Austin, L. J., Parnes, M. F., Jarjoura, G. R., Keller, T. E., Herrera, C., Tanyu, M., & Schwartz, S.E. O. (2020). Connecting Youth: The Role of Mentoring Approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

* This study examines how mentors approach their mentees and how the adults in their mentees’ lives influence various youth connection outcomes (i.e. parent-child relationship quality, natural mentors, help-seeking, and engagement in extracurricular activities) in community-based mentoring programs.
* Findings indicate that having a close relationship with a mentor, who actively connects their mentees with other people or programs from their communities, can promote help-seeking, increase extracurricular activity engagement, and strengthen parent-child relationships.
	+ While having a close relationship with a mentor is beneficial and important, it doesn’t guarantee youth connection outcomes outside the mentorship. Mentors’ active efforts to increase their mentees’ social networks, on the other hand, may have a stronger influence on these outcomes.

Participants were 766 youth, ranging in age from 11 to 14

Person-centered analyses revealed t**hree mentorin**g profiles which were differentially associated with youth outcomes:
“**Status Quo Mentors,”** who reported low-to-moderate levels of closeness within the mentor–mentee dyad, low levels of connecting their mentees with programs and people in their community, and low levels of mediating for their mentees

**“Close Connectors,”** who reported moderate-to-high levels of closeness, moderate-to-high levels of connecting, and low levels of mediating;

“**Connector-Mediators,”** who reported moderate levels of closeness, connecting, and mediating. Youth mentored by “Close Connectors” demonstrated the greatest benefit, with significant improvements in parent–child relationship quality, extracurricular activity involvement, and help-seeking.

Results suggest that community-based mentoring programs that emphasize connecting youth within their communities may be more effective in enhancing youth support networks.

**Implications**

Feelings of support and connectedness are crucial for adolescent health and development.

Substantial literature (e.g., Miranda-Chan et al. 2016) has demonstrated that supportive relationships with non-parental adults can promote adolescent well-being and health.

However, because formal mentoring is a **time-limited intervention,** it is important to understand the mechanisms through which formal mentoring relationships can strengthen existing relationships and expand youth’s social connections so that support is sustained and positive impacts persist after the formal mentoring relationship has ended.

Little research has examined how mentoring approaches relate to youth connection and specifically if there are behaviors that a mentor can engage in to expand a mentee’s network of support beyond the mentoring relationship. As such, the current study used a person-centered approach to explore how mentoring approach to youth social connection relates to youth connection outcomes in formal community-based mentoring.

The results of this study suggest that there are meaningful differences in mentors’ approaches to supporting youth development and that these differences are related to distinct changes in social connection outcomes in the context of community-based mentoring.

Specifically, person-centered analyses uncovered three distinct mentoring profiles: (1) Status Quo Mentors (mentors who reported low-to-moderate closeness, low connecting, and low mediating—the largest group of about 70% of mentors),

(2) Close Connectors (mentors who reported moderate-to-high levels of closeness, moderate levels connecting, and low mediating—about 23% of mentors),

(3) Connector-Mediators (mentors who reported moderate levels of closeness, connecting, and mediating—about 7% of mentors). Importantly, these groupings demonstrate that active or instrumental approaches, like connecting, do not have to come at the expense of mentor–mentee relationship quality, despite concerns in the field that more instrumental mentoring may sacrifice relationship closeness (Rhodes and DuBois 2008).
Instead, the profiles show that closeness and connecting tend to coincide, suggesting that attention to relationships outside of the mentor–mentee dyad could even enhance the mentoring relationship.

These findings suggest that programs can, and perhaps **even should, encourage network-engaged mentoring both in training and ongoing match support**.

The mentees of these three types of mentors, in turn, demonstrated differences in baseline connection measures and change to connection measures over time. As anticipated, stronger connection outcomes were observed among youth with mentors who actively engaged in connecting and mediating behaviors. Mentees of Status Quo Mentors demonstrated no changes in any of the connection outcomes, suggesting that the average mentor may not create the kind of relationship that enhances connection outcomes outside of the mentoring dyad (although they may still influence other domains of youth development such as academic outcomes). Mentees of Connector-Mediators demonstrated significant increases in involvement in extracurricular activities, but did not show changes in any of the other connection outcomes. In contrast, youth who showed the greatest improvements were the mentees of Close Connectors. From baseline to follow-up, these youth demonstrated significant improvements in parent–child relationship quality and help-seeking as well as significant increases in extracurricular activity participation.