

Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Introduction to Peer Mentoring for Schools

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities* project. The project is facilitated by JFA Purple Orange.

Introduction: why this tool

This tool is intended as an introduction to peer mentoring for schools leaders and staff. Peer mentoring is an effective way for schools to create positive outcomes for students with diverse abilities and needs, including those living with disability. They may be referred to as ‘Buddies’ or ‘Big Brother, Big Sister’ arrangements. We outline what mentoring involves and the benefits to those participating in mentoring relationships. Peer mentoring is an evidence-based way to build social capital among young people, including those with increased vulnerability.

“Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship between a young person and a caring individual who offers guidance, support and encouragement”¹.

Mentoring involves a person (the mentor) supporting someone who has less experience in any given area or who requires guidance and support (the mentee). Mentors are good role models and excellent listeners offering support, counsel, friendship, constructive feedback, and reinforcement. Mentoring may be delivered in one-to-one, group or online arrangements however one-to-one mentoring is especially effective and easiest to implement in schools.

Ideas and taking action

Ideas

Peer mentoring in schools involves two students engaging in a structured, supported, and purposeful relationship on a regular basis; most often the mentor is a few years older than the student they are mentoring and brings with them life experience and leadership. For example, a high school may initiate a year 12 student to mentor a year 8 student who is having difficulties with the transition to a new school and who is being excluded by peers; the focus of the mentoring relationship may be social and emotional support and increasing the mentee’s self-confidence and motivation. Peer mentoring in schools is usually coordinated and supported by a teacher or wellbeing officer who initiates and supports the mentoring relationships ensuring both the mentee and mentor have a positive experience.

¹ Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2007. Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks.
file:///C:/Users/letitiar.JFA/Downloads/AYMN-Benchmarks-FINAL.pdf

Many schools locally and internationally have set up successful peer mentoring programs as a means to address social isolation among their students and provide opportunities for capacity building.

What happens in mentoring?

“A well-planned and organised formal mentoring program can provide strong individual support, advice and guidance for the young person and help in practical ways at important transition points in their life”.²

Mentoring is a structured and purposeful relationship, however what happens in mentoring can be flexible according to the mentee and mentor involved and according to the setting. The mentoring relationship is about discussion and reflection looking to the future and supporting the mentee to create their own pathway. Effective mentoring supports the mentee to focus on their strengths and the positives within their life, while assisting them to work on the areas that they feel might need improvement. Mentoring in schools can be particularly helpful for students who are struggling with peers and friendships.

Peer mentoring in schools involves a mentee and mentor catching up on a regular basis spending time on an activity of interest to the mentee such as developing a specific skill, exploring future work or study opportunities, or talking about things that are important to the mentee like school or friends. For example, a primary school may facilitate for a year 6 student to join a year 2 student during physical education classes to support that student to interact with peers and participate in the class activities. Mentoring catch ups need to happen on a regular basis, such as once a week or fortnight, for the mentee and mentor to build rapport and trust and for the relationship to be effective.

Benefits of mentoring for mentees

Youth mentoring programs have the ability to produce numerous positive outcomes, “from raising self-esteem, encouraging healthier behaviours and improving school attendance, to enabling better informed career choices and a more secure place in education or the workforce”³. Some young people may have difficulties going on at home or at school, which could also affect their self-esteem and wellbeing; having a mentor who provides consistent support acts a protective factor assisting young people to navigate through life’s challenges.

² Hartley, R., 2004. *Young People and Mentoring: Towards a National Strategy*. Sydney, NSW: The Smith Family. <https://www.truebluedreaming.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/YoungPeopleandMEntoring-NatStrategy.pdf>

³ Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2007. *Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks*. <file:///C:/Users/letitiar.JFA/Downloads/AYMN-Benchmarks-FINAL.pdf>

Research shows that mentoring improves young people's learning, social, and emotional outcomes. Young people involved in mentoring are likely to experience:

- improved relationships with family and peers
- better communication skills
- reduced feelings of isolation
- a reduction in risky behaviour
- enhanced social and emotional development
- increased opportunities for community participation
- increased resilience⁴

Benefits of mentoring for mentors

Mentors are kind, caring, and reliable people who offer support, guidance and encouragement. Being a friendly and positive role model in a mentee's life can make a big difference, especially when some young people don't know what it's like to have someone in their life that is reliable, encouraging and easy to talk to.

Mentors experience a sense of satisfaction through 'making a difference' in the life of a young person.⁵ There are many benefits for the mentor including:

- building confidence and capacity
- learning new skills especially social, emotional, and communication skills
- taking a leadership role and developing leadership skills
- sharing life experiences and wisdom with a young person
- learning from and with a younger person
- self-reflection

School mentoring programs provide older students an opportunity to bring out the strengths of their younger peers; work towards shared goals with someone younger; and develop patience, tolerance, respect, understanding, and flexibility. Peer mentoring programs in schools enable older students to assume active, valued roles within their school communities and provide youth leadership opportunities.

Action

Recipe for success

A cross-age peer mentoring relationship is a powerful form of youth development and, as mentioned previously, can bring numerous benefits to participants.⁶ When young people

⁴ Blaber, D., & Glazebrook, D., 2006. A Guide to Supporting Effective Programs for Mentoring Young People. Melbourne, VIC: Victorian Government Department of Planning and Community Development. file:///C:/Users/letitiar.JFA/Downloads/A_Guide_to_Effective_Practice_for_Mentoring_Young_People_Sep06_DPCDw.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

are helping other young people, it is essential that there are staff available to provide extra context, structure, and support including engaging activities and ongoing match supervision.⁷ Without an appropriate level of support from school staff, peer mentoring relationships between students are likely to drift or dissolve without benefit, and this may cause harm to a student already living with increased vulnerability.

The first step to a successful peer mentoring program is developing a solid understanding of what is involved and establishing commitment from key staff members to lead and facilitate the program.

Where to go for further information

Before embarking on setting up a peer mentoring program, we encourage schools to read the companion tool titled 'Setting up a Peer Mentoring Program in your School' or contact JFA Purple Orange for more information.

⁶ Garringer, M., & MacRae, P., 2008. Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools: An Introductory Guide. Folsom, CA: Mentoring Resource Center. <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/building-effective-peer-mentoring-programs-intro-guide.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.