



Youth Mentorship Best Practices



POINT SOURCE YOUTH

POSITIVE ACTION



This chapter is part of Point Source Youth’s National Youth Mentorship and Peer Navigation Initiative handbook. Created with the help of our National Youth Advocates, and funded by ViiV Healthcare’s Positive Action for Youth (PAFY) Grant, this handbook was developed to train and support hundreds of youth mentors to provide peer navigation and support related to HIV-prevention, treatment, and care and housing to QTBIPOC youth. Click here to access the full handbook, with chapters on Youth Mentorship and Best Practices, HIV Peer Navigation Best Practices, Self-Care and Community Care, and more.

[Access the full handbook here.](#)

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YOUTH MENTORSHIP BEST PRACTICES

Organizational Considerations for Starting a Youth Mentorship Program

As a homeless service provider you know the power of having youth mentors on your team. We believe that every youth-serving organization should hire youth mentors to help young people at risk of HIV, living with HIV, and experiencing homelessness.

Whether you are hiring a youth mentor for the first time or are ready to level-up your youth mentorship program, there are some basic steps to follow. We've outlined them here to help you set up a program that will help young people successfully navigate the many systems that they need to be familiar with in order to thrive.

We have included some important questions that service providers can reflect upon before building a mentorship program that will ensure the program is inclusive, reflective of the needs of the youth mentors you will hire, and most importantly meet the young people where they're at.

These questions include:

- How will your organization **build and assess** the youth mentorship program?
- Who are the **staff** persons that will manage the youth mentorship program, make certain that the youth mentors are supported, and have a clear understanding of their roles?
- Are those staff persons **trained** in positive youth development, intersectionality, BIPOC, LGBTQ+ inclusive services, adultism, and trauma-informed care?
- Has your organization established **partnerships** with HIV providers that offer healthcare and social supports within the community you serve?
- What are your organization's current **services** for young people living with HIV and how will they expand with the inclusion of youth mentors?
- What does the **job description** of the youth mentor include, and does it have concrete examples of the roles and responsibilities?
- Is the youth mentorship position a full-time job or part-time job? How many contact **hours** are you expecting the youth mentor to complete?
- How will your organization **include** youth mentors on your team (i.e., team meetings, case conferences, staff training, staff outings, etc.)
- How will your organization **recruit** youth mentors for the role? What platforms will you be posting the youth mentor job description on?
- How will your organization **onboard** and train youth mentors for the role? What trainings or support will you be providing the youth mentor?
- How does your organization approach instances of staff **stigma** and biases?
- Have your staff been **trained** in HIV 101, HIV stigma, prevention and treatment of HIV (i.e., PEP, PreP and understanding viral loads)?

Introduction to Youth Mentorship

Youth mentorship is a structured and trusting relationship that brings people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the ability and strength¹ of the young person receiving the services described in this handbook. This position is not specific to young people living with or at risk of HIV.

A Youth Mentor is someone with some sort of lived experience, similar to the youth in your program. They are usually other young people who've experienced homelessness, are BIPOC, are LGBTQIA+, and/or who are living with HIV.

Youth Mentors help provide guidance, support, and encouragement to young people receiving services. A Youth Mentor can help guide people through the different systems of care, which can often be confusing and overwhelming. Youth mentors can use their lived experience and knowledge of these systems to offer guidance and help young people be their own best advocate.

By offering an emotional connection, youth mentors are able to build a trusting and supportive relationship, helping young people become more confident in navigating these systems of care.

In order to build an emotional connection, trust must be built with the young person. The best way to build trust is to clearly communicate what they (the young person) can expect from the Youth Mentor or Peer Navigator. In addition, it's important for the young person receiving services to understand what is expected of them.

The first meeting between the Youth Mentor or Peer Navigator is crucial because it provides an opportunity to spell out what is expected of each party. This also means that the Youth Mentor or Peer Navigator needs to know how to conduct a first meeting with a young person they are assigned to work with; please use [this resource](#) by Adriana Rodriguez-Baptiste, LCSW as a guide. Another important detail to consider is that there may be some Youth Mentors and/or staff who may be guarded and do not desire to develop an “emotional connection” but will connect in a sympathetic/compassionate way and establish a respectful relationship with the young person. We recommend that the approach to the work with young people be considerate of their life experiences and clear about the services and resources your organization can offer.

