First Do No Harm: Ethical Principles for Youth Mentoring Relationships

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Mentoring programs pair youth who are perceived to be at risk for poor outcomes with volunteers who are trained to provide support. Although mentoring has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, the ethical challenges inherent in relationship-based interventions have been given insufficient attention among researchers and practitioners. Rarely acknowledged is the potential for harm that poorly implemented mentoring relationships can render. To redress this problem, a set of ethical principles for volunteer mentors is presented. They are derived, in part, from the American Psychological Association's (2002) *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* as well as ethical codes that have been formulated to guide other paraprofessionals and volunteers in community settings. A description of these principles and their application to youth mentoring is provided.

Keywords: ethics, ethical principles, volunteerism, youth mentoring

Youth mentoring programs (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters) have experienced tremendous growth in the past 2 decades. Millions of young people have a volunteer mentor involved in their lives, and the numbers are continuing to rise at an unprecedented rate (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2006). Volunteer mentors often enter these relationships with a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of young people. Unfortunately, the ethical implications of placing unrelated youth in the care of adults has been largely ignored in the field of youth mentoring. There are few guidelines to address the ethical responsibilities and obligations of adult mentors, or even a clear consensus as to what they should be. Moreover, although

volunteer training can affect efficacy and retention, relationship quality, and youth outcomes (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois & Neville, 1997; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005), its implementation across programs is uneven. This lack of attention is particularly alarming, given the sheer number of mentors entering into matches with youth and the fact that nearly half of the relationships terminate prematurely (Rhodes, 2002). The goal of this article is to delve into some of the moral ambiguities that arise in relationship-based volunteerism, to present a set of ethical principles, and to initiate a dialogue around the responsibilities involved in volunteer mentoring. Particularly because there is no governing body for youth mentoring or for volunteer youth workers more generally, these guidelines are construed less as enforceable standards than as a set of ideals informed by current research and practices in the field.

Background

Youth mentoring strikes deep emotional chords and has attracted powerful constituents who, at some level, have looked to research to confirm what they intuitively hold to be true. And because most program administrators are working under the tacit assumption that mentoring programs are universally beneficial to youth (an assumption that has been countered in the research literature; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008), they often dedicate their limited resources into launching new matches, sometimes at the expense of supporting existing ones. Moreover, because volunteer recruitment is often the rate-limiting factor in program growth, many programs have relaxed minimum volunteer screening, commitment, and training requirements. These trends have reduced the burden that is placed on agencies and volunteers but are at odds with the types of practices that are needed to establish and sustain high-quality mentoring relationships (DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Herrera et al.,

2007). Funding agencies reinforce this tendency, often using the number of new matches, as opposed to their sustainability, as the measure of program success. The only real danger associated with placing children in the care of unrelated adults, in the thinking of many practitioners and policy makers, is child molestation—a very troubling but comparatively infrequent occurrence (Saul & Audage, 2007). The disappointment and suffering of protégés whose mentors fail them in more subtle ways goes largely unattended. These children fade quietly from programs, and the troubled relationships they represent are overshadowed by the more compelling success stories of their peers.

Yet, because a personal relationship is at the heart of mentoring interventions, inconsistencies, misunderstandings, and terminations can touch on youth's vulnerabilities in ways that other, less personal, approaches do not. To the extent that protégés have identified with their mentors, and have begun to value the relationship, they may feel profound disappointment, rejection, and betrayal when problems arise. Such feelings, in turn, may lead to a host of negative emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Downey, Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998). Indeed, in two, large random assignment studies, youth in prematurely terminating mentoring relationships showed increases in problem behaviors relative to a control group (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007). A recent qualitative study described the disappointment experienced by youth abandoned by their mentors (Spencer, 2007).

In the following sections, we present a set of ethical principles to guide volunteer mentors and the program staff who advise them as they strive to build meaningful and growth-promoting relationships with their protégés. These are based, in part, on the American Psychological Association's (APA; 2002) *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* established for practicing psychologists and informed by research findings and practice. Although there are limits to the clinical analogy, mentoring and therapeutic relationships do share certain commonalities. For example, both types of relationships are situated somewhat outside the recipient's network of family, friends, and neighbors, yet are supported by another kind of infrastructure: the therapist's professional community and the volunteer's mentoring program. In addition, both mentoring and therapeutic relationships are characterized by inherent power differentials and involve scheduled "sessions," often on a weekly basis. The most important commonality, however, is that both relationships involve a human connection whose explicit goal is to foster the positive development of one of the partners. When positive change comes about in the client or protégé, it is often the result of an empathic bond with the therapist or mentor (Spencer & Rhodes, 2005).

