Peer Mentoring

A Guide for Teachers
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This guide booklet was made possible through Alberta Health Services, Children’s Mental Health Plan.

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ISBN: 978-0-9810494-2-7

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# Peer Mentoring: A Guide for Teachers

## Table of Contents

- Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1
- What is Mentoring? .................................................................................................................. 2
- What is Peer Mentoring? ........................................................................................................ 2
- Why Peer Mentoring? .............................................................................................................. 4
- Cross-Age Peer Mentoring ...................................................................................................... 5
- Benefits for Mentors and Mentees ......................................................................................... 6
- A Mentor’s Role ....................................................................................................................... 7
- Tips for Making Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Programs a Success ........................................... 8
  - Mentor and Mentee Screening and Selection ..................................................................... 10
  - Mentor Training .................................................................................................................. 11
  - Choosing Mentoring Activities ......................................................................................... 13
  - Mentor/Mentee Activities .................................................................................................... 14
- Summary of Peer Mentoring Process ..................................................................................... 19
- References ............................................................................................................................. 20
Introduction

As a result of years of research, program development, implementation and evaluation, The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities (SACSC) has concluded that the projects that have the greatest impact on young people are the ones that actively engage them in creating positive changes in their lives. This is particularly important when working with older youth. Peer mentoring is a tool to help youth take the initiative to have a positive influence in their school and community.

This booklet provides information about the peer mentoring process and the benefits experienced by mentors and mentees.

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.”

~Benjamin Disraeli
What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a relationship over a prolonged period of time between two or more people where the mentor provides constant, as needed support, guidance and concrete help to the protégé as they travel through life.

- Mentoring can expose youth to new information which may help them make better decisions about their current or future lives.
- Mentoring is about believing in the unlimited potential of each and every youth served.
- Mentoring is about time and patience.

What is Peer Mentoring?

Peer mentoring provides a structure to connect caring youth, who take the role of mentor, with other youth. Most peer mentoring programs are school-based. Youth mentors are positive role models who develop relationships with and mentor younger students. Goals of peer mentoring are often oriented toward positive social skills and relationship strategies supported through skill-building activities between mentors and mentees.

One-to-one mentoring can provide a supportive relationship with an older individual to guide students’ development, self-image and response to challenging situations they experience in their home and/or school life. Peer mentoring will look different in every school. Each school will identify specific needs and will develop specific approaches to meeting those needs. What will look the same, though, is that peer mentoring will become a part of each school’s planning and commitment to create a safe, caring and inclusive culture.
The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities provides support for schools to create and implement a peer mentoring program. School facilitators set the goals of their program and learn processes for selecting and screening mentors and mentees.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”

~John Crosby
Why Peer Mentoring?

By accessing youth as leaders and mentors in a school community, peer mentoring has the potential to have a powerful impact on individual students and support a positive school culture. Youth who provide guidance and role modelling for their peers can strongly influence the skills and behaviours of others. Positive social skills that align with the expectations of the school community can be modelled and transferred in a non-hierarchical relationship.
Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

In a cross-age peer mentoring program, older youth mentor younger students. It is recommended that the mentor be at least two years older than the mentee. Mentors and mentees are peers within the same school community or are in schools that have a cross-age connection (ie. feeder school).

Cross-age peer mentoring focuses on the relationships between mentors and mentees as “the main mechanism by which mentees develop in the areas of self-esteem, connectedness, identity and academic attitudes” (Karcher 2005).

In the relationship, the mentor provides guidance, support, attention and caring over an extended period of time. Mentoring can be used as a means of guiding youth by role modelling or teaching behaviours and skills (Karcher 2005, Karcher 2007).
Benefits for Mentors and Mentees

Peer mentoring has significant benefits for both mentors and mentees. Mentoring relationships provide a stronger connection to the school and create a system of support and belonging for students. Mentees have an improved attitude toward and connectedness to their school and peers (Karcher 2005). They may also show improved grades or academic achievement and a greater sense of self-worth (Stoltz 2005). For mentors, the experience of taking on leadership roles in the school community builds their capacity and enhances their self-esteem. Peer mentoring helps youth develop into active listeners and caring individuals. The result is a supportive and caring school community.

(Garringer & MacRae 2008, Karcher 2007)

Youth involved in high quality one-to-one mentoring are reported to

- be less likely to initiate drug and alcohol use,
- be less likely to hit someone,
- skip fewer days of school,
- feel more competent about their ability to do well in school,
- receive slightly higher grades,
- have more positive relationships with friends and parents.

(Mentoring Adolescents: What Have We Learned?, Cynthia L. Sipe ppv.org)
A Mentor’s Role

- A mentor is a caring guide, a wise advisor, a partner on a journey and a trusted friend.
- A mentor can serve as a mirror for the mentee. They can show the younger student who they are and who they can become.
- A mentor is one who can help the mentee feel comfortable in their own skin and appreciate their gifts while at the same time exposing them to new opportunities and modes of thinking.
- What makes a mentor “a Mentor” is not that they are perfect or always know exactly what to say, but rather that they are able to form a strong connection with their mentee. This connection can serve as a catalyst for positive change and growth.

