



The Mentoring Effect for Black Youth



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Supportive relationships with adults, including mentoring relationships, foster young people's positive development and can provide significant psychological protection in the face of adverse life circumstances.¹ In the winter of 2020, Mentor Canada surveyed 2,838 young adults in Canada to learn more about how mentors supported them while they were growing up: 177 (6%) of the survey respondents identified as Black.

Over half (54%) of Black youth who participated in our survey reported facing at least 2 risk factors during their teen years compared to 39% of all respondents. Mentoring relationships can play an important role offsetting some of the adverse life circumstances Black children and youth face in Canada. However, 41% of Black respondents did not have a single mentor between the ages of 6 and 18. Early intervention to help more Black young people access mentors in their communities and through mentoring programs is critical.



What is the effect of mentoring for Black youth?

The Mapping the Mentoring Gap study determined that survey respondents who were mentored growing up were statistically more likely to report several positive outcomes as young adults compared to their peers who did not have access to a mentor.²

59% of Black respondents had at least one mentor at some point between the ages of 6 to 18 compared to 56% of all respondents.

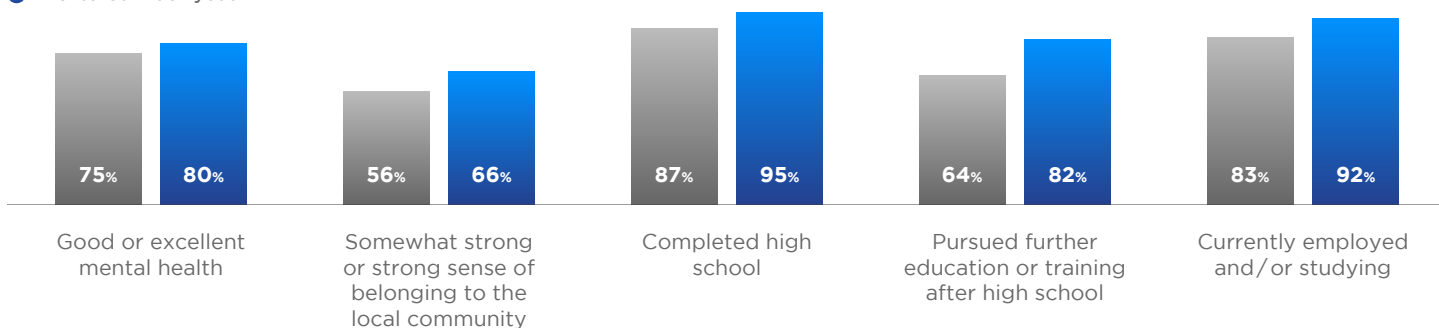
Many Black youth developed natural mentoring relationships with adults in their environments. Yet, a greater proportion of Black respondents participated in a formal mentoring program

compared to all respondents (roughly 27% compared to roughly 16%).

Black youth who were mentored growing up reported positive outcomes related to mental health, education, and employment in greater proportion than their peers who were not mentored.³

The effect of mentoring for Black youth

- Non-mentored Black youth
- Mentored Black youth



How do mentors support Black teens?

Just under half (48%) of Black respondents had at least one mentor during their teen years (12-18 years old) compared to 41% of all respondents. Black youth reported that their most meaningful mentors were often teachers or other members of school staff, family friends, and elders or aunts. They also reported that their mentors supported several areas of their lives and development in meaningful ways. Black youth's most meaningful mentors helped them manage interpersonal relationships, build connections, acquire essential skills, and navigate the transition to adulthood.

Relationships

- 57% talked about their relationships with their friends with their most meaningful mentor;
- 47% talked about their relationships with their parents or other adults in their lives.

Connections

- 58% helped them connect to services and supports;
- 50% helped them connect to their culture;
- 43% took part in community events or offerings with their mentors.

Black respondents who had a mentor during their adolescence reported that their most meaningful mentor had a significant influence on several areas linked to their mental health and resilience:

- 80% reported that their mentors influenced their confidence in their abilities;
- 68% their hope and optimism for the future;
- 65% their sense of pride and self-esteem.

