GUIDELINES FOR MENTORING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS

NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Contents

Introduction

Tutoring, coaching and mentoring

There are many ways of assisting students who need extra help to maximise their learning outcomes. One effective way of doing this is for teachers and other adults to work with students one-to-one or in small groups in a tutoring, coaching or mentoring role.

Teachers may provide extra teaching or tutoring before or after school or at lunchtime. Mentors, tutors and coaches can be recruited from school staff or from the community.

These guidelines can assist in the development of effective relationships to maximise learning and ensure the safety of students. They will also assist in clarifying the boundaries of these relationships.

Throughout this document the terms *mentor* or *mentoring* are used to refer to teachers, tutors, coaches and mentors working on a regular, one-to-one or small group basis with students. *Mentoring programs* refer to programs where one or more teachers, tutors, coaches or mentors work on a regular, one-to-one or small group basis with students.

It is important to recognise that the student/mentor relationship may be a powerful influence in a student's life, particularly for those students who are vulnerable for a range of reasons outside the mentoring relationship. Mentoring programs and relationships need to be carefully managed for the safety of all involved.

For this reason, the attention of staff considering taking on the role of mentor, and their supervisors, is specifically directed to the obligations set out in the Department's *Code of Conduct* of June 2004. Section 14 *Duty of care to students* and Sections 28 to 31 inclusive *Relationships Between Staff and Students*, are especially relevant.

Rationale

Resilience research confirms that the presence of a caring adult in their life is important in assisting students to overcome adversity and achieve at school. Effective mentoring seeks to provide such a presence by establishing a trusting relationship between student and mentor that:

- focuses on the needs of the student

- models and fosters caring and supportive relationships to increase

  - self confidence, awareness and management of behaviour

  - positive attitudes towards assisting others

- develops active community partnerships

- recognises that some students may become dependent

- considers other interventions that may be in place.

Mentoring programs

Mentoring is a complex undertaking. Clear guidelines are required to ensure appropriate relationships with clear expectations of the student and mentor. This requires training programs with child protection, duty of care and appropriate relationships between staff and students (see *Code of Conduct 2004*) as important components of this training. The key elements of successful mentoring programs include:

- the approval of the principal

- the support of executive staff and school community

- student agreement to be involved

- informed consent of parents and, if appropriate, their ongoing support

- realistic expectations of what the program can achieve

- regular, formalised meetings with documentation of objectives (agenda) and outcomes (minutes)

- record keeping appropriate to the activity, consistent monitoring and evaluation of the program

- starting with a small, manageable program.

Selection of students

Students must agree to participate in a mentoring program. Mentoring is not a panacea and will have more positive outcomes for some students than others.

Mentoring programs are particularly effective in transition periods. Mentors can:

- teach social skills to Kindergarten students and facilitate their adjustment to school

- help students in Year 2 develop the skills for Stage 2 learning and facilitate the transition from Year 2 to Year 3

- support students' transition from primary to high school

- increase knowledge of education and training opportunities and further education.

Principals and supervisors are reminded that effective management of identified risks will require closer supervision and increased care for younger and less mature students (*Code of Conduct 2004*, page 7).

Parent involvement

Parents must be informed about the purpose of the program, the anticipated outcomes and their children's progress. They must be provided with the opportunity to discuss their children's mentoring program with the supervisor. If possible, parents should meet their child's mentor. Their consent must be obtained before a student is included in the program. Parents also have the right to withdraw their children from mentoring arrangements should they so wish.

Community involvement

Consultation with the broader school community is also essential. It is important that key school community groups, including parent groups are made aware of the rationale for mentoring and informed of how the program will be implemented in the school. Commitment to any program depends on the demonstrated outcomes of the program. Providing the school community with evidence that mentoring produces positive results and responding to concerns they may have about the nature of mentoring will assist in ensuring support for the program.

