reference the mentee’s life plan prior to matching and during the course of the match itself.

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<sup>11</sup> Melody Davis, RUTH YouthBuild

**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff:** In terms of monitoring and support, “constant check-ins with both mentors and mentees” are crucial.<sup>12</sup> Also, the mentor and mentee should check-in with each other “4 times per month”<sup>13</sup>.

## **Closure/Transitioning**

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Closure refers to the ending of the formal mentor and mentee commitment. With most YouthBuild mentoring programs, this happens between twelve and fifteen months after the match is made. The most important aspect of closure is the emotional well-being of the mentee. For safety and liability reasons, closure also entails having mentors and mentees (and parents/guardians of minors) acknowledge when a match is no longer under the supervision of the program. At the Crossroads (see below) is a training that staff can provide to mentors prior to graduation from YouthBuild. This training helps mentors to assist mentees in making important decisions during this critical transition period. [Transitioning to Post-Grad Mentoring](#) contains forms and surveys that staff can use for the closure process. The document [Match Transition and Celebration Ritual](#) provides strategies mentors and mentoring coordinators can use for both planned and premature closure. It is our most sincere hope the match between a mentee and mentor last a lifetime; unfortunately, this is not always a reality.

### **Things to Remember:**

- Discuss closure and transition over the course of the match; this is a very important topic to be familiar with. The Mentoring Coordinator and mentors being resource brokers will be important here, as well.
- Make sure to have an exit interview (with both the mentee and mentor). Be realistic about expectations for both parties involved. This can help the mentee with the transition from the safe and nurturing environment of the YouthBuild program and out of the mentoring relationship. It can also serve as a learning tool to plan and improve your overall mentoring program.
- Towards the end of the formal match, focus on preparing the young person for life outside of YouthBuild (think about topics such as job readiness, spirituality, legal issues, avoiding gang activity, etc.). What support systems do they have in place once they leave? Is there a role for the mentor? If so, what role does he or she play? Again, be clear on expectations moving forward and involve both the mentee and mentor in the conversation, as appropriate
- Refer to the *At the Crossroads Training*- this is a tool you can train your mentors on at the appropriate time during the relationship/match. It goes over the transition period right before and right after a young person leaves the YouthBuild program.
  - The [At the Crossroads](#) training includes a ninety-minute lesson plan and accompanying [PowerPoint slides](#) to equip mentors to successfully build and perform their critical bridge and support role during the three to six months after the mentee completes the YouthBuild program.
- Go over the expectations on continuing forward with the mentoring match, outside of the formal YouthBuild program (if applicable).
- Talk with the mentee’s family on the mentoring relationship. Do they see progress made with the match or with the young person? Do they have expectations going forward (if applicable)? This should be ongoing over the course of the match.
- Revisit the mentees life plan; note areas of progress and growth, as well as what areas/items need to still be worked on. This should be ongoing over the course of the match.
- What does your program do for alumni and what services are in place? Think about having a mentoring alumni services component if you already have alumni services in place. This can act as a specialized support network for the young people.<sup>14</sup>
- Host a Closing ceremony, as applicable.

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<sup>12</sup> Melody Davis, RUTH YouthBuild

<sup>13</sup> Alicia Lenard, McLean County YouthBuild

<sup>14</sup> Terry Green, YouthBuild Student Alumni

- Find ways to recognize your volunteers and mentors. This can be done through thank you notes, certificates of appreciation, picture on an “appreciation wall”, etc. Check out the [Mentor/Mentee Badges](#) on the YBM CoP.

**Advice from YouthBuild Program Staff:** In regards to encouraging the mentee/mentor relationship to continue after the match length requirement is met, staff says “speak to the fact that mentoring is a lifelong thing<sup>15</sup>” and “you can’t force a relationship to continue, but I think the mentor should be encouraged to do that.”<sup>16</sup>

## Gang Summit Videos

4. **Gang Summit Videos:** Please note: the videos in this section are not specific to a certain region or gang affiliation. Information may be different in your community. This [link](#) takes you to five YouTube videos developed by YouthBuild USA and funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The videos focus on several program staff and a YouthBuild program who worked extensively with gang involved or exposed youth. It goes over organizational framework and assessing whether you can and are ready to serve gang exposed or involved youth. We have gone through each video and pulled out information as it pertains to mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. You will see minute markers which capture specific points in time from the video that best illustrate tips and things to think of when engaging with and mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. Click on the hyperlinked minute marker to take you directly to that spot in the video you are watching. We encourage you to watch these videos in their entirety. You can use them as stand-alone videos and teaching tools or as a collective series. The videos make for a great resource for staff trainings or even during trainings specifically for mentors.

