

5.6 CLOSURE OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

“Leave-taking is always healthiest when done deliberately.” (Johnson, 2007)

OVERVIEW

Figure 12. Closure - key activities



Closure of the mentoring relationship is about looking back and reviewing accomplishments, looking forward to areas of continued growth and goals, and saying goodbye (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). It is a time to celebrate and recognise what has been accomplished, for mentors and mentees to discuss memories of the fun times they have had together, and participate in special activities to mark the end of the formal relationship. A practice many programmes adopt is to hold a special graduation ceremony. This allows the mentees to have a sense of closure with both the mentor and the programme and provides a formal opportunity to recognise contributions of mentors and mentees. It should be transition-focused and inclusive of all participants, including parents/caregivers and programme staff.

Even when programmes hope the relationships will continue after the conclusion of the formal programme, it is important to position closure as a normal part of the mentoring process and prepare mentors, mentees and their parents /caregivers to know what to expect.

Research suggests that in cases where the match ends prematurely, the young person can be vulnerable, reinforcing the negative experiences or sense of abandonment they may have felt with other adult relationships. Thus the aim is to achieve a positive closure, regardless of why the relationship is ending.

Once a relationship has been introduced into the life of a young person, mentoring programmes must do everything they can to ensure that the relationship is handled responsibly – from beginning to end.

It is also important to recognise that mentoring does not happen in isolation. Establishing healthy relationships with other key adults in young peoples' lives can help support their social connectedness and empower them. This can also help with transition, so the learnings and changes both influence those around the young person, but equally are sustained beyond the end of the mentoring experience.

5.6.1 Preparing mentors and mentees for closure

Preparing mentors, mentees and their parents/caregivers for closure will help to ensure the relationship ends positively, regardless of whether the closure is anticipated or not.

Effective practices to support positive closure include:

- Ensuring this is planned in advance and the plans are fully implemented.
- Ensuring clear and realistic expectations are set about the ending, preferably from the outset of the match, including any rules for post-programme contact.
- A focus on accomplishments and opportunities for mentors and mentees to reflect on the past, present and future of the relationship.
- Assistance to mentors and mentees to work through how each is feeling about the closure – reflect on what the relationship has meant to them, including reviewing goals, gains and preparing for the future.

Introducing the concept of closure at the outset of the mentoring match can help to ensure this is viewed as a normal part of the mentoring process. Encouraging mentors to adopt the *3:2:1 reflective technique* at the end of each mentoring session may help prepare mentees for positive closure.

To use this technique, mentors ask their mentees to think of:

- three things that went well in our meeting today,
- two areas for improvement, and
- one hope for our next meeting (Karcher, 2015).

Guidance to mentors for the final meeting with their mentee

The following points provide guidance to mentors for the final meeting with their mentee:

- Set a specific date for your last meeting and inform the mentee of this well ahead of time to allow them time to prepare for it.
- Be honest and supportive, regardless of the reasons for the closure.
- Talk about the reasons for ending the relationship.
- Talk about your thoughts and feelings for the mentee and about closure, and encourage your mentee to do the same.
- Be positive and supportive, especially about what the future may hold for your mentee.
- Don't make promises you may not be able to keep, particularly about keeping in touch.

Mentors may need to be flexible with timing of closure to ensure it does not impact negatively on their mentees. For instance, it is important to make sure it does not fall around the same time as a significant event in the mentee's life, such as an anniversary of a family member's death. Closure may evoke more anxiety for some mentees than for others. Mentors will need to be empathetic to this. For instance, if closure is at the end of the year, it may be appropriate to send a Christmas/holiday card and/or New Year's card. Contact does not have to be face to face.

5.6.2 Handling unplanned closures

In those instances where the mentoring relationship comes to an end prematurely, it is important for programme staff to ascertain why and to help the pair end the relationship on a positive note for everyone involved. Debriefing all participants if the match closes for reasons other than coming to a natural conclusion is highly recommended. Programmes should also consider completing exit interviews whenever possible to identify and manage any possible issues from mentors or mentees.

Some of the most common reasons why relationships fail are (Spencer, 2007):

- Mentee's lack of motivation: not realising commitment, family pressure to participate (highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation on the part of the young person).
- Mentor's unrealistic expectations of the relationship and the young person: naïve about the challenges of forming a relationship with a vulnerable young person; overwhelmed by difficult circumstances; possibly driven by the need to 'feel' good and be appreciated by the young person.
- Mentor's lack of youth focus: unwilling to engage in activities that are fun and interesting to young people.