The ethical principles that serve as the foundation for APA's *Ethics Code* (2002) are thus a helpful reference to consider in establishing mentoring ethics. We have drawn on the five general principles—(a) beneficence and nonmaleficence, (b) fidelity and responsibility, (c) integrity, (d) justice, and (e) respect for people's rights and dignity—and developed a set of corollary principles for youth mentoring relationships. In so doing, we have consulted with ethicists in mental health and with administrators and staff in formal mentoring programs, and have considered ethical guidelines established for youth workers in Great Britain and Australia (The National Youth Agency, 2004; Youth Affairs Council Western Australia, 2003). Our extension of these principles is further informed by community research and practice (e.g., Fawcett, 1991;

Heller, 1989; Pettifor, 1998; Serrano-Garcia, 1994) and outcome research on mentoring programs with a specific eye toward what constitutes quality mentor relationships and established practices. The guidelines are relevant to the wide range of youth mentoring relationships (e.g., face-to-face, online, and group mentoring) and, potentially, to other voluntary adult–youth relationships, such as those forged through other programs and contexts (e.g., sports teams, youth groups, camp).

Ethical Principles for Youth Mentoring Relationships

Below we delineate five guiding principles for ethical behavior in youth mentoring relationships, defined in more colloquial language to enhance their accessibility and usability in youth mentoring practice. The general principle from APA's *Code of Ethics* (2002) on which each is based is provided in parentheses. These principles overlap in many respects and are by no means mutually exclusive. The examples, which illuminate the application of the principles, are drawn from the authors' collective experiences conducting qualitative research on youth mentoring relationships and interfacing with practitioners in the field and qualitative research on youth mentoring relationships.

A: Promote the Welfare and Safety of the Young Person (Beneficence and Nonmaleficence)

Mentors should work to benefit their protégés, or at the very least, to do no harm. At face value, this may appear to be the most obvious and least controversial of all principles. In ethical theory, the concept of beneficence, on which this principle is based, encompasses behavior that benefits the good of another and that helps them to avoid harm (Fisher, Hoagwood, & Jensen, 1996). Hume held beneficence (which he contrasts with egoism) as a central principle in his moral psychology, close to the essence of morality (as cited in Beauchamp & Childress, 2008). Thus, a mentor's primary responsibility is to take positive action to promote the welfare of the young person and to refrain from any action that may cause harm.

Ernest Hemingway (1932) wrote that, "I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after" (p. 117). Yet morality is not always that clear and simple in the field of youth mentoring. What if there are competing ideas about what is best for a young person: ideas that are rooted in differing values, culture, and worldview? For example, a parent might do something (e.g., discourage participation in a competitive summer math camp so that the teen can work in the family store) that, at face value, may not seem to be in the best interest of the youth. It may, however, make perfect sense when considered within the broader social ecology of the family. Promoting the welfare of a young person will, in many cases, require that mentors build rapport not only with protégés, but also with the protégés' primary caregivers so that they may develop an understanding of the family's circumstances, belief systems, and expectations for the child. Indeed, the success of a mentor match often depends on cooperation between mentors and family members (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006).

Related to the concept of beneficence is the mentor's ethical obligation to do no harm. This encompasses the more extreme forms of harmful behavior, such as sexual harassment, abuse, and

exploitation. Most programs have careful background checks and screening procedures in place, and the incidence of such occurrences is minimal (Saul & Audage, 2007). And, for the most part, all but a small fraction of volunteers do not intend to deliberately harm their young charges. Nonetheless, if volunteers lack skills, knowledge, or sound judgment, difficulties can and often do arise. Some research (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kalbfleisch, 1997) has suggested that harm to protégés arises from the misuse of power (e.g., exploitation, heavy-handed persuasion) and inappropriate boundaries (e.g., breaching confidentiality, improper disclosures).

