

# My Mentor & ME



**Ethan's  
Zoom calls with  
his mentor are  
the highlight of  
his week.**

**Ever wish you could talk to someone who's been through the same things as you and can offer smart, judgment-free advice? Sounds like you need a mentor. Here's how to find the perfect fit.**

*By* MICHELLE CROUCH

**B** **EING A TEEN CAN BE TOUGH.** Between school pressure, social drama, family weirdness, and uncertainty about the future, it can sometimes feel like too much to handle all on your own. In those times, wouldn't it be nice to have someone who has been there, done that to give you advice, support, and motivation—all without judging you or overreacting?

Well, guess what? That type of person actually exists. They're called mentors.

Think of a mentor as a combination of the best parts of a parent, teacher, and coach. For example, a mentor might help you with your homework, but they won't ground you



**Esther, left,  
and Ariana  
instantly bonded  
over shared  
experiences.**



**Talahyeh, left, appreciates that Stephanie challenges her to get out of her comfort zone and try new things.**

COURTESY OF ESTHER CORTÉZ (ESTHER); COURTESY OF STEPHANIE DOLENTAS (TALAYEH)

## ● YOUR FUTURE

if you don't turn it in on time. (They might, however, suggest strategies to help you meet deadlines in the future.)

A mentor might be someone with a similar background to yours who can relate to your day-to-day struggles. Or maybe it's a person who has a job in an industry you're interested in who can give you solid career advice. It could also be someone who's up for just hanging out.

Research shows that having a mentor can make your life better in many ways. Teens who have a mentor tend to miss less school and feel more confident, and are less likely to feel anxious and depressed than teens who lack a mentor figure. Mentored teens even get higher grades. But don't just take it from us. Read on to learn from three teens and their mentors what the relationship means to them.

# Talayeh & Stephanie

New York, New York



**T**alayeh Vega connected with her mentor, Stephanie Dollentas, through a mentoring organization called Bigs & Littles NYC. Talayeh, 16, wasn't sure about Stephanie at first. Then they had an outing to a bookstore and "we ended up just walking around the bookstore for an hour and a half because we had so much to talk about," Talayeh recalls. "I really loved spending that time with her."

Now the pair talk every Thursday. They also go to parks, restaurants, and museums together. Stephanie encourages Talayeh to step out of her comfort zone by challenging her to do things like trying new cuisines. In return, Talayeh has introduced Stephanie to some of her favorite things, including TikTok and anime.

Talayeh says she's become more outgoing thanks to Stephanie. She also feels more motivated in school. "She always lifts me up," Talayeh says. "She says, 'I know you can do it.' Having someone that isn't my mom but is still an adult to be that support system, it's extremely helpful."

Stephanie, meanwhile, says she loves being a mentor and is excited about Talayeh's future. "We click," Stephanie says. "She's such a great student and is eager to try new things. I really enjoy having this bond with her."

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MENTOR

You've found a mentor? Great! Follow these tips to get the most out of your relationship.



### 1. INCLUDE YOUR PARENTS.

Be sure to tell your parents about your plans. It's a good idea for them to meet any prospective mentors they don't already know well. They should also have full contact info for your mentor, and should always know your plans if you're meeting them in person.



# WORDS OF WISDOM

Can you match the inspiring quote to the famous fictional mentor who said it?

A

“JUST KEEP SWIMMING.”

B

“IN EVERY JOB THAT MUST BE DONE, THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF FUN.”

C

“IT IS OUR CHOICES THAT SHOW US WHAT WE TRULY ARE.”

D

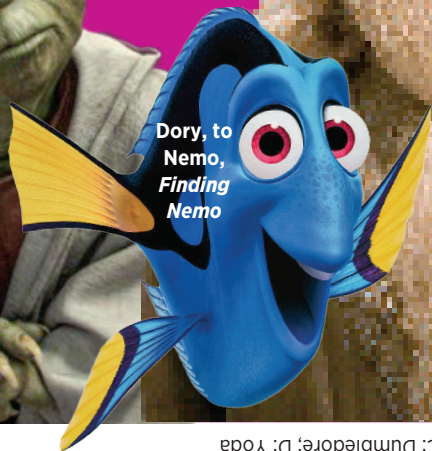
“DO OR DO NOT—THERE IS NO TRY.”

Yoda to Luke, *The Empire Strikes Back*

Dumbledore, to Harry, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Dory, to Nemo, *Finding Nemo*

Mary Poppins, to Jane and Michael, *Mary Poppins*



Answers: A: Dory; B: Mary Poppins; C: Dumbledore; D: Yoda



## WHERE TO FIND A MENTOR

Finding the perfect mentor may be easier than you think.

