



Creative Mentoring® News

Building a better future, one child at a time.

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Kirk Middle School Celebrates Mentors!

HAPPY SPRING

On Wednesday, January 31st, Kirk Middle School celebrated National Mentoring Month and honored their mentors and mentees with a buffet dinner and recognition ceremony. Twelve mentors attended, along with their students and the students' parents, and all were treated to a wonderful buffet dinner of barbecued chicken, hamburgers, assorted salads and sides, and dessert.

On hand to observe and help celebrate were Art Madric and Crystal Jackson, the coordinators for the Kirk mentor program, Principal Donald Patton and Acting Assistant Principal Eric Mathis. Also present to represent Creative Mentoring were Celeste Hall, Director, and Joyce Fangman, the Creative Mentoring trainer for New Castle County. All spoke to the group praising their efforts and emphasizing the mentors' importance to the overall success of the participating students. In addition, each mentor was asked to stand and be recognized, and received a gift certificate in thanks for their hard work and dedication.



Principal Donald Patton

One of the mentors attending the event was Stacey Altemus from Nationwide Insurance, along with her mentee Annie, and Annie's mother April Boltz. Stacey has been mentoring for 10 years, starting with the HOSTS program, and ending with 6 years of mentoring at Kirk Middle. She is now the coordinator for all the mentors from Nationwide who mentor at Kirk Middle. She has been mentoring Annie, who is in 8th grade, for two years. Stacey says she enjoys mentoring tremendously, and it "takes the focus off the daily hustle and bustle and (puts it) onto what's really important – Annie and the other kids."

When asked about Stacey, Annie said she is a wonderful person who has helped her through



Art Madric (left) and Crystal Jackson (3rd from left) with the mentees of Kirk Middle School

many situations. Stacey has helped her with her organizational skills, social skills and math, and they have had many fun times together. (Stacey says her math contribution was to help Annie focus while Annie actually did the math work herself.) Annie feels she is better prepared to succeed since she has had a mentor.

When asked what improvements she has seen in her daughter since she's had a mentor, Ms. Boltz replied that she has seen significant improvement in Annie's ability to express herself without becoming upset or frustrated. She said, "It's a big thing to have someone other than her mom and her teachers pay attention and spend time with her."

Kirk Middle School currently has 18 active mentors and is actively pursuing additional volunteers.



Annie, an 8th grader, hams it up with her mentor, Stacey Altemus.

Dealing with the Blues

Most of us have had the blues some time in our life. Hopefully it is a transient feeling related to a situation or occurrence in our lives which passes in a few days or weeks as we come to terms with the situation or deal with the problem. As adults we usually have many resources to help us deal with these feelings such as friends to talk to and family to support us. Sometimes the symptoms last longer than a few weeks and feelings are particularly overwhelming or disabling.

In that case we may be diagnosed with depression and turn to professional counselors who can help us manage and overcome the depression so that we can continue competently with our lives.

It should come as no surprise that children also can fall victim to the blues. According to the surgeon general, 10 to 15% of children and adolescents show some symptoms of depression, while 5% of children ages 9 – 17 can be diagnosed with major depression which can last from 7 to 9 months. Finally, 3% of adolescents have dysthymia, which is a low-grade depression which can last for several years. The worst aspect of these illnesses is that if left untreated, they can lead to suicide, which is the 3rd leading cause of death for teens.

What can you do to help if your mentee seems to be depressed? First and foremost, if you believe the child is in danger of attempting suicide, immediately report this to the school coordinator. He or she has the resources to intercede with the parents and school administration to get the help the child needs. Do not attempt to call a suicide hotline or contact the parents or a professional on your own; let the school administration deal with the issue following state procedures.

What if the child just seems mildly depressed or unable to cope with everyday stresses? There is much you can do to help the child learn better coping mechanisms so that they are less inclined to feel depressed or overwhelmed. The main area to focus on is **thinking patterns**. Often children get caught up in **negative self-talk**, which can help cause depression and also keep it going once a child has become depressed. Negative self-talk means the things that a child automatically says to himself in his mind, like “I always mess up”, or “Nothing good ever happens to me”, or “I just know I can’t do it.” Try to challenge these statements if the child verbalizes them to you. Point out successes the child has had as evidence that he doesn’t always mess up. Praise, praise, praise every success the child has with phrases like “I knew you could do it!” and “You did a great job!” Give him new phrases to practice saying to himself, such as “I know I can do it” and “Nobody’s perfect” and “I’ll just do my best.” With patience and constant positive reinforcement, you can help a child work his/her way out of negative thinking.

