

3

Getting Ready to Mentor

This chapter covers:

- What is mentoring?
- The referral process
- The mentoring relationship
- The range of mentoring interventions that can be applied
- Confidentiality and Learning Mentors



What is Mentoring?

One of the things to consider is a definition of mentoring. A definition that may be useful in the context of examining the work of Learning Mentors is one that describes mentoring as a 'process in which one person (mentor) is responsible for overseeing the career and development of another person (protégé) outside the normal manager/subordinate relationship' (Clutterbuck, 1999).

Learning Mentors will essentially do the same outside the normal teacher/student relationship but with one main difference, that difference being the role of the Learning Mentor is a formal one within an educational setting.

In most cases, the mentee/learner is referred to the Learning Mentor by a member of staff. The process of formal referral compromises the voluntary nature of the natural mentor and gives it a very precise focus within the school environment. It is this that is at the heart of the Learning Mentor function. The Learning Mentor's approach must be one of facilitator, guide, supporter, enabler and even sometimes advocate. The role is not one of a friend, or of a manager.

We need to be clear about what the day-to-day activity of mentoring is, and so below is a summary of the work that a Learning Mentor may find themselves doing:

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- working with children and young people to identify any barriers to learning
- working with children and young people to develop an action plan for moving forward
- target setting around issues such as behaviour and attendance
- making provision for students to work on coursework, homework, revision and study skills
- offering guidance and support with personal and domestic issues
- providing opportunities for students to develop self-esteem and confidence
- working collaboratively with other professionals to support children, young people and their parents and carers
- co-ordinating, developing and running groups on issues such as conflict mediation, anger management and similar.
- contributing to and making provision for holiday clubs and activities

Looking at this overview of Learning Mentor activities and interventions, it's clear that Learning Mentor activities can generally be described as falling into two categories, firstly individual one-to-one work with students that I will call casework, and group activities that include workshops, groups sessions, after school clubs and holiday activities which I will call group work. The principles remain the same for both.

Learning Mentors and Working with Students

When working with children and young people, we need to develop a carefully planned and considered approach. It is important that we do this from the initial meeting with the student, as this is the foundation upon which the mentoring relationship is built. Important qualities for the Learning Mentor to consider are their own professional skills and practice, as mentioned in Chapter 1. These professional skills come into play when establishing the relationship with the student, parents or carers, teachers and other staff in the school, as well as external partners working with the child and/or family. Gathering some key facts before meeting with the student is vital. Use the 'Preparing to Mentor Checklist' as a guide to help you with this.

It can also form the basis of your case file for the student. If it is kept at the front of the student's file, it will serve as a quick and easy reference checklist

Preparing to Mentor Checklist


Preparing to Mentor Checklist		
	Activity	Completed
1.	Name of student being mentored	
2.	Form class and form tutor name	
3.	Print basic data from SIMS student	
4.	Obtain parent/carer consent to mentor	
5.	Obtain attendance and punctuality history	
6.	Obtain any medical information that may be relevant	
7.	Discuss the reasons for the referral with the referrer (this may be the form tutor/head of year/class teacher or similar)	
Now you are ready to make the appointment to see the student		



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for key names, contact details, the class the student is in and so, and this can be very useful when information is needed in a hurry. If dates are added as and when the checklist is completed, then a clear historical picture is also created and this is a simple way to track progress. Computer casework records are an absolute necessity these days particularly as they facilitate monitoring and statistical analysis and I will talk about this in detail in Chapter 5, but a handy accessible paper record like this checklist is always a boon.

 Case Study – Anger Management

The Referral

A 13-year-old boy has been having difficulty with dealing with his anger. His teachers describe him as an able but at times reluctant and troubled learner. Lately he has become more unmanageable, refusing to engage in learning in the classroom at times. His behaviour is better in some lessons than others. He has been 'on report' countless times, but this has had little effect. His mother is supportive and she is the lone parent. There are two other younger female siblings. He has been removed from lessons on several occasions for poor behaviour.

Action

His mother agreed, after a meeting with the Form Tutor and Head of Year, that a Learning Mentor might be helpful. The Learning Mentor wrote to the parent and followed up the letter with a phone call. The first meeting with the student was attended by the mother, who came to show her support for the process, and to encourage her son. Over a period of eight weekly meetings the Learning Mentor worked with the student to firstly build up a rapport, using listening and communication skills, and supporting the student when he had difficulties with his temper, for example by providing him with a 'Time Out' card in the short term, and developing a set of targets and an action plan that was shared (with the boy's agreement) with his mother. He was also invited to attend the half term holiday programme, thereby giving him a break from his responsibilities at home. His sisters, who attended the local primary school, were also invited to attend, providing the mother with some respite time and releasing the boy from babysitting duties. This was organised by the Learning Mentor. At the end of the eight-week period, the boy was managing his anger more effectively; he still needed help with this but the Learning Mentor had helped him develop some strategies for anger management. Additionally, by working closely with the family the Learning Mentor was able to provide help, support and an understanding of the situation, and provide tangible options, suggestions and solutions for managing the excess pressure that the young boy was feeling with regard to responsibilities in the home.

