

RESEARCH SUMMARY

“The mentoring FAN: A conceptual model of attunement for youth development settings”

What is this study about?

This study explores the usefulness of a new approach to training that can help staff members and mentors work together to build stronger relationships with mentees. The model is based on the importance of *attunement* in relationships, which involves the ability to be mindful of others needs and preferences and respond to them in a timely, sensitive, and appropriate manner. Acknowledging the critical role that mentoring practitioners play in the facilitation of high-quality mentoring relationships, the FAN (Facilitating Attuned Interactions) model seeks to build stronger connections between mentoring practitioners and mentors, which ultimately helps mentors develop stronger connections with their mentees. This study describes the Mentoring FAN and illustrates how the model can build staff members’ communication and relationship-building skills.

Where did the study take place?

This research study took place in the United States.

Who was involved in the study?

This study involved 9 staff members of a site-based mentoring program that focused primarily on literacy skills.

How was the study conducted?

Before being trained in the Mentoring FAN, participants completed a questionnaire about their self-reflection, mindfulness, and attunement skills. After training, staff members applied their learning over the course of 5 months. The study concluded with interviews and a follow-up survey.

What were the key findings?

This research identified five core components of the Mentoring FAN:

Calming: Being mindful and centered before meeting with the mentor. Identifying, regulating, and understanding emotional reactions throughout the meeting with the mentor.

Feeling: Listening to the mentors’ feelings with empathy, concern, and care.

Thinking: Collaborating with the mentor to think through their current challenges or concerns and developing a plan to address them in a responsible and caring manner.

Doing: Supporting the mentor to enact the plan by focusing on their strengths, providing information, and/or practicing the plan together as a team.

Reflecting: Supporting the mentor to discuss what they have learned about themselves, their approach to mentoring, and how they will carry this learning into their relationship with their mentee.

- Results also discovered that all participants responded well to the new training model and appreciated the new skills and insights that they developed.
- Over the course of 5 months, results also indicated that the Mentoring FAN improved staff member's empathy, listening and collaboration skills, ability to reflect on themselves as support staff, gain insight about themselves and their work, and increase their attunement to the needs of mentors and youth.

“The staff members’ role shifts from expert to collaborator. Rather than rushing to fix or give advice, the support person pauses to use a series of reflective questions to draw out the mentor. The ultimate goal is for the person being supported to feel more capable” (p.7).

Why does this research matter?

In general, this research indicates that the Mentoring FAN provides staff with a “mental model” and “practical communication tool” for increasing their relationship-building skills (p.4). This new model has several implications for mentoring organizations.

Staff Training

- This research indicates that investing in training and professional development opportunities for staff members can offer many benefits to mentoring organizations (i.e., improving staff member capacity to strengthen their relationships with mentors).

Monitoring and Support

- This research provides a new approach to monitoring and support. The Mentoring FAN can help mentoring practitioners and mentors increase their communication skills by guiding them through stages of learning and reflection during their support meetings.
- In other research, the Mentoring FAN has been shown to improve mentors’ experiences during support meetings. For example, mentors reported that the FAN model increased the amount of constructive feedback that they received from staff members, which ultimately increased their confidence as mentors and helped them build new knowledge and skills for mentoring.

Reference

Gilkerson, L., & Pryce, J. (2020). The mentoring FAN: a conceptual model of attunement for youth development settings. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 1-16.