



# Mentoring Matters: Special Bond Between Mentor, Mentee Creates Unique Family

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MIAMI (CBSMiami) – For Vanessa Perry and her mentor Erin Lewis, the zoo is a place to spend the day, not only seeing wildlife but also talking and catching up, as they’ve done for nearly a decade.

“I was there every step of the way, and she’s going to be there every step of my way,” said Perry.

Lewis worked for the mentoring organization Big Brothers Big Sisters. When she interviewed a young Vanessa in order to match her with a “big sister,” she knew she could not let her go and decided to step in herself.

“I interviewed Vanessa to get a ‘big sister,’ and I thought about all the people on my caseload, and whether I could match her to one of these other ‘big sisters,’” said Lewis. “In the end, I just felt like she was right for me, so I chose her as my ‘little,’ and I feel like she chose me, too.”

The impact Lewis made in Perry's life was dramatic.

"When it comes to school, I had my ups and downs, where my grades were slacking, and she just kept telling me, 'Don't let other people affect you, don't follow the crowd, do your own things, stay positive, work hard,'" said Perry. "And ever since, my grades have just gone up and up and up."

There have been times over the past eight years when it was hard to stay positive. Perry's parents struggled with drugs, and then her other caretaker, her grandmother, died of pancreatic cancer. Perry spent time in foster care, before going to live with her cousin.

"When things got difficult, she was always there to say, 'Remember, I'm the angel on your shoulder, make sure to listen to me,'" said Perry. Lewis says supporting Vanessa has been a pleasure.

"She's always been very willing to take my advice, so it makes it easy to stick with her and help her make good decisions," said Lewis. "She's already a very resilient person, a sweet person, so she has made it easy for us to be matched because she's just so wonderful."

Lewis says Perry has been helpful in her life, too. Hanging out with her was a big stress reliever while Lewis went through law school. Perry was even a part of her wedding.

"I'm her biggest fan," said Perry. "No one compares to me."

In fact, mentoring has been such a big part of Lewis's life, that she met her husband through Big Brothers Big Sisters, and matched him with his "little brother" at around the same time she connected with Perry.

See more about their story by [clicking here](#).

The four of them have spent time as a family ever since. Now, there is a new addition to the gang, Lewis' three-year-old daughter.

"There have been a lot of changes throughout the years, but we have grown together," said Lewis.

More changes are on the way. Perry has applied to several colleges, and plans to study psychology, so she can be of help to others.

“I just love to help people,” said Perry. “It hurts to see somebody going through something and they can’t talk to anybody.”

Though the official mentorship will be over later this month when Perry turns 18, Lewis says wherever she ends up, she will have a visitor—for life.

“Nothing is going to change,” she said. “She will be my little sister forever, and she’s always welcome, any time she wants to come over.”

Perry says their relationship demonstrates the value of mentoring.

“I think a mentor can change a child’s life,” she said. “Whatever you’re going through, you know that there’s someone you can rely on, someone you can fall back on, someone’s shoulder you can lean on.”