

Introduction

The Mentor, (sometimes called a 'Buddy') plays an important role in the learning process. The Mentor provides support and guides the Learner in a non-supervisory/non-assessing role. The Mentor's role differs to that of the Workplace Supervisor and it is best if these roles are played by two different people.

This guide provides you, the Mentor, with information about your role in the mentoring process and how you are able to support the Learner.

What is a Mentor?

A Mentor is someone who is willing to support and guide the Learner within a service. Mentors are usually highly experienced and respected people (preferably someone who holds an early childhood Diploma, early childhood degree or equivalent) and who take their Mentee's longer-term personal and professional goals into account. Being qualified ensures that the Mentor already has the skills and knowledge required to work as an educator, meaning they are able to guide and support the Learner and also that they have experience in being a Learner themselves, and are familiar with the learning process.

The benefits of being a Mentor

The mentoring process not only benefits the Learner (also known as the 'Mentee'), but also benefits you, the Mentor. These benefits include:

- having the satisfaction of passing on your skills and knowledge
- enjoying seeing Learners develop their skills
- applying and developing skills as a Mentor and coach
- improving your own skills in communication as you explain tasks and answer questions
- developing staff who are able to complete delegated tasks to enable you to complete other work
- having the opportunity to assist the Learner in building positive work relationships and an understanding of how the service operates.

The role of the Mentor

As the Mentor, you must be willing to:

- mentor, support and encourage the Learner
- foster a positive relationship with the Learner
- be flexible, trustworthy and honest
- be a good listener
- assist the Learner to follow service policies and procedures
- be a good role model
- have regular discussions with the Learner
- provide the Learner with positive and constructive feedback
- reflect on your own performance as the Mentor
- reflect on and evaluate the mentoring process.

Expectations of the Learner

It is important to have appropriate expectations of the Learner. It is possible they have not had any experience working in an education and care setting so it is important to keep this in mind. It should not be expected that they will demonstrate the skills and knowledge of a qualified educator as they are still undertaking the learning process.

It is important to be mindful that:

- the Learner is still learning—please be patient and supportive
- under no circumstances is the Learner to be left alone with the children
- the Learner must not be included in your child:educator ratios
- the Learner must ask permission to introduce a new activity to the children
- if you allow the Learner to take a group activity, they must still be supervised
- if the Learner wishes to make written observations on a child, they must gain written permission from the child's parent/guardian and submit this with their work
- the Learner must be supervised when nappy changing (if your service allows) or supporting children with toileting
- the Learner must participate in your daily routine to the best of their ability.

The mentoring process

The following diagram describes the four stages of the mentoring process. By working together, both yourself (the Mentor) and the Mentee can benefit from this process and achieve common goals. Be sure to reflect on each stage as you work through them and at the end of the process evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring process. You may need to revisit some stages throughout the process to clarify information, purposes or goals. If you find you do need to do this, take some time to reflect on what may have been missed while working through that particular stage initially.

