

How Near-Peer Mentoring Creates Tomorrow's Leaders

Mentoring has been around for many years and has shown to have many positive outcomes for all participants. In SKILLZ Martial Arts, the mentoring program that is implemented is called the STORM Team, or Special Team of Role Models. This is a "near-peer" type mentoring program that is very structured and incorporates a full curriculum and training system. The members are hand-chosen by their instructors and the process and outcomes of this near-peer mentoring approach benefit both mentees and mentors.

Although mentoring is not a new topic, near-peer mentoring provides a new variation to this timeless approach. This method of mentoring involves people that are closer in age, although the mentor is still old enough to act as a role-model. The biggest advantage to this, however, is that the mentor has a stronger element of relatability than in a typical mentoring relationship. Mentors that are closer in age to the mentees often have more success in reaching them than adults usually do.

The STORM team is an exclusive team for Martial Arts students with aspirations of becoming leaders within the community so they are the perfect fit to be in the mentor position. STORM Team members are chosen on the highest standards of on behavior, performance, attitude, willingness to serve others, and commitment to their art. The program covers things from leadership lessons to hands on training.

In the STORM Team mentoring program, the benefits that the mentee gains from participating in it are invaluable. They feel more connected to their peers and have longer lasting relationships. In addition, connections with the adults they interact with are improved and they have better attitudes towards school and learning. All of these things ultimately increase their self-esteem so they are more confident to try new things and feel more equipped to handle the ups and downs of life.

But not only does this type of program benefit the mentees, the mentors also gain important skills. They learn a sense of responsibility while serving in this role and they also learn communication skills, relationship management, and leadership skills. Through this process, mentors also become more patient and learn to utilize active listening skills. They are often the most valuable in bridging the gap between instructors and other students. And one of the most rewarding benefits to this program is that the mentor feels a sense of self-satisfaction from their service to others. They experience the feeling of pride when their mentees are successful.

When children and teens take part in near-peer programs such as the STORM Team, all participants can reap the benefits. Mentees generally become the next set of mentors and the cycle of spreading these valuable life skills continues. This often makes the next set of mentor/mentee relationships easier because this has been modeled over and over again and the successes in the program build on each other.