Mentors

Selection of mentors

Mentors may include community members, teachers or students who have:

- knowledge of relevant child protection issues
- long-term commitment to the program
- respect for alternate views and cultures
- the capacity to focus on the needs of the student
- good listening skills
- the ability to relate positively in a supportive, non-judgemental manner
- knowledge of when to call in specialist assistance
- willingness to allow the student to take responsibility for their decisions
- willingness to do things differently
- the capacity to establish firm boundaries that will assist the student at school.

Community mentors

Community mentors, including parents, add to the number of adults in a school. Knowing that an adult has given up time voluntarily can assist students to feel valued. All adult mentors must sign a *Prohibited Employment Declaration.* At times a *Consent to Screening* form must also be completed (refer to the subsection *Employment screening* on page 11).

Teacher mentors

Teachers, at times, provide individual or small group instruction to students outside of class lessons to meet an immediate learning need. Such instruction may arise informally and is likely to be brief. It should be seen as mentoring, tutoring or coaching, however, when it involves a regular commitment of time.

Entering into a mentoring arrangement requires planning in advance and a careful consideration of the teacher's other commitments. Teachers must remain aware of the differing roles of mentor and teacher and ensure that the two remain separate.

As the learning need of the student or group is met, the teacher will withdraw from the mentoring role. Students' needs determine the appropriateness of this strategy.

Student mentors

Mentoring can strengthen the student leadership program in the school by providing relevant experience and responsibility to students.

Mentoring by students may include peer tutoring, an approach that is particularly valuable for middle school students benefiting both students. This may be set up by the Learning Support Team.

Tripartite mentoring is another student mentoring approach. It involves appointing an older student who has a mentor themselves, acting, in turn, as a mentor to a younger student. This provides a positive opportunity for vulnerable students to practice the skills they have learnt, to receive recognition and develop responsibility.

Recruiting mentors

Mentoring programs require a wide range of volunteers to provide maximum flexibility when matching mentor to student. All appropriate volunteers should be trained so that if a mentor has to drop out of the program, a trained replacement is readily available.

Training must include child protection, duty of care and appropriate relationships between staff and students (see *Code of Conduct 2004*).

Some programs select community members including parents as mentors while others recruit mentors from service clubs or cultural and linguistic diverse (CALD) associations. Advertisements in local papers work for some schools while others recruit from TAFE early childhood or youth worker courses.

Where positions are advertised, advertisements should include appropriate wording on the screening requirements that will apply to recommended applicants. Where employment is arranged by the school and an advertisement has not been placed in the press, applicants must be advised of the requirement to complete a *Prohibited Employment Declaration* and *Consent to Employment Screening* where the person has direct unsupervised contact with children.

If student mentors are to be used they should be asked to apply formally for the position and undergo a semi-formal selection process. This provides them with valuable experience and strengthens their commitment to the program.

Mentors need to be aware of the time commitment and the importance of continuity. An hour per week is usually the minimum requirement to cover one 30 minute session and a debriefing period. Students must be confident that their mentor is reliable and will see them regularly. If this minimum condition cannot be met, student's self-esteem may suffer.

Supporting and supervising mentors

Principals and supervisors are reminded that "Risks associated with the activity being undertaken need to be assessed and addressed before the activity is undertaken" (*Code of Conduct 2004*, page 7).

Debriefing and the provision of feedback to mentors after each session is critical to the success of the mentoring process. All mentors need feedback and support sessions with their designated supervisor to prevent over-involvement with the students and to pre-empt problems. Mentors need to know that the school appreciates their work and that it is providing a benefit to the student.

A trained supervisor is needed to support and monitor the mentoring program. The supervisor must be available to resolve interpersonal problems, manage grievances, and deal with premature closure of the mentoring relationship. They may also need to arrange new mentors if a relationship cannot continue. Feedback sessions may be used to provide resources to ensure the mentoring sessions proceed positively and to provide praise for achievements as appropriate.

The supervisor should be provided with adequate time, within the program budget, to maintain records for the information of the principal and to ensure continuity for new supervisors.

