



Mentoring Policies & Procedures

1. Introduction

1.1 Mission Statement

Partnerships for Children's mission is to make tomorrow better than today by supporting and empowering children, youth, and families involved with Child Protective Services.

1.2 Mentoring Programs

Youth Empowerment & Success (YES) provides a supportive, consistent adult mentor to youth aged 12+ who have been affiliated with the child welfare system in the greater Austin area. YES Mentoring aims to support older youth to and through the transition out of foster care and into adulthood through life skills and positive relationships.

Kids in a New Groove (KING) provides youth ages 5+ in the greater Austin area who have had experience with the child welfare system a committed one-on-one mentoring relationships through free weekly, private music lessons, giving students the ability to transform their lives through connection and music.

2. Qualifications of a PFC Mentor

2.1 Requirements

A PFC Mentor must be at least 21 years old and reside in Bastrop, Hays, Travis, or Williamson County areas. All Mentors must successfully clear an extensive background check, including Child Protective Services, sex offender registry, and criminal history check before becoming a mentor. They must also complete online training and an interview with PFC staff, as well as have dependable and legally insured personal transportation.

2.2 Acknowledgement of Policies

All PFC Mentors must acknowledge and agree to abide by all program policies and procedures. Failure to comply will result in the inability to serve as a mentor. Acknowledgement is provided at the time of application and must be signed (online signature permitted) to become a mentor.

2.3 Application

Prospective mentors are required to complete an online application containing information about their background and any relevant experience working with children.

2.4 References

At minimum, mentor applicants must provide at least three references of individuals who are unrelated to the applicant and have known the applicant for more than one year. The applicant must list their references and provide PFC with the reference telephone number, email address (when available), relationship to applicant and years known. PFC staff will contact each reference and evaluate responses prior to acceptance as a PFC mentor.

2.5 Internet Presence Review

PFC retains the right to conduct an online search of the mentor's name and social media accounts as part of the screening process. Conduct viewed as at risk to the prospective mentee or PFC's credibility or indications that the applicant was dishonest in their application will be addressed and may be cause for ineligibility as a PFC mentor.

2.6 Background Checks

Mentor applicants are asked to disclose any criminal history, involvement with the courts and/or with CPS, even if unsubstantiated and/or the applicant completed deferred adjudication of an arrest, charge or conviction has been dismissed, vacated, pardoned or expunged. If an applicant discloses in their application or interview a prior arrest or criminal offense, the Program Manager will review eligibility with the Director of Programs and Executive Director.

All PFC mentors must provide accurate identification information to complete all required background checks, including criminal and CPS.

PFC will secure initial criminal background checks, and all active mentors are subject to a criminal background check every two years that will include a review of an applicant's criminal history information, including:

- 1) National criminal check obtained from the National Crime Information Center maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigations
- 2) Texas Public Sex Offender Registry maintained by Texas Department of Public Safety
- 3) National Sex Offender Public Website maintained by the United States Department of Justice
- 4) Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry maintained by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- 5) If the volunteer applicant has lived in another state, those records will also be requested and reviewed.

Partnerships for Children will reject any applicant or mentor who(se):

1. Refuses to release information to PFC to conduct required background checks or refuses to submit to any of the required background checks;
2. Is found to have been convicted of, or has charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect or related acts that would pose risks to children or PFC's credibility;
3. Background check produces a conviction, guilty plea, plea of no contest, acceptance of deferred adjudication or pending charge that includes any grade of felony and less than 10 years have passed from the date of the offense;
4. Background check produces a conviction, guilty plea, plea of no contest, acceptance of deferred adjudication or pending charge that includes a misdemeanor or felony regardless of whether 10 years or more have passed from the date of the offense is automatically barred from being a volunteer if the charge is any level of offense under Penal Codes:

- a. Chapter 19, Criminal Homicide.
 - b. Chapter 20, Kidnapping.
 - c. Chapter 20A, Trafficking.
 - d. Sections 21.02, 21.07, 21.08, 21.11, 21.12 Continuous Sexual Abuse of Young Child or Children, Public Lewdness, Indecent Exposure to Another Person, Indecency With a Child, Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student.
 - e. Sections 22.011, 22.02, 22.021, 22.04, 22.041, 22.05, 22.07, 22.11 Sexual Assault, Aggravated Assault, Aggravated Sexual Assault, Injury to a Child.
 - f. Chapter 25 Offense Against the Family: Bigamy; Prohibited Sexual Conduct.
 - g. Section 28.02 Arson.
 - h. Chapter 29, Robbery.
 - i. Section 30.02 Burglary.
 - j. Section 33.021 Online Solicitation of a Minor
 - k. Section 42.072 Stalking
 - l. Chapter 43, Public Indecency.
 - m. Section 46.06, 46.09, 46.10 Unlawful Transfer of Certain Weapons.
 - n. Section 48.02 Prohibition of the Purchase and Sale of Human Organs.
 - o. Section 49.045, 49.05, 49.07, 49.08 Intoxication Assault, Intoxication Manslaughter. See Additional Section 49.045.
 - p. Chapter 71, Organized Crime.
 - q. Any other Charge Involving Violence, Child Abuse or Neglect, Assault with Family Violence, or a Sex-Related Offense.
5. For a mentor or applicant whose background check produces a conviction, guilty plea, plea of no contest, acceptance of deferred adjudication or pending charge that is not an offense described under paragraph (4) and would not pose a risk to children or negatively impact the credibility of the PFC program, PFC will determine eligibility. The decision will be based on the seriousness of the offense, length of time since the offense, any pattern of criminal activity, activities the mentor has been involved in since the offense, mentor's explanation of the offense, and references.
 6. Pending Charge: If the mentor or applicant has a pending charge described under paragraph (4), a new review of the check may be made if the charge is dismissed or a finding of not guilty or other determination of innocence is entered.
 7. Pattern of Offenses: A mentor whose background check produces information that includes a group of offenses or information that if considered separately would not bar a volunteer, may result in disqualification of a volunteer if it is determined that the offenses constitute a problematic pattern.
 8. Child Protective Services: A mentor or applicant shall not have ongoing involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) due to their own actions or lack of actions. If a mentor has previous experience as the subject of a CPS investigation, PFC will use discretion to determine whether to admit the applicant to the program.

2.7 Alcohol and Drug Abuse

If a mentor or applicant has struggled with substance abuse in the past, they must have been continuously sober for at least one year. A volunteer applicant who has been continuously sober for more than one year but less than 3 years will be asked to include in their personal references at least one person who can speak to the applicant's substance abuse recovery.

2.8 Mental Health

If a mentor or applicant has previously experienced a psychiatric hospitalization, the hospitalization should be 3 years in the past. This time frame may be waived if the volunteer is working with or has worked with a therapist familiar with the work of a PFC mentor, who will provide a recommendation stating it would be appropriate for the applicant to serve as a PFC mentor.

If during the screening process an applicant discloses that they have a major mental health diagnosis the applicant may be asked to provide a recommendation that it would be appropriate for them to serve as a PFC mentor from a therapist they are working with or have worked with.

2.9 Mentor Training & Interview

Online Training: is a go at your own pace online training designed specifically for our program. It takes roughly 2 hours to complete and includes 5 sections, each with a question prompt at the end of the section in order to go to the next section.

Training covers the following topics

- Basics of mentoring and our program
- Motivation behind mentoring do's and don'ts
- Role of a Mentor Part 1
- Role of a Mentor Part 2
- Trauma

Interview: After completing the online training, the potential mentor will meet either virtually via video call or in person with a PFC Program Manager to do a final assessment, clarifying online training, program rules and expectations, asking questions targeted at revealing any biases or agendas of a mentor, and general personality fit for the program.

3. Mentor Acceptance and Matching

3.1 Final Decision

Final determination of acceptance into the program for mentor matching will be at PFC's discretion and will be based on consideration of the applicant's responses to interview questions, to training topics as well as to the results of background and reference checks.