Children who are depressed often exhibit **erroneous thinking**. There are 4 main types of erroneous thinking:*

Catastrophic thinking – anything negative that happens is a catastrophe of huge proportions. There are no small problems.

Black and White thinking – there is only

Signs of Depression in Children and Adolescents*

- *Eating too much, or too little*
- *Sleeping too much, or unable to sleep well*
- *Feeling very restless, or very sluggish*
- *Losing interest in or pleasure with activities they used to enjoy*
- *Feeling worthless or thinking negative thoughts about themselves*
- *Difficulty concentrating*
- *Thinking about running away, death or suicide*
- *Often irritated or in a bad mood*
- *Indifferent about hygiene or clothing*
- *Fatigued nearly every day*
- *Trouble making decisions or setting goals*
- *Thinking about hurting others*
- *Withdrawal from friends or family*
- *Dip in grades, attendance and/or class participation.*

great and terrible, fantastic or awful, with no shades of gray in-between.

Pessimistic thinking – no good can possibly come from any endeavor.

Everything is personal thinking – if anything bad happens, it is the child’s fault whether she/he had control over it or not.



When talking with your mentee, listen for examples of erroneous thinking. Gently challenge the conclusions that they come to and help them see the parts they’re missing. Ask if they had thought of other possible outcomes and give examples. Then ask them what they think is the most likely outcome. Thinking a problem or situation through and seeing all sides of it is a skill that you can help your mentee develop with practice and understanding.

Children and some adults too often think that their emotions are caused by events. They forget that there is a step in the middle, the thinking step. The pattern is like this:*

Action or Event =====>**Belief or Thought** =====>**Feelings and Behaviors**

For example, suppose the child leaves the project that is due today home on the kitchen table. The child immediately thinks, I’m doomed, I am going to fail this project and my parents will kill me, and becomes very upset and panicky. This is an example of catastrophic thinking; the child has completely skipped the Thinking step. If the child stops to think, he may see he has a lot of options. He could call his parent or a neighbor to bring the project to school for him. Or he could explain what happened to the teacher and bring in the project the following day, possibly for less credit, and ask for an extra-credit assignment. After he does the thinking step, he may still feel discouraged but will not be panicky, knowing that he has options.

Remember that if you believe the child has a real depression, lasting over several weeks or months, talk about it to the school counselor. There will be additional steps the counselor can take to get the help the child needs.

**Getting Over the Blues: A Kid’s Guide to Understanding and Coping with Unpleasant Feelings and Depression*, by Kim Frank and Susan Smith-Rex, Educational Media Corporation, 1996.

Borrow this book from the Creative Mentoring Library! Just give us a call at 302-656-2122!

* **The Skills** *
* **Corner...** *

Middle School Activities

Photo Album

Adapted from *My Mentor & Me – the Middle School Years* by Dr. Susan G. Weinberger, 2003, published by the Governor’s Prevention Partnership for Connecticut Mentoring Partnership, Hartford, Connecticut.



Capture your time together with your mentee in a way that he/she can appreciate for years by creating a photo album of your time together. **You will need: a camera (regular, digital or disposable), an album, markers and crayons, construction paper, glue, and regular white paper.**

Every time you see your mentee, take pictures of what you are working on together, even if it’s simply playing a game. Be sure to record the date each picture was taken, and include a note about the activity (“Jenny won this game but I want a re-

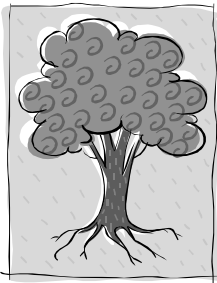
The Skills Corner . Continued

match!") Have the photos developed and look at them with your mentee and decide which ones should go into the album.

Glue the picture onto a piece of construction paper, and write the date of the picture and any note about it onto the paper. Then mount the paper in the album. By the end of the year you will have a lovely photographic record of your time together.