A record should be kept of feedback sessions and must include any issues raised by the mentor and how the issue was dealt with. Any significant issues or feedback in relation to the mentoring arrangement that are raised by members of the school community, including staff and parents, should also be recorded. Records must be stored securely. If issues relate to child protection matters they must be referred immediately to the principal for information and action as required.

Planning the program

Setting up

Before implementing a mentoring program, clear aims must be identified. For each aim there should be a series of concrete, specific, measurable objectives so that progress can be measured at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the program. Both parties should agree on the negotiated plan of action. The stated aims of a mentoring program forms the basis for evaluation. Evaluation should be ongoing so that the program can be fine tuned.

The principal must be informed of, and approve, any mentoring programs or arrangements.

All programs providing students with extra support through mentoring need to be planned so they fit into the normal working patterns of a school. Initial enthusiasm may make mentors wish to see students more frequently but programs are more effective if they are limited to once or twice a week. The time commitment and timeframe needs to be made clear and agreed upon by all parties, including the student, to avoid disappointment. In mentoring arrangements specific goals and a conclusion date need to be set.

Mentors and students need to have a space to meet which is suitable and comfortable. This could be a section in the library, the assembly hall or another space within the school. If a mentor is working one to one with a student it is best if their activities can be seen by others, e.g. through an open door. A study room in the school library or a room off a busy corridor are often appropriate. If mentors are community members, mentoring must take place where they can be observed by a teacher except where specifically approved by the principal.

Supervision

The success of mentoring programs, as for all programs, requires commitment and enthusiasm. The selection and appointment of an appropriate supervisor is essential for the success of the program. The supervisor may have a complementary role within the school such as that of year adviser, head teacher welfare, school counsellor, senior teacher, careers adviser or learning support team co-ordinator. Effective communication, tact, patience and diplomacy, and organisational skills are essential. The appointment of an assistant supervisor is advisable to relieve the work load and provide program continuity.

The supervisor's role includes:

- assessing risks

- ensuring that the duty of care owed to all students is paramount in determining how the program will operate

- ensuring the principal is informed of, and approves the program

- recruiting mentors and ensuring their commitment and retention

- matching of students with mentors

- organising support material for mentoring sessions

- monitoring the relationship between mentor and students

    - resolving unrealistic expectations

    - intervening if the relationship becomes inappropriate

    - reminding mentors and students about appointments

- co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating the program

- organising and conducting debriefing sessions for mentors (after each session) and students

- record keeping of feedback including any issues raised and how they were dealt with

- providing progress reports to the principal, as required

- referring to the principal, immediately, any issues that relate to child protection

- organising celebratory events to mark key stages of the program.

In addition, the supervisor is responsible for:

- planning meetings with key personnel

- promoting the program to the school community

- finding suitable venues for mentoring sessions.

Child protection

Staff employed by the Department of Education and Training are expected to plan for a safe environment for all student activities. The safety, welfare and well-being of children, young people or students are paramount. *Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People: Revised procedures December 2000* and *Responding to Allegations against Employees in the Area of Child Protection 23 April 2004* provide clear advice for school staff to report child protection concerns directly to the principal.

Community mentors need to be aware of the obligations of schools in protecting students against abuse, misconduct or improper conduct.

Responding to Allegations against Employees in the Area of Child Protection provides information about behaviours which constitute abuse, misconduct or improper conduct. The procedures include "volunteers, for example, parent helpers" in their definition of an employee.

Reporting suspected risk of harm

Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People: Revised procedures December 2000 require that all staff in schools are aware of the indicators of child abuse and neglect of children and young people, their obligations to report suspected risk of harm and the procedure for doing so.

Principals must ensure that community members such as mentors and other volunteers are provided with child protection training to ensure that they are aware of the role of schools in reporting concerns about risk of harm, and their associated responsibilities.

Working with individual students places mentors in a position of trust and authority. Students may talk more freely about personal concerns, including abuse or neglect. Mentors may also be in a position to observe indicators or behaviours that raise concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a student.

