



embrellaTM
Embracing & Empowering Families

HEART TO HEART MENTORING PROGRAM MENTOR GUIDE

Any questions or comments regarding this guide can be addressed by contacting embrella's Family Support Manager at 609.250.6439 or lbonilla@embrella.org.

Introduction

Through **embrella's** Heart to Heart Mentoring Program, experienced volunteer resource caregivers (mentors) are paired with caregivers who are in need of extra support (mentees). Mentors provide a listening ear, support and encouragement. This program utilizes a peer-to-peer support model with the goal of retaining resource and kinship families for the New Jersey Division of Child Protection & Permanency (CP&P).

As a current or former resource and/or kinship parent, your valuable experiences can help to support and encourage others who are dealing with the many daily challenges and issues licensed caregivers face. The support that you provide has the potential to significantly impact the lives of children in foster care.

This guide will take you through the important considerations you, as a Mentor, must be aware of to successfully provide support to other caregivers. You will be learning about **embrella's** services, what to expect as you participate in this program and skills that will assist you in being an effective mentor. In this guide, here's what we'll cover:

- 1. Overview of **embrella's** Services**
- 2. Program Expectations**
- 3. Effective Mentoring Skills**

Overview of **embrella's** Services

As a representative of **embrella**, it is important for you to have an understanding of the agency and our programs and services. This will allow you to refer to services and encourage your mentees to contact **embrella** as needed. More information on all of the programs and services discussed here can be found by visiting our website at www.embrella.org, reviewing our program flyers or by contacting our Information Line at 800.222.0047.

Our Mission

The heart of our mission is to provide advocacy and enriching programs and services that to empower families and youth to thrive.

Our Vision

Our vision is a world where all children are living in safe, stable and nurturing homes, and no child is the victim of abuse or neglect.

embrella Programs and Services

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has been contracting with embrella since our inception to provide support services and training to resource parents. embrella is the largest provider of in-service training to licensed caregivers, and has a dual model of peer to peer support (community-based support groups and individual assistance). Our contract is renewed annually and has received many expansions over the years to continue to meet resource and kinship parent's needs.

1. Information Line

Our Information Line staff serves as the initial contact point for foster, adoptive, kinship parents and other individuals seeking information and/or assistance in four very important areas:

- Providing basic information on CP&P policies and procedures as well as the Manual of Requirements for Resource Family Parents
- Providing information on embrella's programs and services, as well as other community resources
- Referring to Family Support Advocates or other agencies when appropriate
- Assist in completion of an inquiry to become a foster, adoptive, or kinship parent as well as explaining the licensure process and various programs

2. Peer to Peer

Services under Peer to Peer are categorized into two areas: individual and local community.

- Services to Individuals: Family Support Advocates assist resource and kinship families throughout New Jersey with problems that range from lack of policy information to IAIU investigations. They can provide basic assistance by answering questions or providing referrals. They can provide more in-depth individualized support and advocacy services specific to the issues faced by the caregiver. Family Support Advocates can also serve as a liaison/mediator between caregivers and the Division of Child Protection & Permanency and Office of Licensing.
- Community Support: embrella's Connecting Families Meetings provide foster, adoptive, and kinship parents with the opportunity to come together, share challenges and how they overcame them, and encourage one another. Led by Family Support Advocates, Connecting Families meetings take place throughout New Jersey and in-service training is often available.

3. Community Education

embrella is the largest provider of in-service educational courses to licensed resource and kinship parents in New Jersey. All courses are free for licensed caregivers. Modalities include: Home Correspondence courses, E-learning, Community-Based Workshops, and Webinars. embrella provides transcripts to caregivers which confirms for the Office of Licensing the in-service training hours they have taken with the agency. Please note, only courses taken through embrella will be tracked on the transcript. There are over 100 course topics that are available to caregivers to assist them with the various challenges and issues they may face when caring for New Jersey's most vulnerable children.

4. NJ Foster Care Scholars Program

This program is funded by the federal and state governments to assist youth aging out of foster care, and those adopted after the age of 12, with assistance in attending a post-secondary educational institution. Several hundred students are enrolled each year.

embrella also offers community workshops and webinars to youth eligible for the NJFC Scholars Program to assist them in completing their FAFSA and NJFC Scholars applications.