As always, it's important to recognize that young people are the experts of their own lives. Even though a Youth Mentor might have had similar experiences, they should still approach the youth with humility.

We love the [Cultural Humility Humble Model](#), to help youth mentors (and other staff) remember what this looks like.

- H** — **Humble** about the assumptions you make
- U** — **Understand** your own background and culture
- M** — **Motivate** yourself to learn more about the other person's background
- B** — **Begin** to incorporate this knowledge into your work
- L** — **Life-long** learning
- E** — **Emphasize** respect and negotiate service plans²

Youth Mentors are in a unique position to build a really strong, trusting relationship with young people receiving services. The best mentoring relationships are authentic, engaging, and empowering.

Authenticity is super important. Young people can tell if you're not being genuine right away. By being their authentic self, a Youth Mentor is able to have real conversations with youth. They'll gain insight into the young person's thoughts, feelings, and intentions. By being authentic and relatable, and sharing their own lived experience and expertise, the Youth Mentor is able to really deepen the trust in that relationship. This puts Youth Mentors in a unique position to provide authentic feedback and recommendations.

Engagement means physically, mentally, and emotionally being there with the young person. By consistently being there in the way the young person needs or wants, trust is deepened and the core of the relationship is built. Youth Mentors should be mindful to show up however the young person prefers or requests, not how adults want or is most convenient for them.

Youth Mentors should be encouraged and empowered to engage with youth as themselves, rather than as a staff member. They should engage with youth in "real" conversations without an agenda or follow-up assessment. Save this for later, after rapport has been established.

"Meeting the youth where they are" is different for Youth Mentors than other staff members. Youth Mentors can physically meet young people where they are by taking things out of the office. Go out for ice cream or a walk and be unique in how you approach young people. Keep an open mind and ask the young person what they need from you — are they looking for advice, guidance, or just a listening ear?

The essential step is to never leave a meeting without a follow-up. Always offer the youth a follow-up text, email, or call "do you mind if I check in on you tomorrow? Want me to call or text?"

Empowerment means approaching things from a strengths-based perspective. Youth Mentors should help young people to find their own strengths. And even more importantly, they should teach them how to identify and address the oppressive forces pushing against them and challenging their growth. Youth Mentors should resist the urge to "do it" for young people. Rather than stepping in and advocating for them, they should focus on teaching young people how to navigate barriers and thrive long after the relationship with the youth mentor has ended.³

What makes a good mentoring relationship?

As service providers, it's essential to identify the strengths and areas of support within our Youth Mentors. Assessing these areas is crucial when providing the appropriate support, supervision, and training to the Youth Mentor. Youth Mentors have a history of lived experience, making them a more significant asset when working with youth, as no other staff member will be able to connect with the youth the way they do. **Youth Mentors should be matched with a young person who has at least one lived experience in common.** It's also crucial that youth mentors are provided with support through regular supervision, training, and coaching.

This is ideal whenever possible. If you're only able to hire one youth mentor when you're first starting, that's ok! Work towards this goal in the future, but don't let perfection be the enemy of progress.

Organizations and Youth Mentors are successful when everyone is on the same page. For example, organizations should specify how often they expect Youth Mentors to meet with the young person and outline how long the mentorship relationship should last. Some other good questions to reflect upon include:

- How will your organization **measure the success** of the youth mentorship program?
- How will you include the **Youth Mentors' feedback** to make certain the program is inclusive of the voices being served and of those with lived experience?
- How will you include the **input of youth** you are serving? What feedback loops will exist within your program to ensure growth and success?

How can organizations support good mentoring relationships?

