

## **BUILDING THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

Successful mentoring comes from the mentor and protégé working as a team. This relationship develops as a result of the efforts by both. The mentor plays a vital and unique role by bringing guidance program experience and expertise to the relationship. The needs of the protégé will be the focus for the mentoring year. The team seeks to establish a relationship based on mutual trust, respect, and collegiality (Jonson, 2002).

Recent statistical reports indicate that more than 50% of today's new counselors entering classrooms will leave the profession before they have five years of experience. Beginning counselors can become discouraged because they are expected to perform with the same skill and confidence as colleagues with many years of experience. Mentors can help protégés develop confidence in making informed decisions that enrich professional knowledge and sharpen their counseling abilities.

There are two important factors in effective mentoring programs: building the relationship and two-way communication. Both are critical, and each relationship is as unique as the individuals involved.

The responsibility of the relationship rests with both the mentor and the protégé. The protégé is an active partner in this relationship. As you go through this information, please keep in mind this is a collaborative, collegial relationship that grows. In a collaborative relationship, both parties are actively building the relationship.

**NEW COUNSELORS AS ADULT LEARNERS:** Following the idea of lifelong learning, new counselors are adult learners. There are five basic principles of adult learners, and these principles hold implications for the mentoring partnership. Consider these principles when working as a mentoring team (Knowles, 1978).

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered.
3. Experience is the richest resource for adult learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.
5. Individual differences between people increase with age.

**GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP:** Many things contribute to a successful relationship. Below are a few pointers to keep in mind when preparing to start the mentoring year. Both mentors and protégés should have a:

- Willingness to invest time and energy.
- Strong conviction that counselors have a positive effect on the quality of school.
- Sense of confidence in their own abilities.
- Belief that mentoring is a mutually enhancing professional development opportunity in which both partners will achieve satisfaction from the relationship.

Mentors have the responsibility to carry out many roles throughout the relationship. At times, the mentor will advise when the protégé is seeking information, counsel to provide emotional support, and at all times role model to ensure open continual communication. The protégé can expect the mentor to be **ADVISOR, COUNSELOR, TRAINER, SPONSOR, ROLE MODEL, ADVOCATE, OPENER OF DOORS** and, of course, **FRIEND**. (Daresh, 2003).

**WORKING TOGETHER TO ENSURE SUCCESS:** To find support and solutions, the protégé and the mentor come to the relationship with a commitment to:

*Get involved in the mentoring process*

- Do what you say you will do
- Earn and keep the trust of your mentoring partner
- Share concerns and feelings about the guidance program
- Share experiences
- Show respect

*Take responsibility*

- Take initiative when it comes to having needs met
- Clarify ground rules early
- Avoid making assumptions
- Receive feedback objectively
- Take responsibility for your personal well-being
- Maintain confidentiality

*Be an Objective Observer*

- Observe master counselors in addition to working with your mentor
- Focus on a particular aspect of the guidance program or lesson you observe
- Reflect on questions you may have for your mentoring partner about the observation

*Ask questions*

- Understand you have the right and responsibility to ask questions
- Be comfortable in asking for help as a protégé
- Focus questions and requests on what you really want and need

*Chart Your Course*

- When unsure, seek more information
- Deal with the “most pressing” need-to-know items first
- Share and celebrate progress

*Network*

- Join peer support/learning groups in schools, districts, or professional organizations
- Check out the guidance program Listservs
- Expand networking at professional meetings

*Take Risks*

- Be willing to go out on a limb when following your convictions
- Consider ramifications before taking a risk
- Reflect on possible ramifications with your mentoring partner
- If it causes harm, do not take the risk
- When you have made the decision, do it with confidence
- Understand this is not an evaluative relationship

*Reflect*

- Pay attention to the results of your decisions
- Analyze your actions, motivations, and outcomes
- Write down your reflections

- Share and discuss the reflections with your partner
- Use the reflection process to make improvements

*Give Back*

- Provide feedback that assists the mentoring program
- Actively seek out opportunities to improve student learning more effectively
- Look for opportunities to share and use past experiences
- Share your enthusiasm about counseling with others