(Adapted from Designing and Customizing Mentor Training, Center for Applied Research Solutions, Inc. 2004)
Tips for Making Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Programs a Success

• Ensure mentors fully understand their roles.

Mentors will need training on their role, tips for being supportive, when to access help with problems that are too large for them to handle, and program expectations. Mentees may be intimidated by an older peer mentor and will need to be aware that their participation is not a punishment.

• Remind peer mentors to model positive behaviours.

Mentors will need reminders to pay attention to the social needs of their mentee. It is important to remember that the mentee is younger than the mentor. How mentors speak and topics they discuss may be appropriate for a teen (ex. dating, parties), but are not appropriate for mentees. A mentor’s behaviour and conversations with peers in the presence of mentees will influence the behaviour of mentees.

• Make sure it is enjoyable.

Mentor qualities such as empathy, authenticity, trust, and collaboration are important but so is having fun. Don’t get too caught up in having to complete specific activities. The more important goal is developing relationships and enjoyment.

• Maintain consistency and quality of peer mentoring relationships.

When mentors miss meetings or are not attentive to their mentees during a meeting, mentees may feel rejected and the mentor may be doing more harm than good.
Mentees sometimes report they do not enjoy meeting in a group because their mentors are in the company of their peers and their attention is not focused on the mentees.

Mentors have to resist the temptation to socialize with other mentors when they are in a group or team mentoring situation.

(Big Brothers Big Sisters http://highschoolbigs.org/lessons/view/1)  
(Garringer & MacRae 2008)

“A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside of yourself.”

~Oprah Winfrey
Mentor and Mentee Screening and Selection

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities helps teacher facilitators of peer mentoring programs consider processes for screening and selecting mentors and mentees. It is important to consider the many diverse groups of students in a school and criteria for identifying potential candidates for the program. Some factors to consider are: sufficient age difference between mentors and mentees, availability, scheduling, student need and parental permission.

“One of the things I keep learning is that the secret of being happy is doing things for other people.”

~Dick Gregory
Mentor Training

Training mentors is a significant component of successful peer mentoring programs (Herrara et al. 2008). Mentors need to be aware of the program's purpose, their role as a mentor and will need opportunities to practice the skills that are required for mentoring (Garringer & MacRae 2008). Several training sessions should take place before mentors begin mentoring and training should be on-going throughout the mentorship program. Training activities should include a variety of opportunities for student interaction to keep students engaged.

Goals of mentor training

While the details of training will vary depending upon the particular program, the overall goals are generally consistent across programs.

Training should

- Help participants understand the scope and limits of their role as mentors
- Help them develop the skills and attitudes they need to perform well in their role
- Introduce them to the concept of positive youth development
- Provide information about the strengths and vulnerabilities of the children or youth who are in the program
- Provide information about program requirements and supports for mentors
- Answer questions they may have about the mentoring experience
- Build their confidence as they prepare to start working with their mentee (Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence 2007)

General topics to consider for mentor training

- Outline the role of mentors and mentees
- Provide ground rules and expectations for mentors
• Explain the role of adult facilitators
• Examine characteristics of mentees (developmental characteristics, unique characteristics to mentees)
• Go over program schedule and activities
• Define confidentiality and when to share information with adult facilitators (not sharing personal information about mentees with others, types of personal information mentees might share, what types of information are important to share with adult facilitators)

(Garringer & MacRae 2008)

Skill development topics

Mentors will also need opportunities to develop specific skills such as:

• Team collaboration
• Leadership
• Listening and communication
• Establishing boundaries (to promote a safe and trusting relationship)
• Problem solving
• Decision making
• Conflict resolution

(Cole 1999, Garringer & MacRae 2008)
Choosing Mentoring Activities

Mentors and mentees should have opportunities to meet regularly (weekly or bi-weekly) for several weeks to allow strong, positive relationships to develop between them. Initial meetings often include fun activities that create enjoyable interaction and establish a comfort level for mentors and mentees then move toward activities and conversations aimed at the focus of the mentoring project. Mentoring activities may focus on trust-building, communication skills, listening skills or conflict resolution and can involve activities such as role-plays, art, board games and using picture prompts.

“The unselfish effort to bring cheer to others will be the beginning of a happier life for ourselves.”

~Helen Keller
Mentor/Mentee Activities

These activities may be used for training mentors or if mentors and mentees meet together as a group.

Ice Breaker Exercise

Inside-Outside Circle Ice Breaker

Choose a partner and number yourselves #1 and #2. All of the 1’s form a large circle facing outward. The 2’s face their partner. You have now formed an inside and an outside circle. Now the inside circle moves one person to the left. With the individual you are now facing, the person in the outside circle introduces themselves and tells about a time they did something that helped others. When they finish, the person facing them in the inside circle does the same. Give a couple of minutes for everyone to finish. The inside circle now moves one person to the left. Repeat introductions but this time tell about a time someone else helped you. The trainer can choose a variety of statements for participants to respond to or just have the participants introduce themselves.

Getting to Know Each Other

On The Spot

Use two dice. Take turns rolling the dice and then answering the question of the number you roll. Play until you have worked through most of the questions. If you roll the same number twice, give your partner a new answer.