If concerns arise, advice must be sought from a supervisor or the principal unless that person is the subject of the concern. Where a staff member has reasonable grounds to suspect risk of harm to a child or young person a report must be made to Department of Community Services (DoCS). In schools these concerns are reported to DoCS by the principal who will take responsibility for any follow up and can co-ordinate support for the student and staff involved. These reports are treated confidentially. In circumstances where a mentor is a member of staff he or she should ensure that a report of risk of harm has been made to DoCs by the principal.

A brochure with general information for community members about recognising and reporting risk of harm to children and young people published by the Department of Community Services is available at:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/child_protect/how_report.htm

Professional conduct

Effective mentoring relies on positive relationships that are developed in a professional manner. The mentor is, by the nature of their role, in a position of trust, authority and influence. They can have a significant impact upon students' educational progress, social and emotional welfare and behaviour and have the responsibility and authority to manage the situation.

Where teachers provide additional instruction to students in the form of mentoring they should routinely advise their supervisors about the progress of this instruction and the plans for its continuation. This also provides an opportunity for any issues which may arise in the relationship between the teacher and student to be discussed as soon as possible.

Students who are given extra help by a mentor often feel special and welcome the individual adult attention. A student may develop a feeling of attachment to the adult. This situation needs to be handled carefully. If a mentor suspects that a student is developing an attachment, the situation must be discussed with a supervisor and a plan developed to manage it. This may involve another adult sharing or taking over part of the role or providing the extra tuition.

Adults working with primary and secondary school students need to be aware of the possibility that a student may develop a "crush" on them. If this happens, maintaining professional distance becomes extremely important to ensure the welfare of the student is safeguarded, and that the welfare and effectiveness of the mentor are not compromised. Again, the mentor must immediately seek advice from a supervisor.

Any staff member who becomes aware or suspects that a student has developed a crush on the student's mentor, is required to report that crush to either the mentor's supervisor or the principal. In all cases, the supervisor shall report the matter to the principal. This duty to report to the principal forms an element of the Department's role in child protection and reflects its strong commitment to protecting and supporting students. **This is a mandatory duty for all mentoring supervisors**.

Where a principal becomes aware that a student has developed a crush on the student's mentor, the principal should consider informing the student's parents of the situation and confirming the parents' ongoing consent to the mentoring relationship. If a student indicates that he or she does not consent to the principal discussing the issue with the student's parents, then the principal should terminate the mentoring relationship with the current mentor.

Support for the student (e.g. from the year adviser or school counsellor) should be arranged. The attachment must not be encouraged or allowed to continue to develop without appropriate intervention. Advice about maintaining professional relationships with secondary students can be found in *PDHPE: Friend or Foe?* This document may be found on the Department of Education and Training's website at:

http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/PDHPE/files/
PDH_friendorfoe.pdf?CFID=2080005&CFTOKEN=31431229

Similarly, a mentor must seek immediate advice from a supervisor should a student develop a 'dislike' for them. In these circumstances, arrangements need to be made, for the reallocation or termination of the mentoring responsibility. This must be done in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of the student.

Mentors must not use physical contact of any kind to achieve a student's compliance with an instruction. They must not strike, push or physically discipline a student. Such actions are contrary to departmental and school policy and can result in disciplinary and/or criminal charges.

Shaking hands is a signal of formal recognition or greeting that is widely expected and accepted across families and cultural groups. Other than this however, there will be little need for physical contact in professional relationships with students. Mentors must be aware that behaviour intended to demonstrate care and concern, including, for example, touching a student on the shoulder or patting a young student on the head, may be inappropriate for some students and may also be misinterpreted, both by the student and by casual observers.

Mentors should also discourage students from touching them. School provides the opportunity for students to learn about appropriate behaviour in more formal relationships than those that occur within families. This learning is valuable as it highlights for students that there are particular ways to communicate with adults other than family or extended family members. This knowledge may, on occasion, protect them from harm.