Misuse of power. Although mentors serve to "empower" youth, relationships are sometimes rife with unacknowledged power inequities. Power differentials inherent in the ages and roles of adults and youth can widen when there are also differences in class and cultural backgrounds. Mentors may not even be aware of the social inequities driving these differentials or how these can play out in interpersonal relationships (Fisher, 1997). Mentors may express beliefs or opinions that are at odds with the experiences, values, and beliefs of their protégés, creating conflict for the young person. Mentors should thus strive to refrain from religious or political proselytizing, raise their own awareness of power dynamics in cross-age and cross-cultural relationships, and seek consultation from mentoring programs to effectively negotiate these differentials. Training, adopted from counseling professions and directed toward helping mentors to identify their culture- and class-based privileges and expand their cultural knowledge, can be critical to the success of mentoring relationships (Constantine, 2002; Spencer, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003). Moreover, programs can improve efforts to reach volunteer mentors with backgrounds more similar to the youth being served (Liang & Grossman, 2007).

Despite these power inequities, mentors' relative advantages can be used for good. That is, a mentor's power (i.e., position, knowledge, experience, interpersonal connections other material and human resources, etc.) is a form of social capital that can be deployed to the advantage of protégés. Mentors may use their connections, personal and professional experience, and other resources to help protégés gain desired information, status, position, influence, and other types of personal and professional achievements.

Inappropriate boundaries. Clear and appropriate boundaries, considered to be a linchpin of successful helping relationships, protect mentors and protégés from exploitation and are thus vital to the safety and health of mentoring relationships. Boundaries provide defined limits around relationships wherein certain behaviors are deemed appropriate and others inappropriate in light of their nature and context. Some guidelines for professional helping relationships are easily translated to the mentoring context, such as prohibitions against sexual relationships and placing primacy on the needs and safety of the child (Fisher & Younggren, 1997). Yet, many of the boundaries surrounding mentoring relationships are far murkier. Mentors fill a niche that lies somewhere between professional and kin, and are thus afforded greater latitude in what constitutes appropriate boundaries. Despite the need for guidelines, boundaries should be considered case specific and negotiated within the context of the specific mentoring relationship. For example, although there is nothing inappropriate in a mentor holding hands with his 6-year-old protégé as they cross the street, other instances of physical contact or seemingly benign gestures or

comments can be interpreted differently. And, particularly in light of the power differentials, it is not always easy for protégés to set limits or voice concerns. A 7-year-old child might be hesitant to accept a mentor's invitation to sit on his lap as they share a computer screen, and a teenager might feel vaguely uneasy by her mentor's comments about her changing body. Yet, neither would want to appear unappreciative or disrespectful. In light of these issues, it is best to err on the side of caution, as there are many ways to show affection and closeness that do not involve physical contact or even benignly crossed boundaries.

Another boundary issue concerns multiple roles. Just as it may be unfeasible for therapists to avoid social or other nonprofessional contacts with their clients, mentoring relationships may involve multiple roles. Mentors should be aware of the potential harmful effects of certain types of multiple roles on their relationship with protégés and protégés themselves. They should avoid entering into personal, professional, financial, or other relationships with their protégés (and family members) if such a relationship might interfere with their objectivity or ability to work effectively as a mentor or might harm or exploit the protégé. For example, although parents might naturally gravitate towards their child's college-aged mentor when looking for a paid math tutor, the volunteer may better serve the parents by connecting the family with other resources. Other potentially compromising situations include mentors personally providing employment for protégés or offering advice to the child or family based on their professional expertise (e.g., medical, legal, psychological). For example, mentors who offer summer employment run the risk of their protégés performing poorly or even transgressing on the job. Such problems can be avoided if compromising multiple relationships are not entered in the first place.

In other instances, mentors may find themselves encroaching on the territory of professionals in the child's life (e.g., tutors, therapists, juvenile probation officers). Maintaining clarity about the boundaries of the mentor's role is not always easy. Mentors should be mindful of situations in which protégés make disclosures or raise concerns that would be better handled by a parent or professional and suggest that the child take his or her concerns up with them. Training and supervision can assist volunteers in recognizing the boundaries and limits of their expertise and to seek assistance from program staff when needed.