Family Tree

Adapted from *My Mentor & Me – the Middle School Years* by Dr. Susan G. Weinberger, 2003, published by the Governor's Prevention Partnership for Connecticut Mentoring Partnership, Hartford, Connecticut.



Making a family tree is a wonderful way to start learning about your mentee's family. You can also share some of your family history as you work on your trees together. **You will need: white poster board (2 small or 1 large sheet cut in half), colored markers/crayons, lined paper and pencil, and a ruler.**

First, each of you should list on the lined paper the members of your immediate family – mother, father, sisters and brothers. Then starting with your mother, list her parents and her siblings, and the children of her siblings (your cousins.) Do the same for your father, including his parents, his siblings and their children. If there are any step-relations, include them also. Can either of you go back any farther? Include as many family members as you can.

Then on the poster board use your pencil to draw an outline of a tree similar to the one shown here. You will be filling in the names of the immediate family in among the leaves, and the names of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins will be shown down by the roots, so be sure to leave enough room in each area for all the names.

Write your name right in the middle of the leaves, underline it using the ruler, and write ME underneath it. Then write the names of your immediate family among the leaves around your name. Underline each name and write their relationship to you underneath (mother, sister, etc.)

Then write your grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins down by the roots. Try to list them in order so you can see which cousin goes with which aunt and uncle, etc. Underline and label each with their relationship to you.

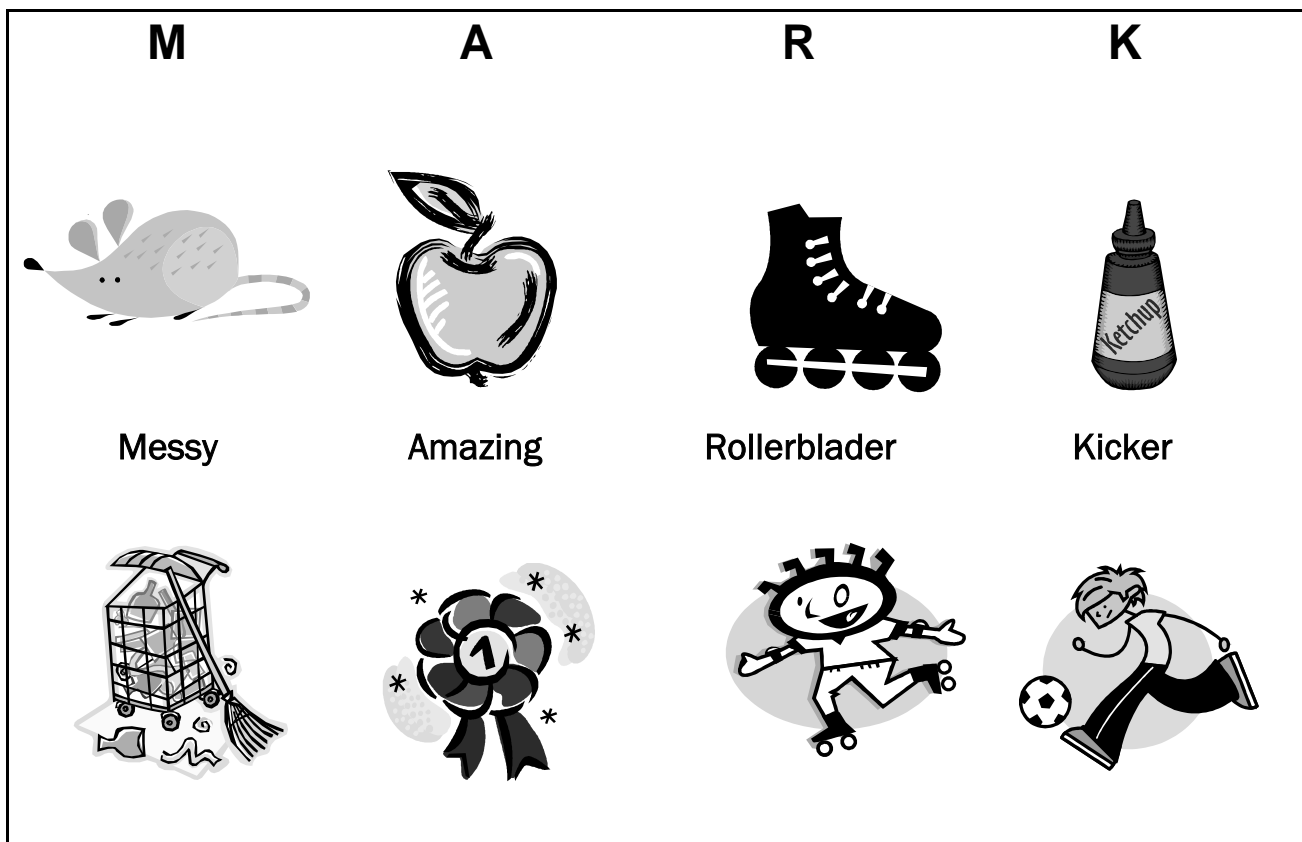
Across the top of the poster board, write "My Family Tree". Do you know the meaning or origin of your family name? If so write that underneath the heading. Finally, decorate the tree using the markers or crayons. Laminate the tree if you can and be prepared to enjoy it for a long time!