It's important that everyone — the organization, Youth Mentor, and the youth receiving services — are all on the same page. This means that everyone understands the expectations of the Youth Mentor role and support is provided to the Youth Mentors to clarify questions as they come up. Establishing professional boundaries for Youth Mentors working with young people in need of services can be tricky. There are some important onboarding techniques that will help facilitate this process to ensure boundaries are clear:

1. The Youth Mentor's supervisor should thoroughly **review the job description** with them during the first week of their employment.
2. **Supervision meetings** with the Youth Mentor and their supervisor should be scheduled and established on an ongoing basis.
3. The Youth Mentor should have knowledge of the organization's **code of ethics** as part of their onboarding process.
4. The Youth Mentor should understand what is considered a **reportable incident** at the organization.
5. The Youth Mentor should understand their role as a **mandated reporter**.
6. The supervisor should ensure that the Youth Mentor understands the **hours of operations** and that late calls or text should be re-routed to other parties (i.e. their supervisor or the organization's on-call/after-hours system).
7. The supervisor should inform the Youth Mentor of the preferred **method of communication** with young people receiving services (i.e. text message, email, or other apps your organization supports, etc.)

Here are some pro-tips for the Youth Mentor's supervisor to keep in mind:

- What are some **check-in questions** that a Youth Mentor should ask during their meeting with the young person?
- How should the Youth Mentor **document** their meetings and who will review their notes for feedback or questions, if needed?
- How does the young person living with or at-risk of HIV want to connect and what is your organization's preferred method of **communication** (i.e. in person, FaceTime/What's App, phone call, text messages, etc.)?

- Who are the staff persons assigned to accept calls **in cases of emergency** from the Youth Mentor? Are there protocols in place for staff to support the Youth Mentors and/or youth when receiving an emergency call?
- Who are the staff persons a young person in your program can **contact** if they have questions about the mentorship program or about their mentor?
- How often will the Youth Mentor have **supervision** and what meetings/trainings are they expected to attend?
- How will your organization welcome the **expertise** of a Youth Mentor (i.e., how will they be introduced to the team and welcomed into the organization).

Training for Youth Mentors

What should it look like?

Youth Mentors should receive the same training and professional development opportunities as other members of your staff. As service providers, it's important that we honor Youth Mentor's expertise, and trust that they know how to communicate with young people best because they have lived through similar experiences. Youth Mentors also have an incredible amount of lived experience that prepares them to navigate multiple service systems.

We highly recommend ensuring all of your staff are trained in Motivational Interviewing and Harm Reduction approaches. Both of these evidence-based techniques are person-centered and are used to help young people make informed decisions about their health, housing, employment/education, and relationships.

There are many systems to navigate when a young person is homeless, unemployed, and/or living with HIV. Therefore, it's important that Youth Mentors are connected to the existing case management services your organization has established. This means that the Youth Mentor has access to the young person's service plan to ensure they understand the goals the case manager is working on. It's also essential that the case manager and Youth Mentor update each other on the progress the young person has made towards their stated goals.

The Youth Mentor may find out about a crisis or emergency before the assigned Case Manager or Program Director — therefore it's important that the Youth Mentor knows what is considered a crisis (e.g. thoughts of harming themselves, discontinuing medical treatment, an increase in viral loads, etc.) in order to reach out for additional support from the program. Youth Mentors should understand your organization's protocols for handling a crisis or emergency. As noted earlier, establishing safety plans with young people is important and a Youth Mentor should know how to conduct a meeting to establish a safety plan.

Lastly, it's critical that Youth Mentors understand your organization's mission and structure. Youth Mentors should experience the same onboarding that all staff experience. In addition, we recommend your organization outline its commitment to having the expertise of Youth Mentors on the team. For example, your organization can describe the goal of the mentorship program and the reason the program was created. Also, your organization can acknowledge the expertise Youth Mentors bring to the table by highlighting the importance of lived experience and how vital this role is for the services that are provided. Most importantly, Youth Mentors need to know who their supervisor is and who to go to with questions when the supervisor is not available.

A Note on Youth Mentors for Young People Living with HIV

Youth Mentors who work with young people with HIV may also help advocate with health professionals and medical providers. However, it's important that Youth Mentors do everything necessary to help the young person be their own best advocate without "doing the work" for them.

