HEWITT | CENTER FOR GIRLS' Research and Leadership™

Girls Mentoring Girls: How Peer Mentorship Shapes Development

RESEARCH BRIEF | Summer 2026

What is peer mentorship?

In K-12 settings, peer mentorship programs pair older and younger students or students within similar grade ranges. The role of the peer mentor is to help their mentees navigate school life.[1]

Peer mentorship programming improves academic achievement, boosts social and emotional skills, and increases college and career readiness for both mentors and mentees.[2]

Working in one-on-one or group settings, peer mentors provide academic support, motivation, future planning, goal setting, guidance for new students, and an improved sense of school belonging and community.[3]

Peer mentorship programs have been found to boost students' self-esteem, confidence, and sense of purpose by making them more aware of strengths they had not previously recognized.[4]

Why is peer mentorship critical for girls and young women?

Girls and young women are often subjected to gendered discrimination that causes an imbalance in leadership development opportunities in both school and employment settings.[5] The pressures they face — including but not limited to adultification, perfectionism, and expectations around body image and emotional expression — create stress and anxiety that can negatively impact confidence, mental wellbeing, and personal growth.

> Through peer-to-peer relationships, girls and young women build intra- and interpersonal skills that improve their mental wellbeing and leadership abilities.[6]

Mentorship is crucial for ensuring students feel seen, heard, valued, and that they belong.[7] In particular, K-12 peer mentorship invites girls to practice listening, giving advice, and sharing their own lived experiences in a safe, judgement-free space.

At Hewitt we offer students multiple opportunities for peer mentorship:

- Our upper school peer mentorship program pairs 11th and 12th graders with 4th grade students.
- Our cross-divisional buddy program pairs upper schoolers with lower and middle school students for community building activities.
- Upper school students provide peer tutoring to middle and upper schoolers.
- All newly enrolled students are assigned buddies who help guide them through their transition to Hewitt.
- Through our Hewitt Houses, students come together in K-12 groupings to create meaningful bonds across grades and divisions.

At Hewitt
by Madison Seabron '27, Student Support Research Intern

I interviewed several of Hewitt's upper school peer mentors about their work with the 4th graders. I was interested in understanding the connection between wellness, mentorship, and leadership amongst girls and young women, and this research study provided me with the opportunity to learn directly from students about the impact of their peer mentorship experiences. Key findings from my interviews include:

Academic Development: Peer mentorship bonds strengthened the mentors' sense of responsibility to model good academic habits and hold themselves to high academic standards. One mentor shared, "Talking about school with [the 4th graders] or asking them what they're learning encourages me to be a good role model and to strive for academic excellence."

Social and Emotional Development: Peer mentorship boosted girls' self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, and voice; encouraged participants to consider multiple perspectives in conflicts; and reminded them to approach challenges with greater presence and empathy. As one mentor reflected, **"Being a peer mentor helped me to find myself and be more involved at Hewitt."**

College and Career Readiness: Peer mentorship increased participants' communication and self-advocacy skills in both academic and personal settings, helping girls and young women clarify their future aspirations and explore career direction. One mentor shared, "Communicating with some of the girls who love musical theater has definitely narrowed my focus on what I want to do, and inspired me to commit to it."

Leadership Development: Peer mentorship enhanced participants' leadership skills and deepened their sense of purpose. Mentors felt encouraged to assess and understand the needs of the community they are serving, viewing their work as an act of "giving back" and an opportunity to positively influence those around them.

At Hewitt
by Dr. Nkenji Clarke, Upper School Psychologist

After researching the factors that contribute to effective peer mentorship programs, **Hewitt's counseling team developed a more structured peer-to-peer initiative** for our 11th and 12th graders.[8] Juniors begin the program by shadowing experienced 12th graders, who model critical skills in time management, communication, leadership, and active listening.

I partner with our lower school psychologist, administrators, and teachers to design mentoring sessions that actively support our school culture and reinforce what 4th graders are learning in their homerooms and wellness classes. Additionally, I lead weekly check-ins with peer mentors to provide guidance on strengths, areas of growth, and strategies for upcoming mentorship sessions.

With thoughtful planning and appropriate scaffolding, the peer mentorship process can be a joyful experience that encourages academic success, goal setting, and career exploration. At Hewitt, this process provides both mentors and mentees with opportunities to build their social-emotional and interpersonal skills as they develop into impactful leaders.

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2 Ibid.
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5 Deutsch, et al., (2017). "It Gave Me Ways to Solve Problems and Ways to Talk to People": Outcomes From a Combined Group and One-on-One Mentoring Program for Early Adolescent Girls. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 32(3), 291-322.
6 Ibid.
7 *What Research From Girls' Schools Reveals About Building Student Agency*. International Coalition of Girls' School. (2025, September 2). https://www.girlsschools.org/blog/podcast-details/~board/blog/post/equipping-girls-to-lead-their-learning-insights-from-garc-2025
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