Elementary School Activities

Name Graph

This project will help the child see how special their name is as beginning sounds and language skills are reinforced. **You will need: sheet of drawing paper or white poster board, crayons or markers, scissors, glue, and old magazines.**

Have each child write his name across the top of the paper as shown. Evenly space the letters across the whole page. (Children with very long names may want to use a nickname.) Draw vertical lines between the letters and a line underneath the name going all the way across the page.



Then review each letter in the name and the sounds they make. Have the children draw a picture of something they like that begins with that letter, or they can cut out pictures from the magazines and glue them on.

For the 2nd row, have the child think of a word that describes them that begins with that letter. Finally for the 3rd row, have the child draw a picture or glue on a magazine picture that illustrates the word above it.

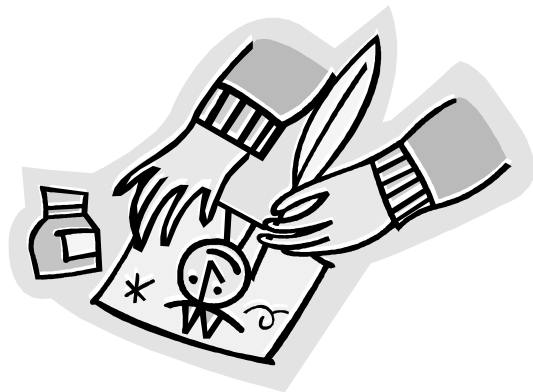
Picture Portfolios

Children's self-portraits reflect how they feel about themselves and tell a story about their development as they grow and change. **You will need: drawing paper, crayons, markers, paints and a mirror.**

At the beginning of your mentoring relationship, ask the student to draw a picture of him or herself. Let them use the mirror so they can see what they look like. Date the picture and let the student dictate or write a sentence to go along with the picture. Save the picture in a folder.

Each month or so ask the student to draw another picture of him or herself. Date each picture and have the student write or dictate a sentence for each one.

At the end of the year, put the pictures together to make a book to send home with the student. Look at the pictures together and talk about how the student has changed and new things he or she has learned since you started with him/her. Let the student decorate the covers of his/her book.



Speaking and Writing for Success –

helping your mentee learn the language of achievement

The following is taken from the book “A Framework for Understanding Poverty” by Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., published in 1996 by aha! Process, Inc.

One of the problems facing young people from lower income families and neighborhoods is the inability to express themselves, both written and orally, in the way that school expects. Children from higher-income families seem to do this much more easily compared to their counterparts from lower-income families. Teachers become frustrated when a child can't write a simple story or can't explain an answer when called upon, even though the child appears bright and able.

Dr. Payne explains this as a difference in **language register**: The school expects the child to communicate in **formal register**, while the child only knows how to communicate in **casual register**. She defines **formal register** as “the standard sentence syntax and word choice of work and school. Has complete sentences and specific word choice.” (p. 27). What you are currently reading is written in formal register. Formal register is used in schools, on tests, at job interviews, and has a much broader vocabulary than casual register. It is learned at home as a matter of course by middle- and upper income children.