Skills

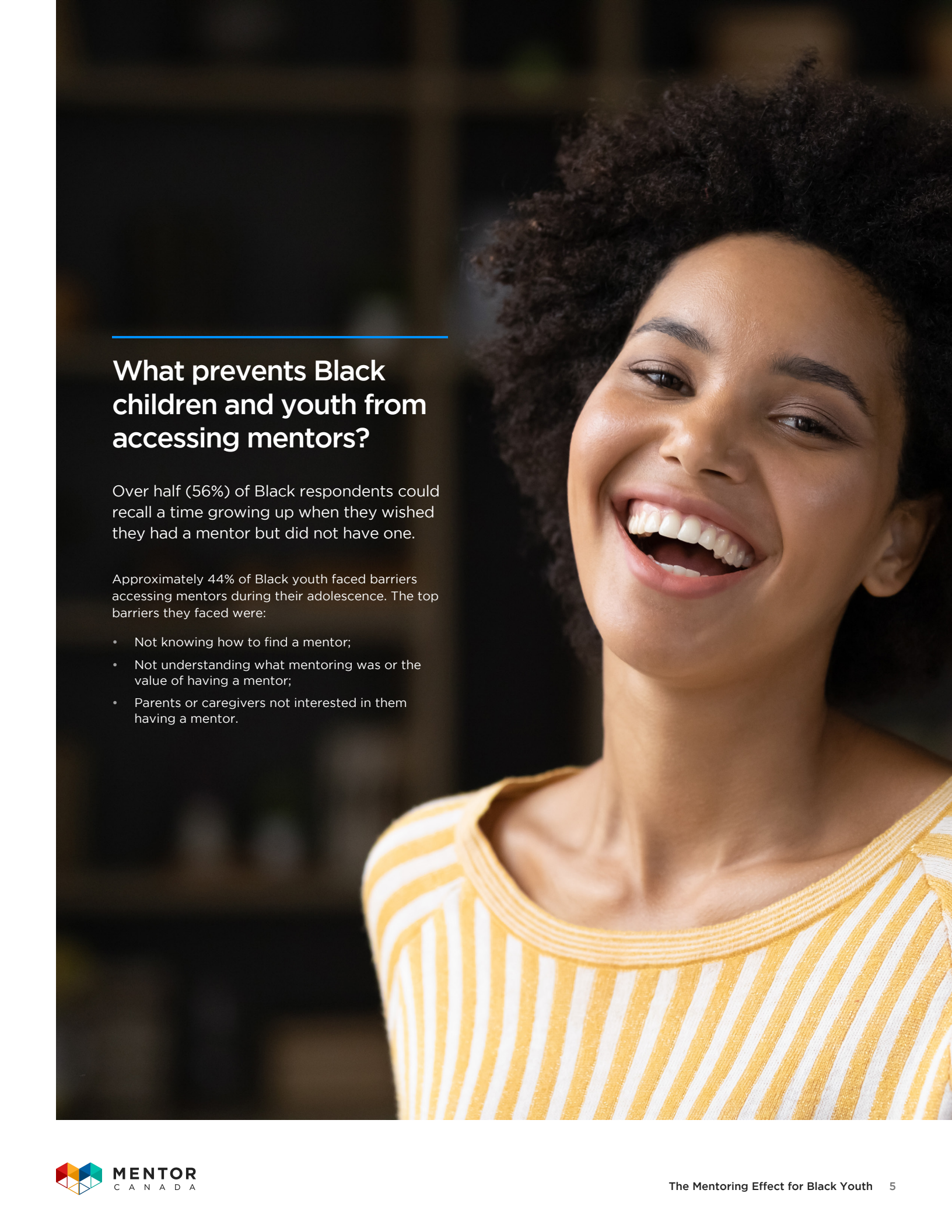
- 51% helped them acquire academic or school-related skills;
- 50% helped them acquire job-related skills;
- 49% helped them acquire life skills.

Transitions

- 34% helped them establish independence from their parents or guardians;
- 34% helped shape their job or career aspirations;
- 32% helped them get a first job;
- 28% helped them apply for or find funding for trade school, college, or university.

“As a result of participating in these projects and learning many useful lessons, I now have a lot more knowledge about not only what it means to be the best version of myself academically and mentally, but what it means to be a person of colour. Being a person of colour is a privilege that I now pride myself in but I have learned that it should not be my main drive for accomplishing my goals. My love for what I am doing should be my motivation. Because as wonderful as it is to be Black, my colour is not what defines me as a person, but my actions in my everyday life. [...] Thank you for how much you have helped me and prepared me for the future. It is something that I can only repay you back for by going out and using all the tools you have equipped me with to make society a better place for future generations.”