For example, when preparing for a visit with their medical provider, the Youth Mentor can help the young person identify questions they want to ask during their appointment. The Youth Mentor could encourage them to write these questions down or include these questions on the Notes app on their phone. The Youth Mentor should also suggest that the young person write, type or voice record notes about what their provider said.

When working with young people living with HIV, it's crucial that Youth Mentors have an understanding of the symptoms, prevention practices, and treatments available. Therefore, we strongly recommend that all of your staff, including Youth Mentors, dedicate time to understanding HIV 101, Pep, PreP and viral loads. The links below are good training resources to start with:

- [HIV 101](#)
- [HIV transmission 101](#)
- [HIV treatment as prevention](#)
- [PEP](#)
- [PreP](#)
- [Undetectable viral load](#)
- [HIV testing locations](#)
- [HIV testing](#)

For more information: please visit [HIV Basics | HIV.gov](#)

After your organization's staff and Youth Mentor have been thoroughly trained on HIV prevention and treatments it's important to determine if the young person living with HIV is experiencing barriers to treatment. Some of these barriers can include lack of transportation to medical appointments, homelessness or unstable housing, disconnection to treatment services, and no support from family or friends.

Youth Mentors can provide support overcoming barriers and alleviating stress the young person is experiencing. Some of these specific interventions include:

- Reconnecting with their medical provider by helping them make an appointment.
- Brainstorming the questions the young person wants to ask their medical provider.
- Accompanying the young person to their medical appointment, if needed or requested.
- Helping the young person organize all of their appointments by establishing a calendar with reminders.
- Reminding the young person about upcoming appointments.
- Following up with the young person after an appointment to determine the next steps in their treatment which will ensure health status is stable.
- Helping the young person create a consistent routine taking medication, going to appointments, and checking in with their healthcare providers.
- Recommending they set up automatic refills with their pharmacy.

- Asking if the young person has a plan for their medicine routine they're going to be away from home.
- Reconnecting the young person with case management who can help them with homelessness prevention services, rapid rehousing, career counseling and employment placement services.
- Providing car fare or transportation services to medical appointments.
- Reviewing HIV education material that the young person received from their medical provider or review the material linked above together.
- Staying connected to the young person to ensure changes to their treatment or potential risks are documented and assessed.
- Asking about the young person's support system by inquiring, "Who do you call when you are having a bad day? Who do you vent to? Who knows about your status and how do they support you?"

Confidentiality

Youth Mentors should receive training in HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), [mandated reporting](#), and other confidentiality procedures. Youth Mentors may run in similar circles as youth in your program. They may see each other outside of your organization at community events or other social gatherings. It is important that boundaries and confidentiality are discussed in advance.

Youth Mentors should have a clear understanding of when to say hi or not, how to acknowledge their unique relationship, and how to address any conflicts of interest with their supervisor. When working with young people, it is important to receive informed consent for sharing their information. If your organization allows multiple people to look at case files, make sure that the youth is informed of this. Oftentimes when building rapport with youth, we may get very personal information they may not feel comfortable sharing with others. Check your policies and procedures around information sharing and address any areas of concern. If possible, it can be important to have a Release of Information document to review with youth about what information they are sharing, who is privy to it, and allow them autonomy over what information is put into your organization or community database.

After Testing Positive for HIV

It's vital that young people living with HIV understand the importance of confidentiality as it relates to their status. The knowledge of their HIV status can be terrifying, and Youth Mentors can be a support to help them understand what happens after the young person tests positive. The testing site will report the results to the local department of health because they monitor the HIV infections in each community.

The reason the Health Department needs to know this is because Federal and state funding for HIV services and treatment are often directed to communities where the HIV positives statuses are high.

The state health department then removes all personal info from the test results and sends it to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which is the federal agency that is responsible for recording national public health infections. The CDC does not share this information with anyone else, including insurance companies. For more information on this please visit HIV.gov.

It's also important to note that some states have partner-notification laws — which means that if the young person tests positive for HIV, they or their healthcare provider may be legally obligated to inform the young person's sexual or needle exchange partners. For more information on this please visit [Partner Notification Services](#).