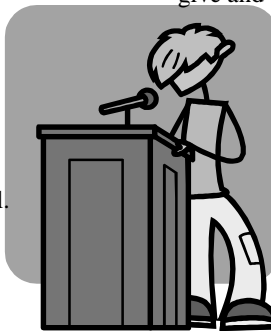
Casual register is defined as “Language between friends...characterized by a 400 - 800 word vocabulary. Word choice general and not specific. Conversation dependent upon non-verbal assists. Sentence syntax often incomplete.” (p. 27). To understand casual register, imagine a conversation between 2 young people on the street. “Hey, whazzup dude? Boy, today was lousy. That test by Miz Griffin was so... (shakes head). I was like... (shrugs) lost, you know.” Casual register is in general the only way lower-income children learn to express themselves from interactions with their family and environment. Thus these children do not know how to communicate in the way that school and standardized testing expects them to.

Adding to the problem is the different **pattern of discourse** seen in formal versus casual register. In formal register, the speaker gets right to the point: “Traveling by air is faster than traveling by car.” In casual register, “the pattern is to go around and around and finally get to the point....Educators become frustrated with the tendency of these students to meander almost endlessly through a topic.” (p. 28)

Finally, the **story structure** differs between formal and casual register. “The formal-register story structure starts at the beginning of the story and goes to the end ... The most important part of the story is the **plot**.” (p.31). Speech or writing in this manner shows sequence, order, and cause and effect, all traits necessary for the tasks children are required to do in school.

Casual register story structure reflects the patterns of casual **conversation**. It “begins with the end of the story first or the part with the greatest emotional intensity. The story is told in <bits and pieces>, with audience participation in between. The story ends with a comment about the character and his/her value. The most important part of the story is the **characterization**.” (p. 31). As you might expect, this way of speaking is much more fun with its give and take, interjected comments, humor and colorful descriptions. It is excellent for entertainment and conversation but is not useful for school when a child is expected to give facts and ideas in a straightforward way, without the give and take of normal conversation.

What can you do if your mentee can only communicate via casual conversation? Below are some ideas of how you can teach your mentee how to communicate the way school and jobs expect him/her to communicate. Stress with your mentee that better-paying jobs and doing well on school work depend on his/her ability to communicate the way school expects them to.



1. Explain what formal register is in a way the student can understand. You can call it “school language” and explain that this is the way that writing and speaking is supposed to be done in school. Stress that mastering “school language” will help him/her do better on tests.
2. Have the child write about a situation casually, the way they would talk about it, and then help him translate it into “school language.”
3. Help the child learn how to express anger or dissatisfaction in a more formal, restrained way. Discipline is often lighter if the child can calmly and clearly express his point of view. Make up stories as a way to show the child different ways to behave.
4. Practice telling a story in both ways. Suggest a topic such as, “Tell about one time when you were really happy. What had happened to make you so happy?” First have him/her tell the story as they would in casual conversation, with gestures and give and take, focusing on what seems most interesting. Then help the student tell it in formal register, from start to finish, in order, with no gestures and with no comments or reactions from you. Then talk about how the stories are different and how they are similar.
5. Use stories when working on math and science to help develop concepts. Use human traits to describe math and science ideas and problems.



He Said, She Said in the Volunteer world

by Joan Perry, CAVS
Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital

"How can I be of help?" she asked,
"I have a good idea," he said,
"Here, hold my hand," she suggested,
"We'll do it together," they offered.

"We'll be right here until it's done."
"Let's do it this way, its more fun!"
"It's what we're here for, it's no fuss."
"Call us back if you should need us."

"She needs our help, God bless her heart."
"Oh, I'm just glad to do my part."
"Walk with me, I'll show the way."
"Goodness no, I don't want pay."

"You can do it, I'll show you how."
"You need it when? I'll do it now."
"If you need anything I'm right here."
"Who am I? A volunteer."

"Kindness in words creates confidence... kindness is giving creates love."
Lao Tzu (6th century B.C.) Chinese philosopher



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Mom,

An eagle flying high,
Looks down on our home from the sky
It sees all the love and support you give me,
For my success as a man, you'll be the key.



Love,

Francisco

11 years old, 5th Grader at Highlands Elementary School