B: Be Trustworthy and Responsible (Fidelity and Responsibility)

This principle is rooted in the ethical notion of fidelity, or "behaving in a trustworthy manner and keeping one's promise or word" (Strom-Gottfried, 2008, p. 21). For volunteer mentors, this involves being aware of one's responsibilities for meeting frequency and match duration, as stipulated by the program. This type of consistency and reliability—which has been associated with more positive outcomes for youth participants (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006, 2008)—serves as a basis for trust in the relationship. Trust, in turn, is considered a cornerstone of effective mentoring relationships (Sipe, 1996). Protégés have reported that honesty, keeping promises, and relationship longevity underlies trust (Liang, Spencer, Brogan, & Corral, 2008).

Unfortunately, as many as half of volunteer mentoring relationships end prematurely, most often at the request of the volunteer

(Rhodes, 2002). Some premature endings are unavoidable, such as when a mentor is unexpectedly relocated or the protégé's family decides to leave the area. All too often, however, relationships come to a heartbreaking close when the mentor ceases involvement and contacts neither the protégé nor the mentoring program to provide an explanation. This is concerning especially in light of evidence that early terminations can lead to decrements in youth functioning (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2005; Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Prematch training on this topic is especially critical, as mentors may not be aware of the influence they have had or how the termination will be interpreted (Spencer, 2007).

Many mentors enter the relationships with idealized notions of the experience, in some cases fueled by program promotional material and messages that highlight the joys of mentoring without discussing the everyday challenges and potential vulnerabilities of youth (Spencer, 2007). Mentors can become easily discouraged, even exasperated, if they interpret a child's lack of engagement as deliberate, rather than stemming, for example, from a history of disappointment or abuse. When imagined rewards are not realized or take a different form, mentors may decide that the relationship is not what they had bargained for and end the match.

Others might feel shame at their failure to connect with a child or fulfill their commitment and chose to avoid rather than honestly confront the situation. Volunteers accustomed to success and mastery in their professional or academic lives may experience a sense of helplessness or despair when confronted with the sometimes-chaotic lives of vulnerable youth (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Rather than confront these feelings, they sometimes chose the path of avoidance, casting their decision to withdraw from the relationships as a lack of time, and assuaging guilt with rationalizations that the child already has ample support or will be better served by a different mentor. Programs are obliged to inform mentors of common and predictable challenges and phases in mentoring relationships, and to provide sufficient training and case management to prevent small lapses from becoming insurmountable obstacles. Should a termination become inevitable, programs must provide clear termination guidelines, and mentors should be held accountable to them. Transitions in mentoring relationships should always be planned, and the child and his or her family should be given ample notice and explanation.

C: Act With Integrity (Integrity)

Related to the principle of fidelity and responsibility is mentors' obligation to be thoughtful and forthright about the commitments (i.e., time, financial) to the relationship and to avoid setting up false expectations. A mentoring relationship, like any other interpersonal relationship, holds the potential for disappointment, misunderstanding, conflict, and various types of communication breakdowns, which can have negative consequences for both parties if they are poorly managed. Families can experience lapses in telephone service or fail to be home at an appointed meeting time. Similarly, mentors may leave phone messages or send e-mails that the young person never receives, or may hold unrealistic expectations regarding the nature, promptness, or frequency of communication they expect to receive. Volunteers may also neglect to inform their protégés of travel plans, or cancel meetings and fail to

return telephone calls or e-mails when work or school demands arise unexpectedly.

Mentors should be reminded about how important their obligations are to their protégés, and the meaning that is placed on plans and events. A protégé may experience an outing with a mentor as an especially memorable event or may anticipate planned activities with great excitement. Last minute changes or cancelations of activities, which may seem perfectly justifiable to a busy volunteer, can be crushing to a youngster. And, even minor disappointments and tardiness can accumulate in ways that erode trust and closeness. They can lead to misunderstandings, which may go unresolved and contribute to feelings of hurt and resentment on the part of the youth, mentor, and parents. Mentors should be expected to bear the greater responsibility for finding ways to effectively and consistently communicate with their protégés, to honor plans and commitments, and to seek guidance and consultation from mentoring program staff should they find that they are unable to do so.