The easiest way to find a mentor is to make a list of adults you admire and trust. You might already have a teacher, tutor, or relative who'd love to mentor you! Or ask a parent to sign you up with a program like the National Mentoring Program ([mentoring.org](http://mentoring.org)) or Big Brothers Big Sisters ([bbbs.org](http://bbbs.org)) to be matched with a mentor with similar interests in your area.



### 2. DEFINE YOUR GOALS.

What do you want to get out of this relationship? Is there a skill you want to develop or an upcoming challenge you want to prepare for? Be sure to share your goals with your mentor!



### 3. CREATE A STRUCTURE.

Decide how often you will meet or talk, and schedule several sessions in advance. And remember to show up! Your mentor is making time for you, so respect your commitment to them.

# Ethan & Bob

New Rochelle, New York, and Saratoga, California



**E**than Gotian and Bob Cousins have never met in person. But the two meet every Monday on Zoom, and Ethan says their online conversations are “the highlight of my week every single week.”

Ethan, a 17-year-old aspiring inventor, was paired up with Bob in 2019 through a program called the Mentor Project. The project pairs adult experts in fields such as science, business, and the arts with kids who are interested in careers in those fields.

Bob, who has worked in technology for 40 years and invented more than 20 products, helps Ethan improve his ideas for new inventions

and turn them into real products.

For example, Ethan came up with a plastic door-handle attachment that allows people to open doors with their forearms instead of their hands, helping to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and other germs. Bob helped Ethan apply for a patent, which protects your right of ownership to your invention.

While a shared love of dreaming up new technologies brought the pair together, they both say their relationship has grown to be about a lot more than Ethan’s inventions. Ethan talks to Bob about things that his parents and friends aren’t interested in, like engineering, computer science, and technology.

As Bob says, “Kids need to be able to talk to someone who’s not their parent from time to time.”

Ethan agrees: “It’s not a one-way dialogue,” he says. “I’m teaching him stuff, and he’s teaching me stuff.”

COURTESY OF FAMILY (ETHAN & BOB), SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (BACKGROUND)

## FAMOUS MENTOR-MENTEE PAIRS

These influential leaders and entertainers can thank mentors for helping them when they were just starting out. Go to [scholastic.com/choices](https://www.scholastic.com/choices) for more famous pairs.



### JUSTIN BIEBER AND USHER

Bieber was a 12-year-old aspiring singer when he met Usher in the parking lot of a music studio and asked if he could perform a song for the R&B star. Impressed, Usher took the young singer under his wing and helped him launch his successful music career.

DEBRA L. ROTHBERG/FILMMAGIC (BIEBER & USHER); KUNIMEDIA/NEWS GROUP/BOSTON HERALD VIA GETTY IMAGES (OPRAH & MAYA ANGELOU)

# Arianna & Esther

St. Paul, Minnesota



in her family. “Growing up, she had a lot of the same experiences as me,” Arianna says. “So hearing her perspective really helps.”

In the three years the pair has been together, Arianna says she has talked to Esther about everything—stress, school, family, friends. “She gave me advice on how to fix a friendship,” Arianna explains. “It’s like having an older sister.”

The two often go to restaurants, watch movies, and see football games together. Sometimes they just work side by side in a coffee shop. When they can’t meet in person, they connect over FaceTime.

Most recently, Esther helped Arianna with her college applications. Seeing Arianna’s dreams for her future become a reality is bittersweet for Esther. She’s very proud of everything Arianna has accomplished, but she also knows that she’ll miss Arianna when she goes away to college next year: “She has become my family away from family,” Esther says.

**W**hen Arianna Martinez, 17, signed up for a mentoring program for students of Latin American heritage called Youth in Action, she was mostly hoping to get some help applying to college. But Arianna felt an immediate connection to her mentor, Esther Cortez.

Part of that is because Esther is only about 10 years older than Arianna, so Esther didn’t seem like a typical “adult.” Esther and Arianna are also both of Mexican heritage. And Arianna hopes to be the first in her family to go to college, just as Esther was

COURTESY OF ESTHER CORTEZ (ARIANNA & ESTHER)

## OPRAH WINFREY AND MAYA ANGELOU

Talk show queen Oprah met the award-winning author and poet in the 1970s, as Oprah’s TV career was just starting. The two stayed close until Angelou’s death in 2014. “She was there for me always, guiding me through some of the most important

years of my life,” Oprah has said about her mentor.



JAY L. CLENDENIN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES (CHADWICK BOSEMAN, DENZEL WASHINGTON)

## CHADWICK BOSEMAN AND DENZEL WASHINGTON

Academy Award winner Washington helped pay for Boseman to attend the British American Drama Academy when Boseman was a struggling actor.

Boseman went on to become a star for his role as T’Challa (Black Panther) in the Marvel movies and his work in other hit films.

