TOOLS & STRATEGIES
Mentoring Toolkit Tip Sheet #4

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

Regular reflection and contact with a mentoring partner and/or group are important elements of a successful mentorship experience or program. This Tip Sheet can be used by early learning and care professionals to further develop relationships and reflective thinking and, as a result, improve professional practice.

The Mentoring Pairs for Child Care (MPCC) project uses the tools and strategies included in this tip sheet in its Ontario programs. Over the course of a year, child care supervisors and assistant supervisors explore the Child Care Human Resource Sector Council's *Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators* in their pair relationships and mentoring study groups. Examples of the administrative, program, professional, and community impacts of using these tools and strategies in the MPCC groups include:

- reciprocal learning (i.e. mentor and mentee, group learning) and professional rejuvenation;

- implementation of environmental changes (i.e. photo labelling of shelves);

- development of HR tools and processes (i.e. new staff orientation guide, team task chart, more focused, and participatory team meetings);

- increased ability to develop required plans and policies (i.e. parent policies, pandemic/emergency plans);

- improved collegial and centre sharing (i.e. policies, resources, and best practices within, and among, child care centres);

- development of new networks and programming (i.e. Nature Network established by one mentor pair which promotes and supports nature-based and environmentally friendly programming);

- closer connections to ECE community (i.e. parents included in centre renovation planning and decision-making, mentors and mentoring groups share information and resources at community meetings and events, and increased links to quality initiatives);

- increased familiarity with, and use of, screening and assessment tools;

- decreased isolation and increased confidence;

- decreased stress and increased ability to reflect and generate solutions; and

- increased use of Information Technology, including overall use of computers and email, development and distribution of electronic newsletters, and online resources, surveys and forums.

Mentoring pairs and groups should *begin by identifying the issue or opportunity* they wish to explore or the goal they would like to achieve. Then, they can *select* which of the following *tools and/or strategies they'll use to explore the identified topic(s) and plan for action to achieve goals*.

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What might you need or want to explore in your program, classroom, organization, group, or network? How might you use the following to do so?

Conferencing

Conferencing refers to the various ways that mentoring pairs and groups regularly connect with each other to address issues of relevance and concern in children's services. Examples of pair or group conferencing include: site visits, face-to-face meetings, email, and online forums, and phone conversations. These can range from spontaneous chats – to planned trips – to a centre or program to observe best practices and obtain ideas.

Regular conferencing allows early learning and care professionals to:

- connect one-on-one and with the larger community;
- communicate effectively, efficiently, and conveniently;
- take the time to reflect, problem solve, and set goals for professional development and enhancement of practice;
- observe each other's skills, resources, programs, processes, and best practices;
- dialogue and reflect; and
- identify priorities and create strategies for strengthening practice.

Strategies to encourage dialogue when conferencing include:

- suspending judgment and identifying assumptions;
- summarizing (reviewing what has been said);
- clarifying (confirming your understanding);
- asking open-ended questions (who, what, when, where, how);
- active listening;
- allowing for silence and reflection; and
- sharing stories of successes and lessons learned.

Journaling

Regular journaling is an excellent way to develop reflective thinking and enhance self-reflection. It can also be used to note key learnings, decisions, or plans arising out of conferencing. When journal entries are shared with a mentoring partner and/or group, further dialogue is encouraged. It is recommended that those journaling keep a separate notebook or folder of electronic files where their reflections can be recorded and safely stored.

The following is a **Journaling Prompt Tool** that can be used with almost any identified issue or opportunity in children's services.

- Describe the challenge, goal, or opportunity.
- Identify the professional skills that are important to this situation and why they are relevant.
- List the options for action that you have considered and the possible consequences of taking each action.
- Identify the action you took/would take and why. If action has been taken, assess its impact and effectiveness.
- What is/are the next step(s)?

Mentoring pairs and groups can use the following process to identify the root causes and most effective strategies and plans for addressing an issue or challenge.

Cause & Effect Analysis

1. Articulate the effect that you want to deal with; for example, "not enough qualified staff to meet ratio"; or "inadequate resources for special needs children".

2. Consider and record the following:
   · What is it about the **p**eople that causes this effect?
   · What is it about the **p**olicies that cause this effect?
   · What is it about the **p**ractices that cause this effect?
   · What is it about the **p**lace (facility) that causes this effect?

3. Identify the major or key cause(s) brainstormed under the **four p's** above, and then ask "why does this happen?" for each. Continue to drill down into one or two more levels of cause on each response by asking why it happens.

4. Identify any relationships between undesirable effects and levels of cause identified and look for actions that will address multiple causes simultaneously.

5. Develop a list of recommended actions to address causes and change effects and create a plan to implement.

The following additional processes can also be used to examine topics of interest.

Case Study

In mentoring pairs or groups, actual examples or published cases concerning the issue identified can be explored.

Critical Review

Articles or reports of relevance to the issue/goal identified can be reviewed and discussed.

Professional Development

Mentoring pairs or groups can organize or attend trainings and speaking events of relevance to their identified topic or goal. In this strategy, the mentoring pair or group uses the expertise of an external speaker or trainer to explore the area of interest.

The following is a Reflection & Planning Tool that can be used with the **Case Study**, **Critical Review**, and **Professional Development** strategies.

- Identify the key points of learning from case, article, or training/speaker.

- Describe the future you are working towards.

- List the options for action that you have considered and the possible consequences of taking each action.

- Identify the criteria for selection options/actions and the indicators of success.

- Identify the action(s) you will take and provide the rationale.

- Identify timeline, person(s) responsible, and plan to track, monitor, and/or evaluate.