Advice about the use of touch in physical education or sports can be found in *PDHPE: A Touchy Subject* from the Department's website at:

http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/PDHPE/files/
PDH_touchysubject.pdf?CFID=2080005&CFTOKEN=31431229

Employment screening

NSW legislation requires that employment screening be carried out on all people who work with children and young people where the contact is not directly supervised. This ensures that people who may pose a risk to children are not employed in roles where they have direct, unsupervised contact with children.

- Adult mentors must complete a *Prohibited Employment Declaration* stating that they are not a 'prohibited person'.

- Where contact with children is not directly supervised, adult mentors must also complete a *Consent to Screening* form. The Department is an approved screening agency and is able to undertake a Working with Children Check for adults wishing to work with children in schools for no charge. Forms are to be sent to the Employment Screening Unit where screening is carried out. The Unit can be contacted on:
  Telephone   (02) 9836 9200
  Facsimile   (02) 9836 9222
  E-mail   esumail@det.nsw.edu.au.

Guidelines for Principals for the Implementation of the Working with Children Check and Completion of Prohibited Employment Declarations, 24 January 2002 can assist principals in these processes.

Information for community members about employment screening (the Working with Children Check) can be obtained from the website of the Commission for Children and Young People at:

http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/check/intro.html

Communication issues

Planned social interaction out of school hours between students and tutors, school-based coaches or mentors is not appropriate. Where this happens unintentionally in the local community, interactions should be kept positive but brief.

Modes of communication (such as telephone, e-mail) with the student by a mentor must be discussed with and approved by the mentor's supervisor, as well as the student and his/her parent or caregiver. Under no circumstances should any mode of communication be used to communicate inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature, obscene language or gestures, images of a sexual nature, suggestive remarks, jokes or images, or personal correspondence in respect of the employee's feelings (including sexual feelings).

If a student initiates personal contact with a mentor it should be discouraged. This includes contact by e-mail. The mentor should not reply but should inform a supervisor so the issue is noted and a plan is made to resolve it. This may involve sensitively reminding the student about the roles and relationship boundaries of the program in the next mentoring session.

Again it is important to develop communication that keeps professional boundaries clear and that cannot be misinterpreted as a personal as opposed to a professional interest in the student.

If a mentor is observed, or becomes aware themselves that they are becoming too involved in the student's welfare then reallocation or termination of the relationship should be considered, and the principal informed. In these circumstances, the principal will decide if the relationship should continue and exercise close supervision if it does.

It is important that mentor programs and relationships are carefully managed. If teachers who are relatively inexperienced volunteer for such programs, they will need guidance and support in making professional judgements in these situations.

Mentoring should be a positive experience for all involved. Enjoyment derived from the mentoring relationship per se, however, is not the primary purpose of mentoring. Clear aims and outcomes are required for each session. Insufficient attention to these aims and outcomes may be a sign that the mentor is becoming too involved with the student and intervention by the supervisor is required.