With your partner, complete the following sentences …

1. You can’t roll this with two dice, so there is no question for it!
2. After a long day, I like to …
3. My favourite food is …
4. I am most excited when …
5. My favourite movie is …
6. What always makes me laugh is …
7. I get my best work done when …
8. My favourite time of day is …
9. My ideal day would be spent doing …
10. If I could go anywhere, I would go to …
11. You would be surprised to know that I …
12. The thing that bugs me the most is …

The Name Game

This activity is a fun way to sum up what the mentor and mentee know about each other after they have been together for awhile. Both the mentor and mentee need a piece of lined paper. Each person tries to describe their partner using details they have learned about them. Write the partner’s name vertically on the paper, one letter on each line and skipping a line between each letter. Beside each letter in the person’s name, record a personality trait or something you know about that person that starts with the letter.

Once the list is complete, draw a picture or two beside it to represent the person described. When both mentor and mentee have finished, they should read their description to their partner and tell the person why they used the words and pictures to describe him/her.

Example:

D – dares to try new things
A – always on time
R – really likes hockey
R – runs fast like a horse
Y – yo-yo champion
L – likes to play sports

Twenty Questions

The mentor comes up with a list of 20 questions to ask their mentee. (mentors may come up with the questions as a group or individually) Try to use a combination of closed questions which will have just a Yes or No answer as well as open questions. Open questions will provide more insight.
Sample questions:

What sports do you play?
How many brothers and sisters do you have?
What is your favourite thing to do after school?
What was the last movie you watched?
What is your favourite food?
Where do you live?
What do you like to do in your spare time?

First the mentor asks their mentee the questions. Once all of the questions have been answered, the mentee takes a turn.

Team Building Exercises

Straw and Paperclip Activity

Divide the participants into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a box of paperclips and 20-30 straws. Make sure the straws do not bend and that the paperclips can fit snugly into the end of the straws. Give each group a task (you can use the same task for each group if you want) and let them build a structure as a group. Sample tasks include tallest, strongest, longest, most creative, most functional, etc. Debriefing should include describing teamwork and leadership as well as how different models are needed to accomplish different tasks.

Human Knot Game

Divide the participants into groups of 6-10 people. Each group forms a tight circle, standing and facing each other. Everyone extends their hands into the circle and by inter-mingling their arms, grasps hands with other members of the group. Instruct people to be sure that the two hands they are holding do not belong to the same person. The groups’ goal is to untie the knot. Members of the group physically climb over/under/through each other’s arms to untie the knot of their bodies. Note: It’s RARE but it is possible for a knot to be unsolvable or end in two separate circles.
Building Self-Esteem Exercises

Positive Puzzles

Draw a puzzle, with up to 9 pieces, on a large sheet of paper. Make enough copies so that each mentor/mentee pair gets a puzzle. The mentor helps the mentee to come up with 9 words or phrases that describe themselves. Print one word or phrase (make it quite large) in each puzzle piece. Draw a picture or add designs to each piece to go with the descriptive word.
Three in Common

Break the group into 3’s. Their objective is for each group to find three things they have in common, but not the normal things like age, sex or hair colour. It must be three uncommon things. After letting the groups converse for several minutes, they (as a group) must tell the rest of the groups the three things they have in common.

Concept Review Exercise

Ball Toss

This is a semi-review and wake-up exercise when covering material that requires concentration. Participants form a large circle (no more than 10 people, otherwise make two circles) Give a foam ball to someone in the circle or the facilitator could join the circle and have the ball first. The person with the ball says their name loudly so everyone can hear and then says one thing they have learned about mentoring so far. They then toss the ball across the circle to someone else. That person says their name out loud and says one thing they have learned (each participant needs to remember the name of the person who they threw the ball to because they will be throwing to the same person in the next round). As each person has a turn, they should cross their arms behind their back so others in the circle know they’ve already had a turn. This continues until the ball comes back to the first person. Repeat the above with participants telling about something else they learned about mentoring or perhaps something they would like to learn about. During the second round, the person with the ball says the name of the person they are throwing to before throwing the ball to them. This round should go faster since everyone knows who to throw to.
Summary of Peer Mentoring Process

Step 1: Mentor Selection
Mentors should be chosen to represent the many types of groups that exist in the school such as sport and athletic types, studious types, alternative student types, special needs students and the children who have shown leadership qualities, but not always in a positive way.

Step 2: Mentor Training
All students who volunteer for and are selected as mentors need to participate in training prior to being partnered with a mentee. Training might take place at a one-day retreat (if possible away from the school) as well as classroom training at the school.

Step 3: Selection of Mentees
Mentees should be two or more years younger than the mentor. Suggestions for mentees may come from teachers, parents or other adults working with youth in the school.

Step 4: Scheduling Meetings
Regular mentor/mentee meetings (weekly or bi-weekly) should be scheduled in order for the mentor and mentee to develop a lasting relationship.

Step 5: Activities
Initial activities should help to establish a comfort level for mentors and mentees and above all be fun. Gradually move toward activities aimed at the focus of the project.
References


