

Mentoring



The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice says that Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) “understand the value of reflective practice and leadership development and how continuous professional learning supports their professional growth and contributes to improving the quality of early childhood education for children, families and communities (Standard IV: B.3).”

The College of Early Childhood Educators has developed this resource to support RECEs to understand mentoring. A professional learning goal could be to do additional research to learn more about mentoring and how to pursue, develop, engage and maintain this professional learning experience and professional relationship. Engaging in a mentoring relationship is one example of a continuous professional learning activity that could support RECEs in reaching their goals through the CPL Portfolio process.

What is mentoring?

The College defines **mentoring** for RECEs in this way:

A reciprocal, relationship-based and process-oriented professional learning experience between two individuals (a mentor and a mentee) in the early learning and care sector. The purpose of the relationship is to learn and improve professional practice through reflective practice, self-directed learning and collaboration.

Mentor: An individual who shares and uses their knowledge, skills and experiences to support and guide a mentee to improve their practice and acquire new skills.

Mentee: An individual who is supported and guided by a mentor in order to learn, improve their professional practice or acquire new skills.

Is there a difference between mentoring and supervising?

For those in administrative leadership roles or RECEs who are supervising students or colleagues, it is important to be aware of the differences between mentoring and supervising: “Mentors are open to learning, too — gaining insight from their [mentees], attaining new skills, and reflecting on their own practices. Mentors do not function as supervisors, and do not conduct formal evaluations of their [mentees].”¹ However, many RECEs in supervisory roles are uniquely positioned to become effective mentors. Marilyn Chu recommends that “if the same person is performing both roles (e.g. evaluations and providing support for learning) it is especially important to identify the function being performed at any one time.”²

Mentors and mentees should remember to use professional judgement, ensure professional boundaries are established and appropriate professional relationships are maintained in mentoring relationships.

What is the role of mentors?

Mentors in the early learning and care sector must demonstrate leadership in the mentor-mentee relationship. Some of the ways a mentor does this is by:

- taking responsibility for their professional practice
- supporting, empowering and actively listening to the mentee
- providing opportunities for the mentee to lead their own learning and development skills
- providing thoughtful and informed feedback to the mentee
- asking prompting questions that foster further reflection from the mentee
- ensuring a respectful, inclusive and collaborative partnership
- drawing on the collective knowledge and experiences, from both mentor and mentee, to solve problems
- connecting the mentee to other professionals in order to build and broaden professional networks.

While the focus of a mentoring relationship is on the professional growth of the mentee, the mentor will also gain new knowledge and skills from the mentee and the learning that occurs through the partnership.

What is the role of mentees?

Mentees must also demonstrate leadership in the mentoring relationship by:

- taking initiative and responsibility to extend their own learning
- working collaboratively with the mentor
- being curious, open and interested in new learning and approaches
- willing to be questioned and challenged in their perspectives.

The Code and Standards says that RECEs “build positive relationships with colleagues by demonstrating respect, trust and integrity. They support, mentor and collaborate with colleagues, including students aspiring to the profession.

RECEs value lifelong learning and reflective practice and engage in the Continuous Professional Learning program (Ethic C).”

How do RECEs find a mentor or mentee?

Like with any relationship, mentoring is most authentic and beneficial when both the mentor and mentee willingly come together. The relationship can be initiated in many ways. Newly graduated RECEs often seek out more experienced early childhood educators within their practice setting for guidance and support resulting in an informal mentoring relationship. In other cases, a more experienced RECE may see an opportunity to share their knowledge and provide support to those who are new to the profession. In both cases, initiating the relationship is an organic process, arising out of the practice setting.

However, not all practice settings support the natural development of mentoring relationships. It is also common for a potential mentee to seek support from an experienced RECE, supervisor or other professional outside of their practice setting. Mentees may connect with the professional association, local professional resource centre or other professionals from their community to find a suitable mentor. Similar methods also support experienced RECEs who would like to become a mentor.

RECEs can also engage in electronic mentoring (e-mentoring) through email communication, video chat services, discussion boards or video conferencing. The use of technology removes the barriers of finding a suitable mentor or mentee in the local community or work place. Mentees and mentors can decide, based on individual learning styles and location, how best to communicate.

Once an RECE finds a mentor or mentee to work with, it is important to be clear about the unique roles each will assume, how they will communicate and agree to some common commitments and ground rules.



Are there ground rules in mentoring? What is the process?

1. Developing the partnership

While there are no hard and fast rules for creating and maintaining a mentoring relationship, developing guidelines or reflective questions is an important step in developing a successful partnership.

RECEs need to first reflect on their learning styles, temperaments, goals, and expectations as well as consider potential challenges that may arise during the mentoring experience. Then, RECEs should brainstorm questions that they intend to ask their potential match at their first meeting together.³

Getting to know one another and ensuring a good fit is the first step in building a successful mentoring relationship.

2. Professional learning agreement

Once the match has been determined, creating a plan, professional learning agreement or even a set of communication rules sets the stage for a professional and collaborative relationship. Some mentors and mentees write a contract, agree to terms they have co-created and signed prior to initiating their work together.⁴ Creating an agreement communicates a mutual commitment to the learning process and serves as a way to stay focussed on the goals and support conflict resolution.

3. Area of practice for inquiry

With an agreement and plan in place, mentors and mentees often begin the learning process by highlighting an area of practice for investigation. Through their reflection, the mentee may have identified a specific practice topic or skill in which they would like to focus their learning. The mentor may also take some time to observe the mentee at work in their practice settings.⁵ The mentor and mentee then agree to an area of focus for exploration and improvement.

Positive and successful mentoring relationships involve mentors and mentees who are both committed to:

- engaging in supportive, respectful and honest interactions
- ensuring trust and confidentiality is maintained
- keeping professional commitments and appointments related to the mentoring relationship
- using effective interpersonal communication and positive conflict resolution strategies
- developing a culture of reflective practice that includes collaborative inquiry, problem-solving, mutual goal setting and continuous professional learning
- developing leadership skills and improving practice
- promoting and reflecting diversity and inclusion
- promoting experimentation and risk-taking with regard to professional learning
- facilitating and sustaining improvements in professional practice.

How do RECEs benefit from engaging in mentoring?

Engaging in a mentoring relationship, either as a mentor or a mentee, is one way RECEs can pursue their professional learning goals as part of the CPL Portfolio process. Mentoring is self-directed and supports the evolution of a culture of learning in the profession.⁶ Mentoring provides both mentor and mentee with numerous benefits that include giving back to the profession, learning from others and creating meaningful and productive professional relationships.

Standard IV from the Code and Standards reminds RECEs to “engage with their professional community through activities such as participation in research, associations, committees, or professional networks, or by acting as a role model or mentor” (Standard IV: C.7).



Endnotes

1. Whitebook, M.& Bellm, D. (2013). *Supporting Teachers as Learners: A Guide for Mentors and Coaches in Early Care and Education*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.
2. Chu, Marilyn. (2014). *Developing Mentoring and Coaching Relationships in Early Care and Education: A Reflective Approach*. Toronto: Pearson.
3. Chu, Marilyn. (2014). *Developing Mentoring and Coaching Relationships in Early Care and Education : A Reflective Approach*. Toronto: Pearson.
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5. Chu, Marilyn. (2014). *Developing Mentoring and Coaching Relationships in Early Care and Education: A Reflective Approach*. Toronto: Pearson.
6. Rodd, J (2006). *Leadership in Early Childhood*. Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.

Resources

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