Mentors should also conduct themselves with integrity in their protégés' schools, homes, and communities by being respectful of customs and regularities, and by not acting in ways that leave programs needing to run interference. Finally, although there are always exceptions, mentors should be wary of entering into financial arrangements with protégés or their families. Although it might seem harmless for a mentor to pay the electricity bill for 1 month, particularly when rationalized in terms of helping the protégé, this may have the unintended consequence of establishing expectations of further (and perhaps greater) assistance. Nonetheless, there are ways in which a volunteer can express generosity without complicating the relationship. A volunteer's desire to fund a child's summer camp could, for example, be brokered by the mentoring program through an "anonymous" scholarship donation.

D: Promote Justice for Young People (Justice)

This principle calls for mentors to exercise good judgment and to take precautions to ensure that the potential biases inherent in their own backgrounds do not lead to prejudicial treatment of their protégé. The standards of the APA's *Ethics Code* (2002) stipulate that psychologists do not "engage in unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law" (p. 5), and the same holds true for mentors. The reality is that the largest proportion of volunteer mentors are White, middle-class students, and professionals whereas youth protégés tend to be more economically and ethnically diverse (MENTOR, 2006).

Differences in cultural backgrounds and values may lead volunteers to hold or unwittingly act on cultural biases. Instead, volunteers should receive prematch training and ongoing supervision/consultation to avoid making assumptions about mentees' that are based on, or insensitive to, the latter's social class, gender, or disabilities. For example, a volunteer's suggestion that his African American protégé serve as a golf caddy at his country club could easily upset the protégé's parents and ignite racial tensions. Similarly, mentors volunteering for one of the many new programs serving children with incarcerated parents often hold assumptions and biases about the prison population that may manifest them-

selves in internal struggles: wanting to be respectful of their protégé's relationship with the incarcerated parent, whereas experiencing anger or even fear towards this parent. When left unchecked and unresolved, these internal conflicts and biases are likely to compromise a mentor's judgment and ability to treat protégé' and their families with fairness and respect.

Mentoring programs have an obligation to provide training in cultural competence and gender sensitivity so as to raise volunteers' awareness of their own biases and blind spots (Liang & Grossman, 2007; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). This should involve both initial training and ongoing supervision as new situations arise so that mentors can openly acknowledge any biases that they may hold and to remain open and nonjudgmental.

Unfortunately, programs often assume that once a mentoring relationship has been formed, the strength of the bond will mitigate against potential misunderstandings and miscommunications that may arise as a result of differences in cultural values and backgrounds. Research does lend some provisional support to the assumption that a strong bond can offset cultural differences. A national study of mentoring relationships formed through Big Brothers Big Sisters (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002) found that, although cross-race matches terminated slightly more often than did same-race matches, this was not the case among those pairs who were matched primarily on the basis of similar interests. Nevertheless, unacknowledged prejudices can subtly affect interpersonal relationships (Cohen & Steele, 2002).

Promoting justice can also extend beyond the one-to-one relationship with a protégé. By bringing more privileged adults into the lives of less privileged young people, mentoring has the potential to promote social change. Mentors' close personal connections with vulnerable youth affords them the opportunity to develop a first-hand understanding of the challenges faced by young people today, which can inspire them to redress social ills and advocate for policies that could improve the health and well-being of all youth living in these kinds of circumstances (Walker, 2005).

F: Respect the Young Person's Rights and Dignity (Respect for People's Rights and Dignity)

This ethical principle is partially rooted in the moral principle of self-determination, and involves respecting a young person's (and his or her family's) choices. Except in extreme situations (e.g., abuse, neglect, endangerment), volunteers should seek to understand and respect the decisions and lifestyle of a young person and his or her family (Beauchamp & Childress, 2008). Respect for self-determination involves behaving in ways that enable rather than interfere with protégés' and their families' ability to exercise their own reasoning and moral judgment. Mentors should seek to understand the youth's own personal goals, desires, and values and not undermine the young person's capacity to make his or her own decisions. Adherence to the rights and dignity principle also involves being attentive to the protégé's right to privacy and confidentiality. Issues of confidentiality, which abound in youth mentoring relationships, have been given insufficient attention. Youth and parents often disclose deeply personal information to volunteers, sometimes with specific injunctions against sharing it with the other. For example, parents have disclosed to volunteer mentors highly sensitive information about themselves (e.g., HIV infection, paternal incarceration), which has not been shared with

the protégé. Complex issues can also arise around the flow of information among mentors, teachers, and parents. Mentors sometimes share private information about their protégés and their protégés' families to schools, or share with parents information that has been provided to them by school staff.