**THE DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP**

- Establish a warm, genuine and open relationship that encourages learning.
- Keep in frequent contact with each other with either taking the initiative. Don't always wait for the other person to call or make the contact.
- Establish realistic expectations for the relationship.
- Use the Decision Points Checklist to determine the best time and method to reach each other in addition to finding out other information.
- Be a good listener. Show a genuine interest in what is being said.
- Encourage the asking of questions.
- As a mentor, do not be afraid to admit you do not know everything about counseling.
- Share your own experiences and insights as a counselor -- good and bad.
- Build trust with respect, open communication, and support. Attempt to offer as much of these as possible.
- Make regular phone calls and/or send regular e-mails. Share unit plans and resources.
- As a protégé, create an environment to be open and honest with your needs. You should not fear judgment. The mentoring relationship is not a performance review.
- Have informal visits and conversations. Be available in a timely manner.
- Try to be nonjudgmental and open.
- As a mentor, validate the challenges of counseling. Take your partner's ideas and feelings seriously.
- Discuss problems realistically and know that sometimes you have the same problems.
- Offer support. Be positive. Ask what is needed.
- Be accessible. Be willing to help in areas that feel more pressing.
- Your mentoring partner is your peer.
- Talk about areas other than counseling. Do not be afraid to share some of your personal interests.
- Be available, open, and honest. Be reliable, and follow through with activities.
- Both can benefit from the experience; the protégé from the knowledge and experience of the mentor, and the mentor from the enthusiasm of the protégé.
- Maintain a sense of humor!

**ESTABLISHING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION:** One of the most important factors in mentoring is good communication. Talking and communicating are not the same. Communicating involves:

- **Listening:** for understanding, facts, and feelings. Create a positive, comfortable environment for listening. Listen until it is your turn to speak.
- **Looking:** making eye contact. Pay attention to the whole person. Is the speaker smiling, frowning or neither? Watch the speaker's body language. Show interest by leaning forward and moving closer with respect for personal space.
- **Leveling:** being honest about what you are feeling and thinking. Use "I" statements when responding. Accept the speaker's feelings. Don't try to change the feelings or give advice without being asked.

Maintaining confidentiality in this relationship is extremely important. Key to the relationship is a sense of trust. This relationship is to support work in the guidance program, not to evaluate. Maintain two-way communication throughout the mentoring year.

**GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER:** The following questions are good to talk about early in the relationship:

- What is important to you in working with the guidance program and working with students?
- Is this your primary work, or will you have additional responsibilities you might find challenging?
- What is your teaching/counseling background?
- What structures have you put in place for managing the guidance program?
- Are you comfortable with new ideas? What are you ready to try?

Many of the questions that arise will be answered as you build two-way communication with each other. MSCA District Chairs and the Career Education Guidance Program Supervisor are also available to answer questions and share expertise.

**MEASURING THE MENTORING COMMITMENT:** The Self-Assessment Rubric shows four levels of involvement in a mentoring relationship. As a team, decide what level you will try to reach. Level Four requires a strong desire and extensive time commitment. Level One does not meet the expectations of this mentoring program. If you do not feel you are moving beyond Level One, whether as a protégé or a mentor, please contact your MSCA District Chair for suggestions.

## Self-Assessment Rubric

Level Four	Level Three	Level Two	Level One
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact between mentor &amp; protégé is scheduled frequently, protected from competing demands, and meets the mutual needs of the partnership.</li> <li>• Both the mentor and protégé consistently initiate learning focused conversations regarding counselor and student learning.</li> <li>• The mentor demonstrates versatility in appropriately consulting, collaborating, and coaching to purposefully develop the protégé’s capacity to generate information.</li> <li>• Mentoring interactions promote connections between guidance practice and student results. Personal leanings are transferred and applied to other content and contexts. These leanings inform future actions.</li> <li>• The mentor models problem-solving processes and reflective practice which protégés adopt.</li> <li>• The protégé participates in school-wide goal achievement and gradually interacts as a collective member of the professional school community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mentor and protégé maintain regular contact.</li> <li>• Interactions promote collaboration through joint planning, problem-solving, decision-making, and reciprocity of learning results.</li> <li>• Learning-focused conversations center on the implementation of guidance curriculum and generally recognized best practices.</li> <li>• The mentor provides connections with grade level/content area colleagues and promotes collaborative opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact occurs as scheduled and satisfies the protégé’s needs for information.</li> <li>• Throughout the relationship, information production remains higher for the mentor.</li> <li>• The mentor conducts conferences employing strategies to fix current problems and adds to the protégé’s list of activities.</li> <li>• Discussion centers on specific episodes and situations. Meeting protégé needs may become time intensive for the mentor.</li> <li>• The mentor provides orientation and introduction to the professional school community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentor-protégé contact is irregular and generally precipitated by a need for information or assistance.</li> <li>• Interactions are limited to the transfer of critical, basic information.</li> <li>• The mentor provides suggestions and advice as requested.</li> <li>• The protégé’s collegial and collaborative opportunities are limited to other novices or professionals close in proximity or content specialty.</li> <li>• The greatest leanings for the protégé are within the management domain and generally do not progress to the examination of impact.</li> <li>• Survival strategies are the emphasis of the protégé’s learning.</li> </ul>

*Used with permission: Lipton, L. & Wellman, B (2003). Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning-Focused Relationships. Sherman CT: MiraVia, LLC.*