

MENTORING FOUNDATIONS

Mentoring Toolkit Tip Sheet #1

Developed by the Early Childhood Community Development Centre and its Mentoring Pairs for Child Care project, based on the Partners in Practice Mentoring Model

"Mentoring is a process for the reciprocal transfer of knowledge and the facilitation of reflective practice and continuous growth and learning that is relevant to an individual's daily work and career, and personal and professional development"

(Tammy McCormick Ferguson, 2009)

Why mentoring for early learning & care professionals?

- Mentoring is widely recognized as an effective training and career development strategy.
- The Partners in Practice (PIP) Mentoring Model, which this Toolkit is based on, has been proven to positively impact staff retention and quality in the child care context.
- A mentoring approach to learning and development can be applied to almost any professional topic and used with most, if not all, types of staff.

Benefits of a successful mentoring strategy

- A learning culture is fostered and encouraged in the wider community, as those in mentoring relationships network and engage more fully with the profession.
- Excellence in practice, ethical behaviour, reflective practice, and continuous growth and learning is modelled and facilitated.
- Skills are shared and competencies developed.
- Professionalism is modelled and encouraged.
- Enhanced job performance, satisfaction, and confidence are experienced.
- Leadership and insight into the profession is gained.
- Staff retention is strengthened.
- A sense of belonging, support, and recognition is achieved.
- Affiliation with child care, as a sector, is strengthened.
- Leadership is demonstrated and developed.

Peer or Reciprocal Mentoring

A relationship which facilitates the professional development and maturity of the participating early learning and care professionals

Mentor

A participating professional, with knowledge to share, who is facilitating the development and growth of a less experienced or knowledgeable early childhood service provider

Mentee

A participating professional, with less experience in children's services and/or a desire to improve her/his practice, who is currently the recipient of support from one or more Mentors

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Guiding principles

These express the values and beliefs inherent in the PIP Model and are meant as guides to how, within a mentoring relationship and/or culture, individuals view themselves and each other. The four Guiding Principles are:

- 1. Support & Recognition;** contributions made to children, families, and communities by early childhood professionals are valuable and must be supported and recognized.
- 2. Reflective Practice;** reflective practitioners achieve excellence in early childhood practice.
- 3. Continuous Growth;** in order to be able to value the growth and development of children we must value our own growth and development.
- 4. Building Relationships;** mentoring relationships are based on honour, respect, and modesty.

The **Mentoring Relationship** is the core of the model and the focus is on the people who form the relationship – the mentor and mentee. Emphasis is placed on creating an environment that allows each to reach their full potential and to practice with professionalism, excellence, and ethics using reflective thinking. In order for all of the above to take place the basic needs of safety, belonging, and voice must be addressed.



Safe Reflection

Mentors and mentees can speak freely, without negative impact, which develops the sense of self-acceptance and security and produces a safe environment for reflective thinking.

Voice

Partners encourage each other to speak openly and offer acceptance and positive feedback which produces a sense of recognition and value and promotes quality in practice.

Belonging

The benefit of having personal needs met through the mentoring partner relationship is that energies are freed for professional concerns which can then affect the wider child care community through increased networking and engagement in professional activities.

The mentoring relationship is further supported by the other two components of the PIP model; i) **Tools & Strategies**, and ii) **Community-Based Development**. Each aspect mutually reinforces and depends on the other, like the legs of a three-legged stool.

Tools & Strategies

These are the materials and processes that are used to support and develop the mentoring relationship and focused learning. They include: reflective thinking, pair conferencing, journaling, networking/site visits, communication strategies, and methods for exploring professional practices. Tip sheets **#2 – Relationship Building**, **#3 – Facilitating Reflective Practice**, and **#4 – Tools & Strategies** provide more information on these topics.

Community-based Development Approach

This refers to a process that both supports mentoring relationships and develops a local mentoring culture which involves a specific and unique application of participatory leadership, collaboration/partnership, and use of local resources and knowledge. The result ... organizations, networks, and communities which:

- Support and recognize early learning and care professionals
- Increase the quality of reflective practice
- Encourage continuous growth and learning
- Build positive professional relationships