

BACKGROUND

Young people in care, or those who come from difficult, abusive or neglectful backgrounds can benefit from experiencing attuned caregiving and a nurturing relationship with a mentor. Many young people who have faced difficulties in their past may go on to struggle with their ability to trust others, to have self-belief, to self-regulate, or to have healthy relationships, and be able to manage their lives. Mentors can help young people who may or may not, have large problems in their lives. The mentor role helps people in need of support and guidance with aspects of their lives. Being a mentor involves serving as a guide and support for the young person. A mentor is a calm, accepting, steadying influence on the young person, who holds in mind their bigger picture.

Young people supported by HYPAR deserve the opportunity to experience positive connections in their lives, receive support and have access to tools and opportunities that will help them toward independence and lead a good life. The way you support a young person may help them to have better self-confidence, improve their ability to self-regulate, develop friendships, improve their academic achievement, and develop connections in their community. Your role may also help young people to increase their interpersonal and daily living skills, gain achievement and engage in good lifestyle choices.

Helping young people as a HYPAR mentor:

It is necessary in your role as a mentor to be aware of the valuable role you play to young people who are supported by HYPAR. Being a HYPAR mentor requires you to know yourself and your practice frameworks, find ways to enjoy your work whilst being mindful of the needs of the young person, uphold boundaries, and equip the young person with necessary life skills. Mentoring requires you to engage young people in their own skills practice, encourage their efforts, and review their progress whilst forecasting new goals that will help them to have a fulfilling life. The next section (Table A) describes the characteristics of a mentor in more detail.

Table A: Key mentor skills

Mentor domains	Key skills	Practice steps
Self-awareness	Be aware of your strengths, your values, opinions, beliefs and how you have learned your own skills in your life. Understand your own areas of bias or where you may become uncomfortable or feel triggered by events you find unpleasant in your mentoring role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your own backup plan if you become uncomfortable in the role of mentor. Remain open minded as much as possible when the behaviour of the young person's conflicts with your values. • Identify your own safety plan, which may include talking with another colleague or your manager. • Seek additional advice if you find you need further support with your experiences (e.g. being triggered or experiencing discomfort).
Know your practice framework	Understand your practice framework or your main mentoring style. This is a good way to have a central theme as to how you work. Your practice framework might be a reflection of all of the things you do well and are most comfortable with.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define your main approach to mentoring. • For some, this involves focussing on client strengths, wanting to prevent harm, or increase skills and participation in life. Other practice frameworks can include the need to role model, manage risks for the young person or help the young person by understanding their wider community, environment and support system.
Enjoy your work	Focus on the aspects of mentoring that you enjoy most through your own reflection. Enjoyable aspects of being a mentor might include engaging in enjoyable activities with the young person, seeing improvements in their skills, teaching them something new or enjoying your own learning and humorous times as a mentor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before you attend each shift, reflect on your main practice framework, to remind yourself of your core goals with the young person. • Reflect on the most enjoyable aspects of your job. • Imagine potential areas of skill you may be able to increase and support with the young people you work with. • Remember you do not need to be a skilled therapist to be a good mentor, or pressure yourself to be "perfect".

BEING A HYPAR MENTOR

Mentor domains	Key skills	Practice steps
Boundaries	<p>Have clarity and awareness of your own values and beliefs, as well as those aspects of yourself which help you get through difficulties. This will be an important basis for you to allow an authentic mentor relationship with young people.</p> <p>The young person will need you to be there for them when they slip up, or need further help. They may not always be able to thank you and many times your efforts may not be appreciated. Therefore, being a steady, accepting and calming presence in their life is essential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself – “is the support I am providing in the best interests of the child/ young person?” It is important to understand times when your own beliefs may get in the way of your thinking or be unhelpful for young people who may be on a different journey to you. Your role is to mentor and guide. Remember that you cannot be responsible for everything (or the entire outcome). • Maintain acceptance, empathy and a clear awareness of goals to strive for, so that the young person can have a better quality of life. Help young people by gently stretching their skills, role modelling and encouraging them.
Transference	<p>Young people may unknowingly transfer their feelings on to you (positive or negative). They may have feelings about their past, or a person in their past and project these on to you (as though you had those characteristics). This can look like fondness, or mistrust or a range of emotions. This is known as transference. Sometimes when we are giving to others as a mentor, our needs and the needs of the young people can become entangled. For instance, if we as a mentor have a desire to help young people because we have had a bad experience in the past, we may unwittingly seek to pressure a particular type of support onto a young person where it is not welcome. This is an example of counter-transference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to realise that the young person may project feelings on to you that you are not aware of and this can impact on how you work together. • Awareness of your triggers is essential in terms of identifying entanglement and to look for an alternative way to view the situation or act. • Ask yourself: “are the needs, desires, or feelings of either the young person or the mentor becoming entangled?”
Equipping skills	<p>It’s important for the young person to have an overall plan for success based on developing skills across several life areas. These important life areas include: school/ academic learning, community involvement, domestic living skills, self-care, personal grooming and presentation, social interaction, accessing the community, having healthy relationships, managing finances, having a job, engaging in recreation, seeking help and finding ways to problem solve when faced with difficulty.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about all of the skills you possess to carry out tasks or engage in your family, work and community life. Think about how important your own mastery of skills is, and how important it is to exercise control and choice over your life. • It is likely those same needs bear similarity to the underlying needs of the young person. Think about how you are going to assist them to have autonomy, choice and achievement based on having new skills. • Identify specific skills development opportunities or goals for the care planning and review process. Discuss and plan the goals with the young person to ensure that they have investment in the outcome.
Engage in skills practice	<p>It is essential that new skills are learned and practiced by the young person. As a mentor you will need to provide opportunities to help the young person have “real life” opportunities where they can learn, make mistakes and receive support. It is also helpful when mentor’s model the skills in advance, or role model at the same time, practicing together with the young person. The young person can benefit from a template as an example to follow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide natural opportunities for the young person to practice new skills. • Role model the skill and provide support. • Participate in the learning by working alongside the young person and demonstrating or role playing the same skill. • Guide the learning through patience and a high rate of encouragement versus correction, for example at a ratio of 5:1.
Encouragement	<p>Take time to reflect on the needs of the young people you work with. Identify how difficult making some improvements in their lives would be. With empathy and understanding in mind, think about how much effort the young person has made, or where they are still struggling. Provide encouragement knowing how difficult change is for the young person, but also acknowledging how their strengths will help them achieve their goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide encouragement with empathy and understanding for the young person’s struggles. • Promote a positive future picture for the young person and help them identify how their strengths will help them to achieve their goals. • Maintain the view that the young person has the competencies to achieve greater things in their life. Use this idea as an anchor point so that positive expectations are in place. • When the young person struggles, offer safety and backup planning and pre-plan for times of struggle so that they are not a surprise.
Review and planning	<p>Regularly review the progress in development of the young person. You can do this through reflection in conversation with the young person. Project and forecast for the young person some future goals and plans to strive toward. Encourage them with new goals or targets to achieve.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a planning focus in mind with the young person. • List completed goals and track progress with the young person every 2-3 months or in the care plan. • With new goals, realistically stretch the skills of the young person and move up in increments, stretching a little further above their current abilities.

FURTHER READING:

References

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