Establishing a mentoring program step by step

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│                  i. Plan the program                     │
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│              ii. Set up supervision process              │
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│ iii. Identify│ ←  │ v. Inform    │ →  │ iv. Recruit  │
│ students     │    │ parents and  │    │ mentors      │
│              │    │ gain consent │    │              │
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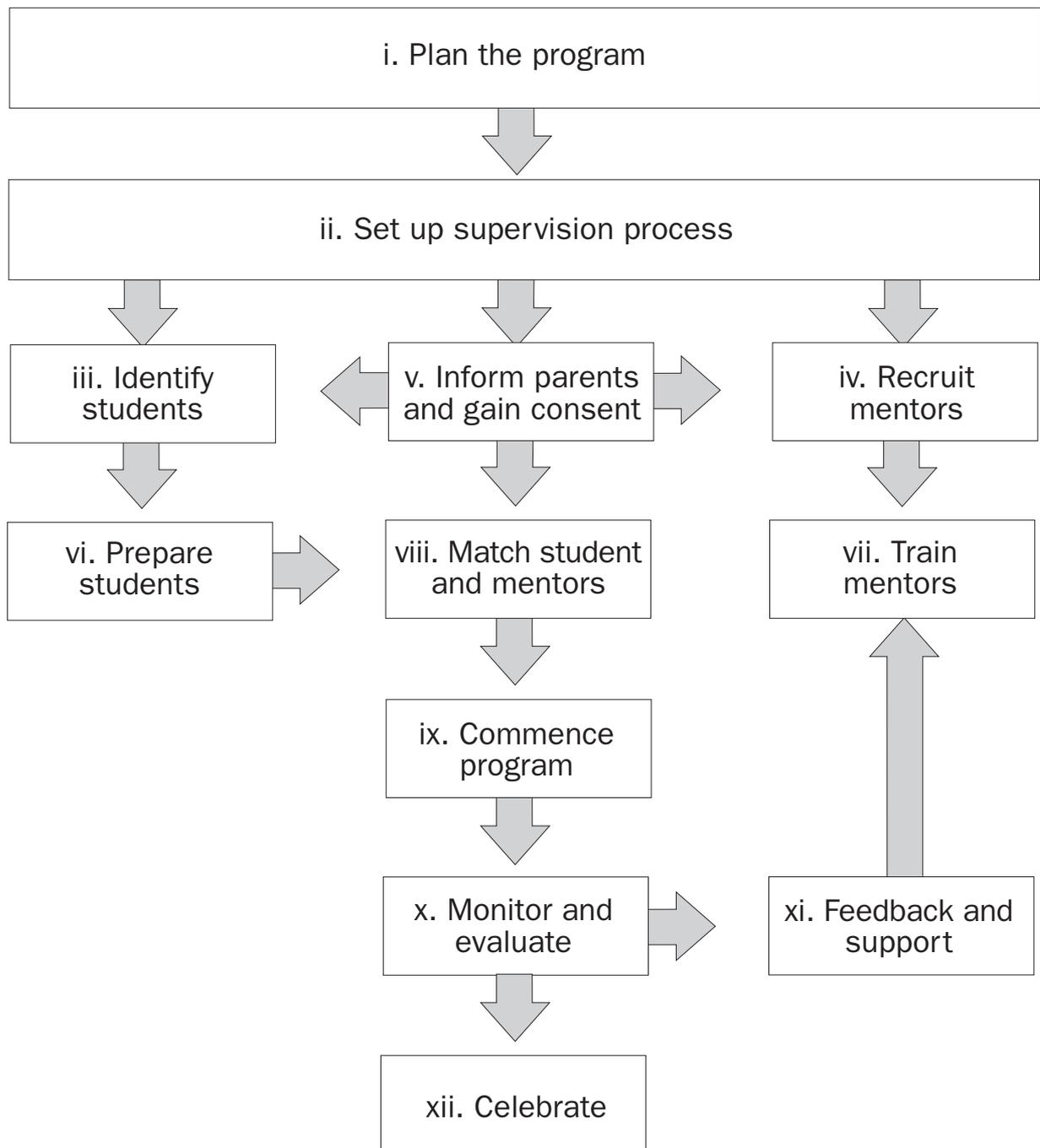
Process

i. Plan the program

A formal meeting needs to be set up between all interested parties to establish:

- aims and objectives of the program
- anticipated outcomes
- incorporation of mentoring into the welfare structure of the school
- resources to be allocated to the program
- staff participation
- criteria for selection of students
- evaluation.

ii. Set up the supervision process

The principal:

- assesses risks
- approves the program and nominates a supervisor
- clarifies the responsibilities of the supervisor, including debriefing of mentors and record keeping
- establishes a process for communicating child protection issues, if they arise, to themselves
- determines the nature and frequency of the progress reports he or she requires. (The frequency of these reports will depend on the risk assessment but should be at least once per term.)

iii. Identify students

Start small and build on success by selecting students who are most likely to benefit from a mentoring partnership. Participation in the program must be voluntary.

iv. Recruit mentors

The nature of the target group will determine the mentors recruited and the support required. Establish criteria for selection including cultural, linguistic, social and socio-economic factors and adherence with Departmental employment screening requirements. Inform potential mentors and parents of the aims, objectives, benefits and anticipated outcomes of the program. Ensure that mentors are screened and briefed as to their child protection obligations.

v. Inform parents

Parents must be provided with the opportunity to discuss the program with the co-ordinator. Inform parents of the aims, objectives, benefits and anticipated outcomes of the program.

