

Building Your Community

Tutoring and Mentoring

The need: Some kids are falling behind in school, or just need someone in their corner: a person who can explain things patiently, cheer them on, and show them what's possible. Youth are often the best people to help, because they're close enough to remember how it feels.

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." — Dr. Seuss

"A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself." — Oprah Winfrey

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." — Helen Keller

FACILITATOR NOTES

Time. about 60–90 minutes, run in one sitting. Works in a classroom, youth group, or club. Option A needs no setup; Options B and C use real service arranged ahead of time.

Service today. Pick one option in Serve below and set it up before you begin.

Warm-up (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

Keep this quick, short answers are great. Read the questions together.

- Who helped you learn something hard, a person, not an app? What did they do that worked?
- What's the difference between a tutor, who helps you learn, and a mentor, who believes in you?
Can one person be both?
- Think of a time someone older encouraged you. How did it change things?
- Why might a kid have a hard time in school even when they're smart and trying?

Learn (10–20 minutes)

Lots of kids hit a point where school gets hard and they don't have the help they need to get through it. Tutoring is helping someone learn: explaining a tricky idea, practicing a skill, working through homework. Mentoring is a little different. It's being a steady, encouraging presence, someone who believes in a kid and shows them what's possible. The two often go together. A patient older student who helps with math and also says "you've got this" can change how a younger kid feels about school, and about themselves.

A kid who could use this might:

- Be stuck on something at school, with no one at home who can explain it.
- Be capable but discouraged, convinced they're "just bad at" a subject.
- Be missing a steady, encouraging older role model in their life.

A closer look. There's a fourth-grader who has quietly decided she's "bad at reading." She isn't, she just missed some basics and now feels embarrassed to read out loud, so she avoids it and falls further behind. Then an older student starts reading with her twice a week: no pressure, lots of patience, a high-five for every chapter. A few months in, she raises her hand in class for the first time. The reading help mattered. Believing she could do it mattered more.

Why kids fall behind. Kids fall behind for ordinary, human reasons. Maybe no one at home has the time or the know-how to help with a tough subject. Maybe they missed a stretch of school and never caught up. Maybe one bad experience convinced them they weren't smart, and they stopped trying. Very often it isn't about ability at all. It's about not having the right person, at the right moment, to help it click and to believe in them. That person doesn't have to be a teacher. It can be you.

How youth can help. You don't have to be a straight-A student to tutor or mentor. You need patience, encouragement, and a subject or skill you're a little ahead on. Youth can:

- Help a younger student with homework or a subject you're good at, one-on-one or in a small group.
- Read with a younger kid, or listen to them read, on a regular basis.
- Be an encouraging presence: notice effort, celebrate progress, and remind them they can do hard things.
- Share what you know, a skill, a hobby, the way you study, with a kid who would light up to learn it.

Keep these in mind.

- **Patience over speed.** Let them struggle a little and work it out; that's where learning sticks.
- **Encourage the effort.** Praise how hard they tried, not only whether they got it right.
- **Meet them where they are.** Start from what they actually know, not from where you think they should be.
- **Be steady.** Showing up again and again is what builds the trust that makes the help work.

Serve (30–60 minutes)

Today you'll put this into practice in a real service activity. Here are ways to do it:

Option A — Be a study buddy *(simple supplies, works in any setting)*

With an adult's okay, pair up with a younger student, a sibling, a neighbor's kid, or a younger student at your school, and help them with one thing they're stuck on. Sit beside them and walk through it patiently. Then leave them something to keep: a few flashcards for what they're working on, a card with the steps written out simply, or an encouragement note that tells them they've got this. One good, patient session, plus something in their hands afterward, can change how a kid feels about a whole subject. No supplies handy? The patient help and genuine encouragement are the heart of it.

Option B — Read or learn together *(low cost, a bit more effort)*

Set up a few sessions to read with a younger kid (or listen to them read), or to teach a skill you know well. Keep it light and consistent: same time, lots of patience, small wins celebrated. Showing up more than once is what turns a bit of help into a real boost.

Prepare ahead. As the facilitator, you'll arrange ahead of time who the group will read or work with, a younger class, a sibling group, or kids from a partner program, and set the times.

Option C — Join a tutoring or mentoring program *(more effort; ongoing service)*

Volunteer with a local or national tutoring or mentoring nonprofit, an after-school program, a library reading group, or a mentoring organization like Big Brothers Big Sisters, and commit to showing up regularly so a kid can count on you. Steady mentoring over time, the same encouraging face week after week, is something a younger kid remembers for good.

Prepare ahead. As the facilitator, you'll connect ahead of time with a local or national tutoring or mentoring nonprofit and set up the group's regular role. JustServe.org can help you find one and make the connection.

Before you go (all options): Always work with younger kids in public, supervised settings, never one-on-one in private, and with a parent or your mentor present or nearby. Programs that pair youth with children have rules and training for good reason; follow them. Never share personal contact information or arrange to meet a child outside the program.

Reflect (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTES

After serving, talk through a few of these together, then give everyone quiet time to write.

What was harder: explaining the material, or staying patient while they worked it out?

Did you catch a moment where something clicked, or where the kid's confidence shifted?

What do you remember a tutor or mentor doing for you that you could pass on?

Why might being believed in matter as much as being taught?

Then finish one or both sentences:

A younger person I could encourage or help learn is...

One thing I'll do to stay patient and encouraging is...
