

# **PUPIL MENTORING**

## **Pocketbook**










**By Bob Garvey &  
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Cartoons:  
Phil Hailstone

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# How does peer mentoring work?



There are many variations including:

- Pupils in both primary and secondary schools can volunteer to be a mentor or mentee following an assembly on the topic
- Some schools allocate mentors to a class and allow potential mentees to choose their own mentor. Others will allocate a mentor with particular subject skills or because they are a positive role model
- In some schools all newcomers have access to either a class mentor or an individual mentor should they want one
- Other schools favour schemes for gifted pupils. Some provide an extra layer of support for those who are falling behind or experiencing problems with school in general
- Secondary schools often draw on students in year 9 or above for their mentors
- Primary schools may draw on year 6 pupils for their mentors

All mentors are trained and supported by the scheme co-ordinator, year tutor or form tutor who acts as a mentor and guide to the peer mentors.

## How does it work from the pupils' perspective?



- They speak the same language as each other
- Have common experiences
- Mentors have high levels of empathy with the mentees
- They share common issues, hopes and fears



## Credibility and facts, empathy and support



Issues such as sex, relationships, drugs and alcohol are often discussed in young people's groups based on gossip, myth and hearsay. But, a trained peer mentor can provide factual information on these topics effectively and with more credibility than adults.

Schools often have clear anti-bullying strategies but children being bullied can feel very isolated and lonely. Peer mentors can offer the bridge between school policy and personal experiences.

The transition to *big school* is often on the agenda in peer mentoring relationships.

# Linking the school's agenda to the pupils' agenda



Effort must be made to find a link between the school's agenda and the pupils' agenda. For example, the school may be interested in issues such as study skills, homework, behaviour, attendance, bullying and health issues. Pupils may have a different perspective, which could be about relationships with friends, a pet dying, sexual experiences, boredom, not seeing the relevance of schoolwork or problems at home.

If the focus is on the **school's** agenda there is a risk of the mentee being put off.

When the focus is initially on the **mentee's** agenda, this will help to build trust, rapport and confidence. The mentee will start to feel valued and respected. Increased self-esteem, confidence and motivation follow and, ultimately, the school's and the mentee's objectives coincide and are achieved.

## Main topics of discussion in peer mentoring

- Bullying – physical, verbal, at school or at home
- Relationships, peer pressure
- Smoking, drinking, sex, drugs
- Changing bodies, general health issues
- Relationship with parents, family break-up, bereavement, redundancy
- Homework, relationships with teachers
- Difficulties with school subjects
- Self-image, food and diet



# Setting up a peer mentoring scheme



Why do schemes fail?

- Insufficient resources
- Lack of planning
- No clear aim or objectives
- Lack of staff support
- Lack of support for the mentors
- No training





## Voices of experience



*'The more time spent thinking about the scheme the better. You need to think about who it is for and what you want it to achieve. You also need to know how you will know when you have achieved it.'*

**Experienced scheme co-ordinator**

*'I found it really useful to write an action plan and to think about who else inside or outside the school needed to be informed or involved.'*

**Scheme co-ordinator**

*'Some staff couldn't imagine that the pupils could be trained to deal with complex and sensitive issues such as sexual health and substance abuse and they have been surprised at the attitudes, maturity and skill of the young mentors.'*

**Head of year**

*'We found our local EBP (Education Business Partnership, see pages 75 & 109) really helpful and supportive.'*

**Headteacher**

*'We are trying to develop community spirit and relationships within the school.'*

**Scheme co-ordinator**

## About the authors



**Bob Garvey**



Bob has been involved in education all his career. His experience includes primary and secondary education as a teacher and he now works in higher education as a principal lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University. In 1998 Bob was awarded a PhD from The University of Durham for his research into mentoring. He has published widely on the topic of mentoring in academic and professional journals and has contributed chapters to a number of edited books. Bob is co-author of the best-selling *Mentoring Pocketbook*.

**Kim Langridge**



Kim has been involved in mentoring for many years both as a mentor and a mentee. He has written many scheme co-ordinators' handbooks for a range of organisations including schools, voluntary sector groups and business organisations. He provides training for mentors, mentees and scheme co-ordinators throughout the UK. He is currently involved in a mentoring project targeting young offenders. Kim is interested in all aspects of human learning and development. He holds a Masters degree in Strategic Human Resources Development from London Guildhall University.