5. Pathways to Academic and Career Exploration to Success (PACES)

The Pathways to Academic and Career Exploration to Success (PACES) program serves New Jersey Foster Care (NJFC) Scholar eligible adolescents between the ages of 16-21 as they transition out of high school in the following counties: Hunterdon, Middlesex, Somerset, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean. This program focuses on adolescents' educational and employment development, as coaches assist each adolescent in decision-making processes, soft skill development and direct assistance during the college application and job application process.

This program also provides: direct access in finding scholarships and understanding financial aid, support in completing the FAFSA, postsecondary applications and job applications, education and career planning for high school students and support to current adolescents seeking postsecondary education.

6. Communication & Development

embrella manages privately funded programs that directly impact the lives of children in foster care including:

- Fostering Wishes for Children – grants wishes up to \$100 per year for the little extras in life, such as class trips and prom that the State and caregivers may be unable to provide due to financial constraints.
- Dreamers and Believers - provides enrichment experiences, such as music lessons and sports camp, to help youth who have a dream reach their full potential.
- Camp Scholarships - provide children in foster care with the opportunity to attend a week of overnight camp where they can flourish and build self-confidence while having fun.
- Private Scholarships & Grant Program – provides youth with the opportunity to pursue their educational and vocational goals, as well as support their independent living efforts.

embrella publishes quarterly online newsletters and e-newsletters to keep our families and supporters informed.

embrella uses social media to promote our organization, share news and information and work to change the public's perception of foster care for the better.

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/embrella.nj>

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/embrella.nj/>

LinkedIn – <https://www.linkedin.com/company/embrella/>

Pinterest - <https://www.pinterest.com/embrellanj/>

Twitter - https://twitter.com/embrella_nj

Vimeo - <https://vimeo.com/embrella>

YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQLM2AZucPCrCp1xCVevrNw>

Any questions that arise regarding **embrella's** programs and services can be referred to our Information Line at 800.222.0047 or website at www.embrella.org.

Program Expectations

The Heart to Heart mentoring program is offered through **embrella** as a peer-to-peer service for the resource and kinship parent community.

As a mentor, your role is to:

- Provide emotional support and encouragement to assigned mentees
- Maintain regular, agreed upon contact with assigned mentees following contact requirements listed in the Heart to Heart Mentor Guide
- Share your personal experiences to the extent that you are comfortable, respecting the confidentiality of those involved
- Refer to a Family Support Advocate when appropriate
- Connect caregivers to our local Connecting Families Meetings
- Submit a Mentor Contact Form for each assigned mentee once per month

Your role is **not** to:

- Provide information on Division of Child Protection & Permanency (CP&P) policies and procedures
- Provide legal advice
- Advocate on behalf of the mentee with CP&P or any other agency

embrella is not responsible for the advice provided in the Mentor/Mentee relationship. Any information provided should be verified with a Family Support Advocate. embrella does not guarantee the quality of the advice provided in this relationship nor is making any representation about the mentor or mentee other than that both parties are or were licensed resource parents in the State of New Jersey. embrella is not responsible for any damages or claims that my result from the Mentor/Mentee interactions under this program.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

All Mentors are expected to meet the responsibilities provided in the Heart to Heart Mentor Agreement and Volunteer Services Description, as well as the agency's Volunteer Manual. Contact the Family Support Manager with any questions regarding these responsibilities.

ASSIGNING MENTEES:

embrella will reach out to you to assign and connect you with a mentee who we believe you will be compatible with. A Family Support Advocate will email you with the mentee's name, contact information and any other pertinent information and will also reach out to you periodically to check-in.

Once you receive your assigned mentee's contact information, it is expected that you will contact them within 48 hours. If you are unable to contact your mentee within 48 hours, you must advise your Family Support Advocate. We understand that sometimes there may be difficulty connecting with the mentee, especially by phone. We ask that you make at least 3 attempts to connect with your mentee before notifying your Family Support Advocate that you were unable to connect.

To support the caregiver and build the Mentor/Mentee relationship, contact should occur weekly during the first 30 days of the match. Following this period, a minimum of bi-weekly contact is to be maintained until the match is closed.

REFERRALS TO A FAMILY SUPPORT ADVOCATE:

Family Support Advocates are available to provide support and advocacy services to resource and kinship caregivers. Should you feel that the support needed by your assigned mentee is beyond the scope of the Heart to Heart Program, the mentee must be referred back to the Family Support Advocate. This includes, but is not limited to, verification of any CP&P policies and procedures or requests for advocacy services.

