

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Mentoring Toolkit Tip Sheet #2

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

Relationships between the people who form a mentoring pair or group and those who support them are primary to a successful mentoring experience. Emphasis is placed on the conditions that allow mentors and mentees to reach their full potentials and practice with excellence using reflective thinking. To do this, their needs have to be addressed.

As introduced in **Tip Sheet #1 – Mentoring Foundations**, the needs of the mentoring pair and the groups they form are low risk (safe) dialogue and reflection and a sense of voice and belonging. A successful mentoring experience incorporates strategies that allow for these needs to be met, including structured and sufficient time to develop relationships, and often training.

This allows early childhood professionals to develop the skills, knowledge, and abilities to facilitate the conditions necessary to: feel safe in their reflection; speak freely without negative impact; and develop a sense of self-acceptance and security and feelings of confidence, competence, and effectiveness.

Offering mentors and mentees, and the groups they form, opportunities for focused dialogue and to plan and evaluate their mentoring activities gives those involved in the mentoring relationship a voice. **Tip Sheet #4 –**

Tools & Strategies offers ideas and templates for achieving this aspect of a successful mentoring strategy. A sense of voice is essential and results from encouragement to speak and the acceptance experienced when heard. Along with positive feedback, this produces a sense of recognition and value in a person. This feeling of being valued affects the quality of one's practice.

Creating occasions for those involved in mentoring to network and engage in professional group activities is a further strategy that will build collectivity and togetherness and an overall sense of belonging. Networking gives participants the courage to engage in activities within the profession. When emotional development is cared for, additional energy can be directed to professional concerns. The enhanced self-awareness, increased confidence, and heightened sense of the impact that they have on children's services leaves those participating feeling differently and seeing themselves as true professionals.

Feelings of safety result from:

- Acceptance and understanding
- Reservation of judgment
- Immediate and continuous feedback aimed at growth
- Activity that produces success
- Time

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Communication guidelines that those engaged in mentoring can use to create an environment where positive relationships develop

- Suspending judgment
- Summarizing or clarifying
- Actively listening
- Focusing on strengths and positive aspects/possibilities
- Emphasizing a solution focus and problem-solving
- Using open-ended questions (who, what, when, where, why)
- Providing immediate and ongoing feedback that promotes success and the achievement of identified goals
- Maintaining trust and confidentiality



Additional tips for building strong, successful mentoring relationships

- Model ethical professional behaviour and reflective practice
- Set clear boundaries (i.e. roles and expectations)
- Connect regularly and with a purpose or goal in mind
- Use structured processes to identify, monitor, and evaluate progress towards goals
- Keep commitments to one another
- Offer honest feedback and positive suggestions
- Encourage feelings of safety

Strong mentoring relationships result in children's services professionals who are better able to:

- share their concerns and successes;
- identify and address their needs;
- plan to meet needs of children, family, staff, and programs/centres; and
- reflect on their actions and changes in their work related to new conditions in programs or services and/or the early learning and care community and sector.