

# Online Peer Mentoring to Support Students Co-Identified with Autism and Giftedness

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## Purpose of Study

This presentation describes a research-based, program pilot to connect students internationally and support social development, cultural understanding and communication for adolescents co identified as autistic and gifted.

## Research Questions

1) Does involvement in a peer mentoring experience, delivered online, support social skill development for young adolescents (ages 10-16), identified as gifted and/or autistic, according to the perceptions of: a)the adolescent participants, b) their parent or guardian and c) the adult/university aged mentors in the program? and if so, in what way or ways?

2) Does involvement in an peer mentoring experience, delivered online, support positive peer to peer communication for young adolescents (ages 10-16), identified as gifted and/or autistic, according to the perceptions of: a)the adolescent participants, b) their parent or guardian and c) the adult mentors in the program? and if so, in what way or ways?

3) Does involvement in a peer mentoring experience, delivered online, influence overall mental well being for young adolescents (ages 10-16) identified as gifted and/or autistic, as measured by pre and post delivery of the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS).

## Participants

Participants will include students age 10 to 16 who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and/or a diagnosis of giftedness. Note: to be eligible for participation, the adolescents may have a diagnosis of autism and/or a formal identification of giftedness, they are not required to have both, however, some may have both.

## Why E-Mentoring

Traditional mentoring methods, although beneficial, face logistical challenges such as travel, time constraints, and inconsistent mentor availability. Using digital technology, online or E-mentoring offers personalised and flexible support that can adapt to each students' needs. The mentoring activities for this study will be completed through Curtin's secure online platform of Microsoft TEAMS.



## Online Safety

Adult mentors will monitor and support peer to peer mentor interactions. Further, the young adolescents' parents or guardians will have access to and provide oversight of the online interactions of the adolescents.

## Theoretical Framework

### Motivational Interviewing\*

- a different way of talking to kids
- Starting with the student's interests and needs, rather than those of the teacher or school

### Universal Design for Learning

- Changing the environment to meet the needs of students
  - <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>
- ### Mentoring
- Role models
  - Common interests
  - Somebody like me is successful

\*McQuillin, S., McLelland, B., Smith, B. (2013). University of Houston Student Mentoring Manual Version 3. Available from [www.http://faculty.coe.uh.edu/smcquillin/UHSM.pdf](http://faculty.coe.uh.edu/smcquillin/UHSM.pdf)

## Program Quality

To support vulnerable populations of youth, in this case adolescents with autism and/or giftedness, it is vital that the program is well thought out with a strong program design, thoughtful recruitment of the youth and adult mentors. Effective training and support is necessary, for all involved including: youth, parents and the adult mentors so that everyone is clear on their expected roles.

Herrera, C., Garringer, M., & Bennett, R. (2025). Elements of effective practice for mentoring, 5th edition. Boston, MA: MENTOR.

**We love to collaborate!**



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