Civil Rights for People Living with HIV

Youth Mentors should know that people living with HIV or AIDS, are protected against discrimination on the basis of their HIV status under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Examples of discrimination would be if a young person is not allowed to participate in a service that is offered to others, or they are denied a benefit, because of their HIV status.

If the young person believes they have been discriminated against because of their HIV status, Youth Mentors can encourage them to file a Discrimination Complaint by visiting this [website](#).

What Do Youth Mentors Do?

Housing

Youth Mentors regularly work with youth who are experiencing homelessness, at risk of HIV, or living with HIV. A big component of Youth Mentors' work is helping young people become successfully housed. Stable housing is closely linked to successful HIV outcomes. With safe, decent, and affordable housing, people with HIV are better able to access medical care and supportive services, get on HIV treatment, take their HIV medication consistently, and see their health care provider regularly. In short: the more stable your living situation, the better you do in care.⁴

Youth Mentors can work within a variety of programs and housing models (that should be self-determined by the young person). Youth Mentors can help support young people in housing with direct cash transfers, supported and supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and host homes.

Housing Youth with HIV

Stable housing is closely linked to successful HIV outcomes. With safe, decent, and affordable housing, people with HIV are better able to access medical care and supportive services, get on HIV treatment, take their HIV medication consistently, and see their health care provider regularly. In short: the more stable your living situation, the better you do in care.

Individuals with HIV who are homeless or lack stable housing, on the other hand, are more likely to delay HIV care and less likely to access care consistently or to adhere to their HIV treatment.

Throughout many communities, people with HIV risk losing their housing due to such factors as stigma and discrimination, increased medical costs and limited incomes or reduced ability to keep working due to HIV-related illnesses.

As most services providers and Youth Mentors know, stable housing equals successful HIV outcomes. When young people with HIV are provided safe, decent, and affordable housing, they can access the medical

care, and supportive services they need. To be specific, if a young person is stably housed, they are better able to take their HIV medication consistently and see their doctor regularly.

It's important that the entire support team understands the impacts of the lack of stable housing:

- Lack of privacy which ensures physical and psychological safety.
- Persistent stress from their surrounding environment.
- Unsafe neighborhoods or communities.
- Compromised identity and agency.
- Meeting basic needs like food, transportation, medical costs.
- Difficulty forming stable intimate relationships.
- More likely to delay entry into care.
- Lack of follow up with their healthcare providers.
- Not receiving medical care on a regular basis.
- Less likely to be on ARVs or adherent to dosages.
- Less likely to achieve sustained viral suppression.

Therefore, it's important that Youth Mentors and organizations are familiar with the Federal Housing Assistance Program available for people with HIV. This program is overseen by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) office who manages the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program. HOPWA is the only federal program committed to delivering housing services for people living with HIV and AIDS. Essentially, the HOPWA Program makes grants to local communities, States, and nonprofit organizations for projects that meet the needs of low-income people living with HIV and their families.

The HOPWA programs can provide both short-term and long-term rental assistance, operate community residences, or provide other supportive housing facilities that have been created to address the needs of people with HIV.

To find the local information for all HIV services please see more at [LocatorHIV.Gov](https://locator.hiv.gov).

Case Management is considered a central component of HOPWA supportive services and key to successful program outcomes for housing stability and access to care. Therefore Youth Mentors are encouraged to maintain relationships with HOPWA case managers to determine the status of the young person's housing stability.

Employment

Getting a job is an enormous step in the right direction for young people experiencing homelessness or living with/at risk of HIV. A Youth Mentor can be an important resource for the young person by supporting them and asking questions that help them understand that working will affect a lot in their life (i.e., medical status, finances, social life, housing, and free time, etc.)

Some good questions that a Youth Mentor can ask the young person includes:⁵

- What are your **employment goals**?
- What **kind of work** do you want to do?
- What types of **resources** are needed to help achieve a new career goal?

- What kind of **training** or education will you need to achieve your employment goal?
- How will your **health** be impacted if you return to work?
- How will returning to work impact the **benefits** you are receiving?