### Step in Video- Key Takeaways:

- ★ Sets the stage for the video series and documents (short video, read along on the video screen).

### Step in Rev 2 Video- Key Takeaways:

- ★ Videos can be used and/or viewed in a stand-alone format or as a series.
- ★ Do not feel compelled to immediately start working with this population; as the Mentoring Coordinator, you and leadership/management at your YouthBuild program should determine and assess the capacity and capability to engage and mentor gang exposed or involved youth.

### Assessing your Program when Working with Gang Exposed Youth (Part 1 of 2) - Key Takeaways:

- ★ The video highlights the organizational framework tool (see document in section 1).
- ★ [24 seconds](#)- Learn about the demographic of the student population your YouthBuild programs serves and you will potentially be serving within your Mentoring Program.
- ★ [1:06](#): Newton’s Cradle Metaphor/example; picture this “toy” as the role of the mentor; as a metaphor, a mentor can help with the “stabilizing” of some of the commotion in a mentee’s life. That person can help to “stop the cradle from rocking”, or at least help to slow it down.

<sup>15</sup> Melody Davis, RUTH YouthBuild

<sup>16</sup> Ely Flores, LEAD YouthBuild

- ★ [2:27](#): Goes over fundamentals of working with gang exposed youth.
- ★ [3:08](#): Communicates the need to be genuine with your intentions as a Mentoring Coordinator. Inform the mentors of this during an orientation or training. You can't pretend to want to work with this population of young people.
- ★ [5:28 through 7:02](#): Talks about having support from the top down (management, board level, etc.) to work with gang exposed or involved young people. The same should hold true for the mentoring efforts at your site. It is imperative you have buy in and support from management. Without it, efforts can be thwarted.
- ★ [7:08](#): Discusses the need and importance for support of young people for several years after leaving the YouthBuild program. This can be compared to closure/transition or monitoring and support as it relates to the mentoring efforts. Support systems need to be in place for the young person, although these services may not look the same for everyone.
- ★ [7:41](#): References alumni services a program has in place. This is essential. For mentoring, this can be tied into a resource option for closure, transition, and support for the match/mentee after the formal match is no longer meeting or the young person graduates from the program.
- ★ [7:52](#): We see a direct shout out to mentoring. Most program staff are providing some level of informal mentoring to the young people they serve. Think about how to formalize this relationship for mentoring efforts at your program.
- ★ [8:03](#): Talks about follow up and support services. Think about this information in terms of closure/transition or monitoring of the mentoring match.
- ★ [9:38](#): Mentoring Coordinator, Frank, talks about how the consistency of mentoring for him helped keep him on track. This highlights the importance of mentoring. He speaks to the importance of recruiting, strengthening the program, and working 1-1 with students.
- ★ [10:36](#): Concept of "pay it forward". Frank went from being a student to a Mentoring Coordinator. This is a great illustration of how mentoring can come full circle.
- ★ [12:40 to end of video](#): Staff need to treat the young people with respect. Look for these "key traits" when recruiting mentors. The individual must have dignity and respect for the young people they will potentially be mentoring.

### **Assessing your Program when Working with Gang Exposed Youth (Part 2 of 2) - Key Takeaways:**

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- ★ [13 seconds](#): Highlights the importance of being an advocate for the young people you serve. This goes for staff and mentors alike. You want to have a mentor who is in the young person's corner.
- ★ [40 seconds](#): In short, the conversation focuses on being a resource broker. For the mentoring work, think about how a mentor can be a resource broker. This section also talks about legal issues. This doesn't necessarily mean a mentor has to be the legal or court support for the young person, but they can be a resource to help that individual navigate the available resources.
- ★ [1:35](#): Talks about being a support system/advocate for a young person who may be court involved. This illustrates how a mentor can be a support system; that level of support may not necessarily be a requirement or responsibility of your mentors, but is helpful.
- ★ [2:33](#): This section can be applied to mentoring in the following way: examine how a mentor can be an advocate for the young person in court. It can be someone who is there to support the young person (again, not necessarily a mentor's responsibility or requirement, but shows how the mentor can be an advocate or support).
  - Mentors can also be supportive through the school system, family engagement, workplace (as a reference check), showing up for that young person in whatever extra-curricular activity they may participate in, and through small actions (pickup ball game, recital, painting, etc.).