Partnerships for Children retains the right to refuse any individual they feel would not be in the best interest of the program. Further, PFC is not required to state reason(s) for non-acceptance into the program.

PFC Mentors are expected to be open to working with individuals of all backgrounds. PFC will not discriminate against any individual regardless of their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, immigration status, religion, belief system, gender identity or expression, and socioeconomic status when considering all applicants.

3.2 Matching

PFC takes various factors into consideration when matching a mentor with a mentee, including:

- Gender: gender and gender identity will be considered to match with mentees.

- Race/Ethnicity: when possible, PFC will match BIPOC youth with mentors of the same racial/ethnic background. Primary language spoken at home will also be prioritized.
- Geographic Location: we aim for about a 20-30 minute driving radius for all matches.
- Musical Instrument (KING only): Mentees preferred instrument will be prioritized.
- Interests/Hobbies/Personality: lists of hobbies and activities are requested from both the mentor and mentee to help assess common interests.
- Requests and needs of the mentee: PFC will make efforts to accommodate any special needs of a mentee, including expertise and comfort level.

3.3 Mentor Reassignment

PFC makes every effort to support mentors and mentees during their initial engagement period of 3 months. Our goal is for a positive connection to be made between the mentee and a consistent caring adult. Any concerns regarding the sustainability of the relationship and match should be shared with the PFC program staff as soon as possible. PFC staff will work with the mentors and mentees to try and preserve the relationships.

Mentor/Mentee matches may terminate for various reasons, including relocation, aging out of the program, lack of engagement, or change of instrument (KING). If eligible, mentors will be invited to remain active in the program and be re-matched with a new mentee.

4. Mandatory Reporting

All PFC mentors are considered mandatory reports, meaning, if any mentor has reasonable cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person shall immediately make a report as required by law. Mentors may first notify PFC staff to share concerns and request assistance in making a report.

5. Vehicle Policy

PFC will obtain Motor Vehicle Records (MVRs) on all mentors. Using objective criteria, PFC will review the MVR for acceptability before assessing driving responsibilities. MVRs for mentors will also be required every two years thereafter and reviewed using the same accessibility criteria.

In order to be granted permission for a PFC Mentor to transport a child in their personal vehicle, they must do the following:

- Pass a MVR check (as defined by the state providing the records);
- Provide to PFC a copy of a valid current driver's license and adequate personal automobile insurance. Insurance must be the required state minimum;
- Obtain permission from PFC staff as an approved mentor; and
- Obtain documented permission from the child's legal guardian or custodial agency.

PFC considers travel and parking expenses incurred by mentors as an in-kind tax-deductible donation to the organization and therefore does not reimburse volunteers for any transportation related expenses incurred while performing the duties of a PFC mentor. Some exceptions may be made to assist with parking fees; however, they must be pre-approved by PFC Staff. The risk of liability is covered by the volunteer's personal auto insurance and the volunteer chooses to accept that responsibility.

6. Confidentiality

All PFC mentors are required to accept and abide by DFPS's confidentiality policy as stated below:

As a volunteer for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, I understand:

- I am not permitted to take or share photographs of DFPS clients, unless otherwise approved by DFPS;
- Any information, including client identities and case details, obtained while I am volunteering with DFPS must not be discussed or disclosed to any person, other than current DFPS employees and volunteers, and then only on a strict need-to-know basis within the scope of the volunteer placement.

I also UNDERSTAND the disclosure of confidential information may be considered a violation of law subject to criminal penalty under both the Texas Open Records Act, §552.352 Government Code and/or §40.005(e) Human Resources Code

7. Media Release

PFC may at times take photos or videos at events engaging our mentors and volunteers and agree to:

- Allow PFC to use my story, photographs, video, and/or audio with or without my name (first name only) and for any lawful purpose, including publicity, fundraising, and Web content.
- Waive the right to inspect or approve the finished product, including written or electronic copy, where my likeness or information appears.

PFC will always make every effort to notify volunteers prior to publishing any items, and mentors may revoke this release at any time.