After asking these questions, the Youth Mentor may get a better sense of the Stage of Change the young person is in. An important aspect of understanding a person's willingness to make changes in their life is to understand that everyone goes through different Stages of Change when they are making a major decision in their life. We want to highlight the Stages of Change lens because it helps everyone understand that only the young person can decide and determine what is best for them and we must meet them where they are at.

Stages of Change

Stages of Change is an important concept from Motivational Interviewing. If your team hasn't already been trained in Motivational Interviewing, reach out to us for more support!

Pre-contemplation	The person does not believe change is needed.
Contemplation	The person begins to see a change is needed in their life and they are weighing the pros and cons of making a change in their life.
Preparation	The person has decided to make a change in their life and being to prepare how the change will happen.
Action	The person has followed through with their plan to make the change and is actively engaged in a new change or behavior.
Maintenance	The person has been carrying out the change in their life for at least six (6) months and maintaining this major life change.
Relapse	The person has experienced a relapse due to a trigger or major stressor and the change they have implemented has stopped temporarily. However, the knowledge and work gained going through the other stages is not lost. The person can resume the change in their life once they are more stable.

How do the Stages of Change inform the young person's employment goals?

PRE-CONTEMPLATION:

If you find that the young person is in the Pre-contemplation Stage of Change and not ready to discuss getting a job, the best way to help the young person is to ensure they have stable income, and help them apply for SSI/SSD, if they don't have it already. [This website](#) is a good place to start. If the young person is experiencing homelessness, they may be able to work with a [SOAR provider](#) (or someone [trained in SOAR](#) on your team) to expedite their SSI application.

It's also a good idea to keep the door open for the young person to revisit the conversation about getting a job in the future. With that in mind, we'd encourage the Youth Mentor to say something like "if now isn't a good time to talk about jobs and a career, we can always talk about it when you are ready".

CONTEMPLATION:

When a young person is in the [Contemplation Stage of Change](#), the Youth Mentor should help the young person weigh the pros and cons of pursuing their career goals. The young person has a big decision to make, as employment can impact them medically, legally, and financially. It will also likely impact their social life and the future of their career.

- Am I medically stable enough to work?
- Will my history of legal issues impact my ability to apply for a job?
- How would getting a job impact my benefits?
- Who can I go to if I am struggling at work?
- Is my housing situation stable enough for me to reliably maintain a job?
- What are my skills, talents, training and education that will help me become employed?
- Do I need career counseling to help me with my resume and interviewing skills?

If the young person decides they'd like to move forward and receive guidance on career exploration, training and job, you can find [more resources to share with them here](#).

If the young person receives Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI), and would like to go to work, there are specific programs such as the [Ticket to Work Program](#) that they can access that will help them find the employment services they need to return to work.

PREPARATION

During the [Preparation Stage of Change](#), the young person is ready to establish a plan that will help them get that job. It is the Youth Mentor's job to help the young person explore the question "what change is best for me, and how can I achieve it?"

In this stage the young person is considering things like child care expenses, transportation, professional clothing, pre-employment drug testing, parenting responsibilities, and maintaining their health.

They are also considering practical vocational questions such as should I pursue volunteer work or paid employment? Who can help me with my resume? Where can I look for a job?

ACTION

Once the young person is in the Action stage, they have typically found employment. The goal of the Youth Mentor is to help the young person remain satisfied in their job, and to ensure they are not neglecting their health, especially if they are living with HIV.

Medically:

- Have I been following through with my medical treatment plan and paying attention to mental health while working?
- How am I doing at work and have I received an evaluation from my supervisor? Do I need an accommodation in order to perform my role at work?
- Am I making use of the health benefits my employer is offering, including going to the dentist?

Legally/Financially:

- Have I looked at my benefits and addressed any changes that working will have on my benefits?
- Have I felt discriminated against while on the job and where do I go for help?
- How do I request a reasonable accommodation, if I need one?

Psychosocially:

- What do I need to do to manage the stress of a job?
- Am I enjoying the work that I do and the people I work with?
- How has having this job influenced my thoughts about the future?