- The mentor doesn't always have to participate in a certain activity with the mentee, but the act of showing up, means a lot as a show of good faith, engagement, investment, and support for the young person.
- ★ [3:24](#): Concept of self-assessment. This can be used during the match for the mentee to give an honest self-reflective assessment of themselves; where do they stand with life plans/goals, how they feel about the match. It can also be used by the mentor and Mentoring Coordinator (Mentoring Coordinator: used to assess where relationship/match is and what you need to do to see if it is on track to be a successful match).
- ★ [4:33](#): Make sure to do a regular assessment of your mentee and follow up on short term and long term goals at each session to show mentee accountability and growth (refer to a sample [life plan](#) as appropriate). This also shows the young person, that you as staff, are invested in them and care.
  - Can also be used for matching and initiating. For example, structure a mentoring activity to coincide with the assessment and follow up of the match and mentee's growth.
- ★ [5:30](#): Discussion on how to bring prominent community figures together to form a committee/advisory group for your program. You could also use these individuals as "allies/friends of the mentoring program" or mentors. Use these individuals to talk about events going on in the community or to speak on the young person's behalf (if applicable or when appropriate). Folks can talk to program staff, act as speakers for activity sessions, and give insight, advice, and act as role models within the larger community.
- ★ [7:44](#): Build a relationship with the Police Department in your community. This helps establish legitimacy of the agency's commitment to improve the lives of your young people. This can be helpful when mentoring gang exposed or involved youth. These folks can be mentors and help bridge gaps between young people and the police/community, as well as be an advocate and a resource.
- ★ [8:35](#): This conversation illustrates how a Mentoring Coordinator needs to build relationships externally in order to help recruitment for the mentoring program (Goal: attract mentors who have different realms of influence and varying degrees of stature/experience).
- ★ [10:13](#): Highlights importance of having effective policies for your program and for the mentoring component of your program (Ex: incorporating best practices such as the Elements of Effective Practice into your mentoring component).
- ★ [10:50](#): Illustrates the need to focus on the young person as an individual (Ex: Staff and mentors should focus on the individual as a mentee, not as a young person who is gang exposed or involved).
- ★ [13:34](#): Illustrates how an individual can influence a young person who is gang exposed or involved. The staff person or mentor will exhibit patience and demonstrate life skills (Ex: In court appearances). If a mentee sees their mentor is invested and spending time with them, it shows they care.

### **Organizational Framework Providing a Safe Environment when Working with Gang Exposed Youth- Key Takeaways:**

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- ★ [1:05](#): Conversation on neutral territory starts here; make sure this information is communicated to mentoring participants (mentees, mentors/volunteers). Be clear on what that looks like for your program and of your expectations for everyone involved with your mentoring program, both internally and externally within the community. Your program is a neutral ground.
- ★ [4:59 through 7:49](#): Discusses safety protocol measures and policies at your program. If something should happen, what are important things to know? It is key to communicate this information to mentees and mentors in training; make it common knowledge so folks are aware at all times.

- ★ [7:50](#): Create an agreement with people in your local neighborhood and let students know about this agreement so they are aware of it. This agreement is intended to put rules in place so members of your program do not cause issues within the community that could hurt themselves or others at the program (Ex: when a student is in program or on a break from program, gang-banging, or throwing up signs). This signifies the behavior will not be tolerated.
- ★ [9:28](#): Make sure staff of the program are informed, involved, and comfortable with working with gang exposed or involved youth. Be up front about what this means. Training is essential, especially for new staff and mentors.
- ★ [11:25](#): Have clear communication and processes/protocols for the staff, young people and mentors. Ex: who gets contacted first if there is an issue with a mentee or young person? Make sure this is communicated to mentors; if something happens or if they have concerns with a young person, the Mentoring Coordinator should be the first person they reach out to, don't just contact people immediately (unless directed to do so or someone is in immediate danger).
  - Go over situations such as when to call the police versus when not to; what situations warrant reaching out to the Mentoring Coordinator or police, etc.

### **Other Resources for Working with or Mentoring Gang Exposed or Involved Youth:**

Below are links to additional resources which may be helpful when mentoring gang exposed or involved youth.

- [Introduction to Youth Gangs](#)
- Addendum- [Conversation with the Experts](#) (recorded webinar hosted by YBM staff)
- [Mentor: The National Mentoring Partnership](#)
- [Check for your state mentoring partnership](#)