Similarly, protégés often make disclosures (e.g., regarding substance abuse, sexual behaviors or orientation) with stipulations that they not be repeated to parents. Having a place to share private thoughts and feelings is an aspect of mentor relationships that youth have identified as being particularly meaningful to them (Spencer, Jordan, & Sazama, 2004). Nonparent adults can serve as important sounding boards for youth, particularly in adolescence when youth are exploring their identities and may experience new forms of conflicts in their relationships with their parents (Allen, Moore, & Kuperminc, 1998).

Serving as a confidante to young people can, however, involve difficult decisions about what information can or should be kept confidential and what needs to be disclosed. Despite such complications, volunteers are rarely trained in the nuances of managing sensitive information, including situations in which confidence should be violated. Professional helpers are trained to disclose the limits of confidentiality, and mentors should follow suit. As such, they should inform their protégés of their obligation to break confidence should the protégé disclose intentions to be harmful to themselves or others. Similarly, mentors are obliged to report to the mentoring program any suspicions that their protégé has been subject to abuse or neglect. Mentors and programs often find themselves struggling to define situations of parents' neglect, and knowing when and whom to report problems.

In less extreme cases, a mentor's desire to build and maintain hard-earned trust, particularly with teenagers, can complicate decisions about whether and when to violate confidentiality. A parent might feel betrayed by a volunteer mentor's decision to keep information about their child's transgressions in confidence. Yet the volunteer might fear that breaking the protégé's confidence would compromise the relationship, potentially shutting down further (and more serious) disclosures. Training around issues of confidentiality should be provided and decisions regarding such matters should be made in consultation with mentoring program staff.

Conclusions

Although youth mentoring shares many of the conventions of more professionalized helping relationships, the informal and voluntary nature of this endeavor releases it from some of the more rigid proscriptions that govern such ties. At the same time, mentors often enter into the lives of children in very personal ways and, as such, should be held accountable for protecting their rights and welfare. Programs have an obligation to sensitize volunteer mentors to the ethical issues that can arise when working with unrelated youth, to offer guidelines on how to support and nurture the positive development of children, and to clearly communicate these expectations through training and ongoing support. Comprehensive prematch and ongoing training, which takes developmental, gender, and cultural issues into account, could ensure more effective relationship development, helping mentors to better understand and relate to protégés of diverse backgrounds, avoid ethical violations, and create more positive outcomes.

Good intentions alone are not enough to ensure that mentors will build relationships with their protégés that are helpful and not harmful. Lack of attention to ethical issues has many pitfalls, and could ultimately lead to poor and even harmful decisions. Mentors will be more likely to frame their quandaries as falling within the purview of ethics if they have been sensitized to such issues from the beginning of the relationship (Kitchener, 1986). Within this context, mentors can be prompted to think about whether and how the actions they take in various case scenarios and actual situations may affect the mentoring relationship and the welfare of their protégés. To achieve this, mentors must be willing to tolerate ambiguity as they determine the best course of action. The complex nature of mentoring relationships, and the many sociodemographic divides that these relationships tend to cross, call for a reasoned, thoughtful, informed, and self-reflective approach.

The ethical principles delineated here are purposely broad. A more detailed set of guidelines would be difficult to apply to the many different types of mentoring relationships in which youth and adults engage (e.g., traditional face-to-face mentoring programs, online programs, group mentoring, informal ties). Further, more prescriptive guidelines would likely limit mentoring relationships in ways that could inhibit the open and natural qualities that make them special relationships in the lives of youth. The principles are thus presented as aspirational goals (Fisher, 2003), intended to raise ethical awareness and to encourage more studied reflection on the complex situations that inevitably arise when caring adults enter the lives of unrelated youth.

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