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Young People's Experience of Mentoring: Building Trust and Attachments

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The study was conducted in the context of PROMISE - a voluntary scheme, in the southwest of England which provides mentors for a young person for a period of up to 2 years. Predominantly these youngsters had experienced a range of difficulties in their lives including periods in care, severe problems in their families, trouble with the police and mental health problems. Each young person is allocated a mentor who has regular contact with them offering activities, support and informal counselling. Although the general response to the scheme has been positive it was felt that there was a gap of understanding about how the young people experienced the scheme. An exploratory qualitative study was commissioned to explore how a sample of the young people, who had been involved in the mentoring scheme for a substantial period, experienced the process of mentoring. The study involved interviews with six young people and group discussions with mentors and staff. Generally, the experience was reported by the young people to be highly favourable with the development of a positive, consistent, available, trusting and caring relationship cited as key ingredients. These findings were supported by discussion with the mentors. The study suggests that attachment theory is helpful in explaining the mentoring process and in promoting ideas for future developments.

Key Words: attachment • experience • mentoring • qualitative • research

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