**High school participant,
Black Youth Leadership and Mentorship Program**



What prevents Black children and youth from accessing mentors?

Over half (56%) of Black respondents could recall a time growing up when they wished they had a mentor but did not have one.

Approximately 44% of Black youth faced barriers accessing mentors during their adolescence. The top barriers they faced were:

- Not knowing how to find a mentor;
- Not understanding what mentoring was or the value of having a mentor;
- Parents or caregivers not interested in them having a mentor.



Closing the Mentoring Gap for Black Youth

Schools, communities, mentoring programs, and policymakers must work together to address the barriers Black youth face accessing mentoring opportunities and to help mentoring relationships reach their full potential.

Public education campaigns to raise awareness about the value of formal and informal mentoring relationships can begin to address some of these barriers. The term mentoring may not resonate with Black youth and communities. Many mentoring interactions take place in Black communities where community leaders, elders and aunties, and other supportive adults act in a mentoring capacity, but these informal interactions may not always be labelled as mentoring since they do not take place in the context of a formal mentoring program. Increasing awareness of the various forms mentoring takes—including natural mentoring relationships that develop organically outside of a formal program—can help more young people identify how adults who offer support, guidance, and those they can count on may be mentors. Furthermore, updating the definition of mentoring to make it more culturally relevant to various communities in Canada could help shed greater light on the prevalence of natural mentoring in Black communities.

Encouraging peer mentoring programs in which older youth mentor younger peers can help

increase access to mentoring opportunities, foster youth engagement, and help build community. Indeed, young adults who have benefited from the support of a mentor and understand the value of mentoring can play a pivotal role in efforts to increase the number of mentors:

- 75% of Black youth who had a mentor growing up are interested in becoming mentors in the future;
- 47% of them have already mentored another young person.

Mentoring can support Black youth's ability to excel when mentors use their connections and skills to sponsor young people and help them access opportunities that may have otherwise been invisible or inaccessible to them.

Intentional and targeted investment by government, philanthropists and communities in youth mentoring programs are necessary to help close the mentoring gap and bring more opportunities to Black youth.

About Mentor Canada

Mentor Canada is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. We are working together to build sector capacity and expand access to mentoring to empower every young person to reach their potential. *Mapping the Mentoring Gap* is one of three studies conducted by Mentor Canada as part of the State of Mentoring Research Initiative. Between January and March 2020, we surveyed 2,838 young adults aged 18–30 about their mentoring experiences growing up and their current lives.

Learn more about Mentor Canada and our research at [MentoringCanada.ca](https://mentoringcanada.ca).

In partnership with:



[Black Youth Leadership and Mentorship Program](#) and Dr. Bukola Salami (University of Alberta)

The Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program is a unique, made-in- Alberta contribution to socially and economically empower Black youth in grades 10 and 11, to contribute meaningfully to Canadian society. The goal of the Program is to improve economic outcomes, community belonging, and leadership skills, as well as foster a positive cultural identity for Black youth, the mentees.



[DYLOTT](#) is a leadership incubator that delivers a variety of youth programs intentionally designed to ensure young Black leaders have the tools to excel in the current and emerging Canadian and International job market. Our programs are designed to address barriers to social inclusion in employment, education and the broader social context. Our culturally responsive supports and services provide: Mentoring and mentorship opportunities, Intensive training and skill development, and Innovative Sector-specific knowledge. We advocate on behalf of Black communities to ensure that the systems we interact with are producing progressive changes to policies and practices.

Research supported by:



The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

1 Resnick, M. D., Harris, L. J., & Blum, R. W. (1993). The impact of caring and connectedness on adolescent health and well-being. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 29(Suppl. 1), S3-S9. Werner, E. E. & Smith, R. S.(1992) *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Cornell University Press.

2 Our analysis determined that there was an association between having had a mentor and positive outcomes (correlation) but could not determine if having a mentor caused or led to these positive outcomes. See the Mapping the Mentoring Gap study for more details.

3 Due to limited sample size (n= 177) caution is necessary when interpreting these findings.