Please feel free to call or email your Family Support Advocate at any time with questions or concerns, or to refer an assigned mentee back to the Family Support Advocate.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Information shared with you in your role as a mentor must be held in strict confidence but may be disclosed and/or discussed with appropriate members of **embrella's** staff as it pertains to the Heart to Heart mentoring program, with the exception of mandatory reporting as stated below.

MANDATORY REPORTING:

In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse and/or neglect or acts of abuse and/or neglect, must immediately report this information to the **State Central Registry (SCR) 1.877.NJ.ABUSE (1.877.652.2873)**.

If, at any time, you feel that SCR needs to be contacted, you are expected to do so immediately. You do **not** need to notify **embrella** prior to contacting SCR, but are encouraged to notify **embrella** after contacting SCR.

MENTOR CONTACT FORM:

On a monthly basis, you are asked to submit a **Mentor Contact Form** which provides a summary of the contact you had with your assigned mentee. This form provides us with an overview of your discussions, any challenges that arose and whether or not a Family Support

Advocate needs to follow-up with your mentee. It will also be used to determine if continued contact with this assigned mentee is needed. This form is also utilized to track your Volunteer Hours through the length of contact section of this form.

CLOSURE OF THE MENTOR/MENTEE RELATIONSHIP:

If, at any time, you feel that you are not compatible or are unable to assist your assigned mentee, contact your Family Support Advocate for assistance.

The Heart to Heart match will remain open for three (3) months to allow for mentors to best manage their schedules with assigned mentees. Just as each person is unique, the length of time spent in each mentoring relationship will be different. Some mentees may need a few conversations and others may need a few months of conversations to get the support and encouragement that they need.

To close the mentor/mentee relationship prior to the three months, notify your Family Support Advocate either by phone or email. Your Family Support Advocate will follow up with you and the mentee will receive written notification from **embrella** when the mentor/mentee relationship is closed.

If it is felt that the mentee needs additional time, the mentor should reach out to their Family Support Advocate to request an extension to the three months. Extensions will be reviewed on a monthly basis.

Effective Mentoring Skills

A mentor is a person who guides a less experienced person by sharing their personal experiences and insights. There are many skills that contribute to a person's effectiveness as a mentor.

Active Listening

Active listening involves giving your full attention the speaker to ensure that you understand the message that the speaker is trying to convey. It also helps to build the relationship between the mentor and mentee.

- Pay attention to what the speaker is saying and avoid interrupting them.
- Ask questions, especially if clarification is needed.
- Paraphrase or restate what the speaker has said. This helps to ensure that the message was received correctly.
- Pay attention to the feelings behind the words that the speaker is saying. If feelings are ignored, the message is missed.
- Listen twice as much as you speak!

When meeting in-person or virtually:

- Maintain eye contact with the speaker while they are talking. This can help to encourage the speaker and allow you to focus your attention.
- Avoid distractions, such as looking at other people, playing with items in front of you, shuffling papers or checking your phone. These activities make the speaker feel like you are not interested in what is being said.
- Pay attention to your body language.

Ask Open-ended questions

As opposed to questions that prompt a “yes/no” answer, open ended questions help to guide the conversation and keep it moving. Asking a “what, when, how or who” question will engage your mentee and help them to share.

Examples of open-ended questions:

- What do you like most about being a resource parent?
- Tell me about some of the challenges you are experiencing.
- How do you typically handle uncomfortable situations with a child in your care?

Keep in mind that “why” questions can sometimes imply criticism and cause defensiveness (i.e. Why didn't you contact your child's case worker?).

Provide Constructive Feedback

Feedback is your observation or opinion. It can be positive or negative, and when done appropriately can be constructive and useful.

- Be honest and respectful. Keep in mind that it can be difficult to hear negative feedback. Take care in the wording you choose.
- Give observations, not evaluations. Provide examples of what you observed when you give feedback, instead of evaluating or providing personal judgment.
- Provide empathy. Put yourself in their shoes and try to understand their perspective.