- Mentor's low awareness of personal biases: including cultural biases and prejudicial stereotypes about poverty and socio-economic status.
- Family interference: family members obstructing communication between mentor and mentee; family member dislikes the mentor influencing the mentee.
- Inadequate support: from the mentoring programme.

Being aware of these reasons can help guide the initial orientation and training provided to mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers. Consistent and frequent monitoring of the relationship should also help programme staff to provide additional resources or support to address these issues before they cause the relationship to fail.

5.6.3 Re-matching procedures

If the mentoring relationship does finish earlier than expected, then it is important to have clear procedures in place to find a replacement mentor and to transition the mentee to the new mentor, if appropriate. Understanding why the relationship ended will help to ensure these issues are resolved through a subsequent match.

In situations where the young person is not responding to mentoring as an intervention, programmes should liaise with the young person's referrer (if there was one) regarding alternative arrangements.

5.6.4 Closure activities

Programmes may undertake a number of closure activities including:

- separate exit interviews with mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers
- a match meeting with all parties and/or a special group event if a number of matches are finishing at the same time.

These activities give everyone the opportunity to reflect on and process the mentoring relationship. In particular for mentees, these activities will help to prepare them to move on and to reflect on what they have gained. Mentors and programme staff should utilise positive strength-based terminology and help them define next steps to continue to achieve their personal goals.

Research suggests that closure, if not formally processed, may contribute to negative feelings even if the relationship has been good (Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, Walsh & Drew, 2014).

If your programme supports and encourages the transition to an ongoing relationship after the formal programme concludes, it is important to give clear support and guidance to mentor and mentee to transition the relationship successfully e.g., Keeping in touch and connecting at key points/milestones.

Establishing an 'alumni' for mentors and mentees can be a good way of creating a community. Experienced mentors may consider mentoring another young person and if appropriate the mentee may consider becoming a mentor at a future point in time, thereby creating a ripple effect.

Checklist 8. Effective Practice – Closure of the match

Closure of the mentoring relationship is about looking back and reviewing accomplishments, looking forward to areas of continued growth and goals, and saying goodbye	CHECK
Establish formal match closure policies and procedures and ensure these are communicated clearly to all participants. These should cover all circumstances, both anticipated and unanticipated closures.	
Establish clear procedures for handling matches that end prematurely , including transitioning/re-matching the mentee if appropriate. Re-matching the mentor with a new mentee should also be considered.	
Establish clear guidelines regarding possible ongoing relationships at the conclusion of the formal programme.	
Conduct exit interviews with mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers if appropriate. This allows reflection on the positive experiences they have shared and the impact that they have had on each other.	
Support young people to define next steps to continue achieving personal goals.	
Plan an activity or event to acknowledge and celebrate the formal completion of the mentoring relationship.	
Document closure meetings to ensure due process has been followed in all instances.	

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Seeking happy endings - Otago Youth Wellness Trust, Dunedin

The Otago Youth Wellness Trust mentors/programmes co-ordinator Anna Bragg says this phase of the mentoring journey is just as important as the matching phase. Ensuring there is an end date means that we are placing parameters around the relationship; yes we are wanting an authentic friendship to develop, however it is still important to hold a framework as this allows for reflection, feedback and closure to happen in a safe, ethical and meaningful way.

We work with young people who have high and complex needs. Many have not had positive experiences of endings. This part of the process often requires a collaborative approach from both the caseworker and the mentor coordinator to ensure that this phase is done in a way that honours the relationship. Both the young person and mentor are encouraged to talk about their 'last official session' to plan something a bit more unique to signify the time that they have spent together. Mentors are encouraged to give a card with some reflections and memories, and when appropriate, the young person is also encouraged to share some reflections, be it by card, e-mail or face-to-face. For some it can feel like a natural time to end, whereas others comment that they only just feel like they are really getting to know each other and opt to remain in regular contact.

If mentors and mentees choose to stay in contact, we encourage them both to talk transparently about their expectations about continuing catch-ups. We also always say to our mentors that they are most welcome to touch base with us if they have any questions/concerns or feel-good stories that they would like to share post 12 months. It is not uncommon for us to get a phone call from a past mentor asking for some advice.