

## Kick Start Your Mentor Program and Stop the Bullies!

by: Paula McCoach Whining about bullying and how rotten the bullies were and the poor students that they bullied used to be one of my regular activities. "We have to do something to help these kids" both the bullies and their victims," I would whine. But for years, I just talked to these kids and sent them on their way. After I got sick and tired of being sick and tired of talking about this - I did do something! I started a mentor program for these students! Behavior referrals, grades, social problems, and poor achievement were our starting criteria for being in the program. Almost every staff member in the building had 2-3 mentees - everyone from the administration, teachers, and counselors to the educational assistants, cafeteria workers and custodians. Over 150 students were in that mentor program which began in 1998. Each mentor was given a mentor folder with a permission slip, a brochure about the program, a profile sheet, and tips on being a mentor, a pencil and a "Welcome Back to School" card. The profile sheet identified their mentees, homeroom teacher, grade, birthday, and area of concern. Also included in the packet was a birthday card and pencil for the mentor to give their mentees. Giving gifts was left of to the discretion of the mentor. Some mentees came to expect gifts and the purpose of the mentor relationship was diminished. The kids came to expect them and thought that they were 'entitled' to getting things from the mentor. I had students asking me to be in the mentor program because they wanted to get stuff. We really learned that first year to reinforce that the mentor program was about improving behavior and grades to be more successful in school - and we had to keep telling the kids that too! As all of you know, people who work in a school are super busy, and we found that having even just 2 mentees was too much. It was difficult to develop the relationship and effect change because the mentors were stretched too thin. So in the years to come, and we are in our 7th year of the mentor program, we have assigned everyone only 1 mentee. Another area of concern was keeping track of the number of mentors in the program. Over the years we have reduced this number - first we cut back to only the professional staff having mentees. Staff who wanted to be mentors and had the knack for working with these problematic students were asked to be mentors. A few educational assistants were also asked also because of their expertise in this area also. Dramatic results were reported with a group of middle school girls. One of the girls had to actually break away from the group of girls who were bullying, so she could improve her reputation as a respectful and serious student. This was a difficult process, and she had 2 mentors working with her to help her make this difficult peer group change. The parent/guardian was not supportive. By the end of the school year, she had completely changed groups of friends, made the honor roll, and received a multitude of awards for academic excellence at the quarterly awards assembly. So, don't worry that you don't have all the pieces in place. You will learn and improve your program each year. Just start helping these kids! You will be inspired and the kids will be thrilled and getting their education! For more information on kick starting your mentor program, send an email to [coach@bullyzapper.com](mailto:coach@bullyzapper.com) © 2004 Permission granted to reprint this article in print or on your web site so long as the paragraph above is included and contact information is provided to the email [coach@bullyzapper.com](mailto:coach@bullyzapper.com)

### About the Author

Paula McCoach has been in public education for 23 years. She has been a school counselor for the past 10 in an alternative school and an elementary/middle school in Maryland. She has spearheaded mentor programs, Character Education initiatives, & Bully awareness. For more information, send an email to [coach@bullyzapper.com](mailto:coach@bullyzapper.com)

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