An information night and/or brochure can help achieve this. Consent must be obtained from parents and they have the right to withdraw their child, should they wish. Parents need to be kept informed about the progress of the program and encouraged to participate where possible.

vi. Prepare students

The aims of the program, benefits to them, their responsibilities and the role of the mentor should be carefully explained.

Students may need to be taught specific skills to enable them to work effectively with their mentor. The basic skills include:

- help seeking skills
- conversation and asking questions
- awareness of obligation to report suspected risk of harm to students
- an understanding of professional standards in relation to staff relationships with students.

vii. Train mentors

Ideally, training for student mentors and community mentors should occur over two days not necessarily consecutive. Teacher mentor training need only take a day. Mentor training should include the following key points. Mentoring is:

- teaching using goal setting strategies
- a partnership to provide guidance and positive perspectives
- a relationship built on trust which requires an understanding of child protection issues and imposes a high level duty of care
- effected over a sustained period of time.

Child protection issues must be included in training. Mentors must also be reminded of the obligations on staff set out in the Department's *Code of Conduct* (June 2004). Section 14 *Duty of care to students* and Sections 28 to 31 inclusive *Relationships between Staff and Students*, are especially relevant.

Mentors must be afforded the opportunity to practise skills in small groups. They should be encouraged to raise questions and discuss issues and concerns throughout the training. Training provides an opportunity for the supervisor to find out if any of the volunteers are not ready to be mentors.

At the conclusion of mentor training, mentors should be provided with a certificate.

viii. Match mentor and student

Criteria may include sex, similar interests, personalities, career choices, cultural or linguistic background or suggestions from teachers and year advisers.

ix. Commence the program

Establishing the aims of the program and the ground rules can provide a focus for the first formal meeting.

A short event hosted by the school can allow a relaxed, non-threatening introduction to the program. Providing mentors and students with opportunities to work in small groups together in the first instance can ease tension.

Mentoring sessions must be based on age-appropriate activities with outcomes defined clearly. Activities that appear patronising are of no benefit. Working jointly on a project, social skills and study skills are particularly suitable for mentoring programs. This defines the length of the program and provides evidence of the success of the relationship.

x. Monitor and evaluate

Monitoring provides information on progress of the program and can be useful to resolve problems or conflicts before they develop. This may be done via surveys, questionnaires, meetings, telephone calls and e-mails. Data should be collected at the start and end of the program and at intervals throughout, from a variety of sources (students, mentors, parents, teachers, program co-ordinator). This includes records kept by the supervisor of feedback from debriefing sessions with mentors and feedback from other members of the school community about particular mentoring arrangements.

Evaluation provides information that can be used to make the program more effective and confirms the value of the program and the effectiveness of the structures in place.

xi. Feedback and support

Discussion and feedback from mentors and students is critical to identify and resolve problems early. Community members, teachers and students may have differing needs.

Teachers need to differentiate their teacher and mentor roles.

Community members may benefit from support in a less formal environment that provides feedback on the positive impact of their involvement.

Students must be assisted to separate from the problems of the student they are mentoring.

Group discussion sessions allow the mentors to bond as a group which maintains their commitment and punctuality.

Feedback from mentors and students assists in the identification of ongoing training and support needs of mentors and can inform training of future mentors.

xii. Celebrate success

The celebration of milestones is essential. Giving mentors and students a certificate is one way to celebrate success. Parents should be included where possible.