Respect

It is important to remember that everyone has different views and opinions, especially when it comes to caring for children. It is inappropriate to impose your beliefs or push your mentee to try to change their beliefs. Know and accept that you and your mentee are two different individuals, who may have different views and opinions. However, as stated in the “Mandatory Reporting” section above, if you have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been or is being subjected to abuse and/or neglect or acts of abuse and/or neglect, you must immediately report this information to the **State Central Registry (SCR) 1.877.NJ.ABUSE (1.877.652.2873)**.

Self-Disclosure

Sharing personal stories is a great way to connect with your mentee and give them valuable insight into what worked or didn't work for you as a caregiver. Self-disclosure is also a great way to develop credibility and establish a trusting environment. Keep in mind, however, that self-disclosure should only be used as long as it's helpful to your mentee. You don't want to share a story just for the sake of sharing a story. It should add value to the conversation.

The personal stories you disclose should be relevant and appropriate.

- **Relevance** ensures that what you disclose about yourself and your experiences represents information that can add to the understanding in a real world way. The goal of the Heart to Heart program is to provide support and encouragement to resource parents. Sharing your own personal experience can add value by normalizing what your mentee may be experiencing. The stories and experiences that you share should support the program's goal.
- **Appropriateness** relates to ensuring that the self-disclosure maintains confidentiality, does not offend anyone and can be appreciated by your mentee. To ensure that you are complying with confidentiality, do not share the child, family or Worker's name when telling your story. It is also important to ensure that your self-disclosure is not offensive, especially with regards to the Division of Child Protection & Permanency (CP&P). CP&P funds **embrella's** programs and services, including the Heart to Heart Mentoring Program. For this reason, it is essential that all representatives of **embrella** portray CP&P in a positive light. We understand that you may have had some experiences that may not have been positive, but it is important to focus on the positive experiences that have brought you to being a successful and respected caregiver.

Building the Mentoring Relationship

Your Initial Meeting

Your first meeting or discussion will form the foundation for the mentoring relationship. The recommendations below will help to develop a strong foundation.

- Use the Mentor Agenda to assist the conversation.
- Set a relaxed and positive tone – Your first meeting will help to set the tone for your relationship with your mentee. Begin by giving your mentee some information about yourself and learning about them.
 - Your information shared might include:
 - How long have you been a resource or kinship parent?
 - How many children you have cared for?
 - What made you decide to become a mentor?
 - You might ask your mentee the following:
 - How long they been a resource or kinship parent?
 - How many children are they currently caring for?
 - What made them decide to participate in the Heart to Heart program?
 - What do they hope to get out of the mentoring relationship?
- Establish expectations and boundaries – Be open and honest about what you can and cannot do. Discuss your preferred method of communication and establish a plan for your mentoring relationship.
 - Will you talk on phone, communicate via email or meet virtually/in-person?
 - What is both parties' availability?
 - What is the preferred frequency of contact?

- Do you prefer contact to be prearranged or are you open to contact as needed?
- Discuss the Heart to Heart program requirements
 - Talk about confidentiality and mandated reporting

Developing the Relationship

As you and your mentee continue to meet and have discussions, the mentoring relationship will continue to develop. Building a trusting and supportive relationship is essential to the success of the mentor/mentee relationship. The recommendations below can assist in building a trusting, supportive relationship.

- Be authentic.
- Be available when you say you are going to be.
- Be consistent. Follow through with what you say you'll do.
- Be present and attentive to your mentee.
- Stay positive.
- Empower rather than enable. Instead of saying what you think they'll want to hear, be honest and provide constructive feedback.
- Have fun!

As the relationship continues to develop, trust is established and the conversation becomes more comfortable, personal and open.

Closing the Relationship

As with all good things, the mentor/mentee relationship will come to an end. We previously discussed the steps you will take as a mentor to notify **embrella** when it's time to close the mentor/mentee relationship. It's also important to discuss with the mentee when you feel it's time for the relationship to end and ensure that they are prepared for it. Talk about what was accomplished and what you each will take away from your participation in the program. Close the mentor/mentee relationship on a positive note.

This discussion should also include what you want your relationship to look like once participation in the Heart to Heart Program ends. You and your mentee may have bonded and want to remain friends and that is perfectly acceptable. The important part is ensuring that you are both on the same page.

Conclusion

We hope that this program guide has helped to prepare you for your new volunteer role as a mentor with **embrella's** Heart to Heart mentoring program. If you have any further questions, please contact the Family Support Manager at 609.520.6439 or lbonilla@embrella.org.