

## Core skills of mentoring

**Creating a learning environment:** You might do this by questioning: probing when necessary to help the mentee explore their thoughts and ideas in a constructive way. It's also important to create a space where the mentee feels safe to disclose things about themselves, and where there is a foundation of mutual respect. So it is a good idea to spend a little time exploring what you are each expecting from the relationship.

### Opening a session

This might involve allowing time to catch up for 5-10 minutes or so. You might use the following approach which is sometimes used to open meetings: Individuals go round the table and say if they have any challenges or preoccupations, which involves saying anything which is on their minds which might get in the way of the meeting. It can be anything, from feeling frustrated waiting for someone to reply to an email or concerns about entertaining a large group of friends for dinner over the weekend! Using this technique can help to ensure the mentoring session is productive and by being open about anything which is on your mind, as the mentor and the mentee can be beneficial to both.

### Giving and receiving feedback

How to receive advice...

- Receive it as a gift
- Don't reject it – decide later what you want to do with it

How to give and receive feedback:

- Focus on facts, not feelings or beliefs. Gather examples, not vague impressions.
- Aim to be observational rather than interpretive
- Deliver simple, specific feedback
- Use feedback to inform, don't give advice, it's too personal
- Allow people the chance to clarify what you say, but not to contest it.
- Feedback is about behaviour and not about personal traits or physical characteristics.

**Agreeing action points:** at the end of each meeting it is important to summarise what they have achieved and agree any action points (sometimes for both the mentor and the mentee). Remember that action points are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**imebound.

A useful structure you might use is **W**hat will you do? **W**hen will you do it? And **H**ow will you know?

### Attentive and active listening

Listening carefully to your mentee will help you to make positive choices about the approach that you take with them and to change your approach when necessary.

Some examples of mentoring approaches and the situations in which you might use them are:

**Reflecting:** if your mentee is confused or unsure of what they want to do, taking a reflective approach, perhaps by asking them to explain in more depth (verbally, in writing, or pictorially) may help them to realise what it is that is blocking them.

**Clarifying:** not only to ensure that you understand your mentee but so that they can see their way through to their next step. Clarifying can include identifying a range of options and talking through how each might work one at a time.

**Open questions:** asking explorative questions such as 'Can you tell me more?' or 'What options can you create?' can help broaden their thinking and be able to generate wider range of options.

**Challenging:** questioning their assertions can help the mentee to prioritise conflicting demands, see possibilities that they might not have thought of, or take a more assertive approach.

**Reframing:** suggesting an alternative perspective to a situation may help them feel differently about it, and be able to see how to move forwards

**Disclosing:** a mentoring session is about the mentee and not the mentor but when your mentee has had a bad experience, it can help you to express empathy if you reveal some of your own bad experience.

**Informing/suggesting:** generally it will be helpful if the mentee decides on their own courses of action. However, if you have or can get information which you know will help them it may help them to make progress if you offer it.

**Sympathising:** there may be times when your mentee is too upset to make much progress in a session. You might want to agree to limit yourselves to tea and sympathetic discussion of their problems. Try to end with an agreement about the focus for next time and a simple action that the mentee can take in the meantime.

**Praising:** when even a small step has been achieved praising in words and by body language will encourage your mentee and increase their confidence.