Vocationally:

- Do I have the training I need to carry out my job responsibilities?
- What is standing in my way from moving up or pursuing additional goals at work?
- What have I learned about my energy, and my ability to focus at work?

MAINTENANCE

At the Maintenance Stage, the young person has been working for six months or more. The Youth Mentor's role is to help the young person to maintain the course they are on.

- Have I experienced new changes in my health while working that I should bring to my doctor?
- How do I feel? Is my health and emotional well-being in balance?
- Am I making time for other activities besides work, like hobbies or seeing friends?
- How am I managing my finances?
- Are my bills paid or do I need help with money management?
- Do I need help filling out my taxes?

RELAPSE

Relapse is totally normal. It is not a failure. If the young person relapses, it's important they understand their rights and how to access the accommodations they need to keep their job and advocate for themselves. They may need to utilize sick or vacation time, or FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act).

If I do need a modification or adjustment at work, how do I ask for it?

Youth Mentors can coach young people to ask for reasonable accommodation if an adjustment is needed in order for them to continue doing their work. Under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) a person with a mental illness or living with HIV is protected. An accommodation is considered any modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that allows the young person to perform their job.

An accommodation may be tangible (for example, a certain type of chair) or intangible (for example, a modified work schedule for someone with a medical condition requiring regular appointments with a health care provider).

Qualified individuals with disabilities, including people with HIV/AIDS, have the right to request reasonable accommodations. You are “qualified” if you are able to perform the basic functions of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation.

What is the best way to make a reasonable accommodation request?

Youth Mentors can encourage young people to go to their employer's [human resources department](#). When requesting an accommodation, the young person should clearly state what they need (time off to go to their medical provider at a specific scheduled time, a certain type of desk, or a change in work hours).

The Youth Mentors can prepare the young person by telling them they should be ready with a doctor's note which will support their need for an accommodation. The note from the doctor does not need to contain their diagnosis but it should confirm that the young person is being treated by them and that they believe the young person needs the accommodation to maintain their health or be able to fulfill essential functions of their job.

In addition, taking leave under the [Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#) is also a way to arrange time away from work to keep medical appointments if the young person has used all of their exhausted sick time or vacation time. For more information about employee rights, reasonable accommodation and other questions that a young person living with HIV may face when they return to work, please visit [DOL](#).

Do I need to tell my employer I have HIV/AIDS?

No, unless you require a modification at work for a reason related to a medical condition. Youth Mentors can explain that an employee's medical diagnosis is not part of what an employer needs to know and that their medical information is private.

Education

Youth Mentors can play a huge role in determining a young person's path to securing higher education. Research has consistently found that achieving higher education is a guaranteed pathway out of poverty and homelessness. Please visit Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)) for more information and resources.

However, many young people face barriers to accessing financial aid because they don't have support to apply or enroll in a community college, trade school or university. [Job Corps](#) is a good resource for education and job training.

Other avenues to kick starting the young person's education include:

1. GED is a way for adults to earn their high school equivalency diploma. [Passing the GED](#) will open up many job opportunities and help the young person apply for higher education opportunities. [YouthBuild USA](#) is another good resource for young people interested in working while they work towards their GED. This program helps low-income young people ages 16 to 24 work full-time for six to 24 months toward their GEDs while learning job skills by building affordable housing in their communities.
2. [Community College](#) offers two-year Associate's degree programs in a wide variety of academic and pre-professional fields and is a great way to get your career started.
3. [Trade Schools](#) are sometimes referred to as vocational schools or technical schools which are designed to give students the technical skills to prepare them for a specific occupation.
4. [Applying to a university or college](#) is also an option that can be explored with young people.

ENDNOTES

- 1 MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. (2003) Elements of effective practice (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- 2 Adapted from [Using Cultural Humility to Navigate Challenges](#)
- 3 Spencer, R. (2006). Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults. Youth and Society, 37(3), 297-315. doi:10.1177/0743558405278263
- 4 <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/living-well-with-hiv/taking-care-of-yourself/housing-and-health>
- 5 Adapted from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/hiv-aids/toolkit/individuals>