

Grand Area Mentoring / 435-260-9646

Small Changes → Big Solutions

Mentoring to Reduce Toxic Stress

Imagine if scientists discovered a toxic substance that increased the risks of cancer, diabetes and heart, lung and liver disease for millions of people. Something that also increased one's risks for smoking, drug abuse, suicide, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, domestic violence and depression — and simultaneously reduced the chances of succeeding in school, performing well on a job and maintaining stable relationships? It would be comparable to hazards like lead paint, tobacco smoke and mercury. We would do everything in our power to contain it and keep it far away from children. Right?

Well, there is such a thing, but it's not a substance. It's been called 'toxic stress.' For more than a decade, researchers have understood that frequent or continual stress on young children who lack adequate protection and support from adults, is strongly associated with increases in the risks of lifelong health and social problems, including all those listed above.

In the New York Times article *Toxic Stress in Children*, David Bornstein describes a challenge some of our students face: chronic stress. Due to continual anxiety or fear, levels of cortisol can be ramped up in the brain, profoundly affecting development. This tension-filled environment prepares children to struggle through a life of danger.

Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn write in their piece entitled *The Way to Beat Poverty*, “in today's world, the result is schoolchildren who are so alert to danger that they cannot concentrate. They are also so suspicious of others that they are prone to pre-emptive aggression.”

The good news? We can take proactive measures to mitigate toxic stress in children's lives. One such step: mentoring.

Enjoying safe, nurturing fun with your mentee reduces their stress load. It allows children to form an emotional attachment to you, which is a critical component for growing up healthy. You can do even more. Help your mentee make friends with other children and supervise their interactions with peers during your weekly session. Role model and explicitly discuss problem solving, cooperation, and proper strategies to resolve disputes. This is mentoring.

Thanks for offering these kids what they clearly need: the safety and care of a responsible adult like you.

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow." –Melodie Beattie



This Month in Mentoring

- **December 22-January 4: Holiday Break.** No School. No Mentoring.
- **SAVE THE DATE – January 17, 10am: National Mentoring Month Volunteer Celebration!** You and a guest are invited to join us Saturday morning at Sweet Cravings (397 N. Main St) for a free brunch. We will eat delicious food, mix with fellow volunteers, and be part of a special gift giveaway for each and every volunteer.

"One big take-away is to change the question from: What's wrong with the person? To: What happened to the person? And: What's the best response? (Hint: punishment is usually not.)"

–David Bornstein, *Protecting Children From Toxic Stress*, NY Times (2013)

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Mail:

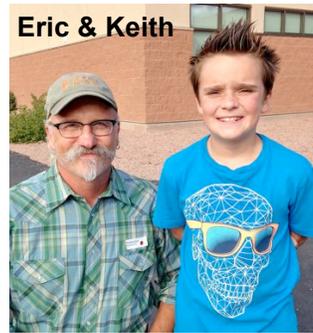
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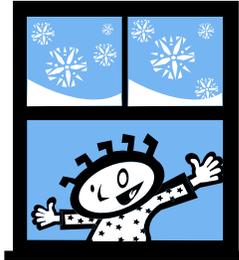
Idea of the Month #2: Venture Off Campus

Wintertime might send us indoors to get away from the cold, but it should not hamper off-campus activities.

There are lots of places to explore in comfort,

locations like: Moab's Rock Shop, the Moab Diner, Gravel Pit Lanes, Back of Beyond Books, the Museum of Moab, Grand County Library, WabiSabi, and KZMU. As ever, please remember these program rules:

- Two adults must be present at all times, both official volunteers or employees of the school district.
- Mentors must call ahead to clear activity with parents.
- Call Megan (260-9645) to tell her know where you will be going for a record of your whereabouts.
- Complete the yellow off-campus report form upon return to school.
- Choose only activities that are safe and appropriate.



Idea of the month #1: Make a Time Capsule!



Create a meaningful reminder to be opened at the end of the year or several years from now. You'll need:

- Container (shoebox sized), decorative materials, duct tape
- Photographs of you and your mentee
- Newspaper or magazine clippings that show current events, trends, fashions, and important news
- Small objects, preferably things that capture the spirit of you & your mentee and the current time period – something like baseball cards, a string to measure your mentee's height (which should change over time!), tracing of your mentee's hand, etc.
- Letters to your future selves about where you expect to be in two years, what you expect to happen in the meantime, and what you would do on a weekend if you could do anything you wanted right now.
- On an index card, list your favorite food, books, movies, sports teams, hobbies, games. On another, define yourself with five words. On another, list the top three things you would buy if you had \$1,000,000.

Plastic containers about the size of a shoebox are available at local discount stores. Heck, a shoebox would work, but you'll want to make it look special somehow. And you'll also want to seal it up tight so you and your mentee know that it will be safe until you open it. When finished, store the capsule at home— just make sure you remember where you store it and when to open it!