This case study demonstrates several aspects of an appropriate referral:

- A valid reason for the referral
- A person with appropriate authority made the referral
- Good communication with the family
- A structured approach to the first meeting with the student
- A negotiated plan with the student
- A period of review and reflection.

The Referral Form

The referral form should be simple to read, easy to complete and not too long. Think about the appearance of the form, consider the font type and size, spacing, use of clear space, the school logo and headings and whether there is a school or house style that you should be using. Think about whether the form should be on coloured paper for easy identification, size A5 or A4. Included here are two examples of referral forms.

The first form ('Referral to Learning Mentor') is more general and gives scope for the person making the referral to write about the student in detail. The second, 'Request for Learning Mentor Intervention', requests that the person making the referral give information about any previous strategies and interventions that have been used with the student. The aim here is to give the Learning Mentor a fuller picture of the student.

The referral form should include the obvious basic information (student name, date of birth, address and form), and information about the reason for the referral; this should meet the referral criteria, more on this below. Categories of referral might be for example anger management, attendance, punctuality, homework issues, coursework issues, family, domestic, health, medical, drugs, self harm, friendship, isolation, bullying, assertiveness and passive behaviour, and so on, depending on what is appropriate for your setting. Alternatively a space could be left for a narrative description, or perhaps even a combination of both. The criteria and definitions for referral are clear and unambiguous. The object here is to make the form fast and easy to complete, and easy to read.

Who can Refer a Student to a Learning Mentor?

A decision will need to be made about which members of staff can make referrals. This is potentially a tricky issue. You will of course want to build

Referral to Learning Mentor

REFERRAL TO LEARNING MENTOR	
Student name:	Class:
Home address:	
Reason for referral:	
Date:	
Name of person referring:	
Position:	



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Request for Learning Mentor Intervention

REQUEST FOR LEARNING MENTOR INTERVENTION	
Student Name:	Form/Class:
Home Address:	
Please indicate here what other support or interventions have been provided for the student.	
Please indicate here reasons for the request for a Learning Mentor for this student.	
Date parental consent obtained:	
Staff Name:	Staff Position:
Date:	



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relationships quickly and effectively with teaching staff and make yourself available to help students, but you will not want to be inundated with inappropriate referrals. Suggestions of staff that could be appropriate referrers are:

- Form Tutors
- Heads of Year (or those in a similar pastoral role leading a year team)
- Heads of House
- Heads of Department
- SENCOs
- EAL Managers
- Learning Mentor Managers.

I would suggest keeping the group of those with referral rights as small as you can; this makes the whole process more manageable and also ensures that those referring are those with an overview of either a class or year group. They are likely to know what other interventions and strategies have already been implemented or attempted, and this will help avoid duplication. They are also able to look at the child as a whole and in the broadest sense, having knowledge of their learning, home circumstances and character.

Why is a Referral Process Necessary?

One of the fundamental aspects of effective provision is formalising the process of mentoring to include the referral criteria, the referral, case notes, action planning, target setting, monitoring and evaluation. It is for this reason that the referral process needs to be clear and transparent. It can be very easy to fall into the trap of seeing students on an ad hoc basis only to find that there is no formal record of ever having had the student referred. This makes it very difficult to pinpoint the effectiveness of the Learning Mentor function, and also makes for a very shaky start with the student and family. Working in this way does nothing to help make clear the status of the Learning Mentor within the organisation, and it can devalue the intervention in the eyes of students and staff. In summary, a referral process is necessary because:

- It ensure Learning Mentors are not inundated with requests to see students on an ad hoc basis
- Learning Mentors can use their time effectively, appropriately and carefully to meet the needs of their students

- It sets the standard for the Learning Mentor team, and makes its status clear to all
- It makes clear that there are sound operational procedures for the work.

The Criteria for Referral

There will be many reasons for referral to a Learning Mentor as we have already established; in order to define the criteria for a referral, consultation with the pastoral team is necessary. Normally, a discussion will take place and a decision will then be made about the criteria for referral. You will need to consider the school ethos, cohort, size and the needs of its students, and keep in mind that the role of the Learning Mentor is to help students overcome barriers to their learning. It can be helpful to begin by thinking about the students who would benefit from having a Learning Mentor, as a starting point for developing the referral criteria. The following are common reasons for needing support, which might become part of your criteria for referral:

- Students who are not meeting coursework deadlines, and are not already being mentored under other academic mentoring mechanisms
- Where it is known that family issues are affecting school work
- Where the student is having difficulty forming friendships, and is isolated
- Where there are issues of bullying, and other interventions have not resolved the situation
- Where a group of students have an unresolved issue where mediation would be helpful
- Where the student is presenting with social and emotional issues that are affecting their learning and/or the learning of their peers
- Personal issues are affecting student learning and achievement
- Where support is needed when referring the student to an external agency.

Preparing to Mentor

Once you have agreed on the criteria for referral in your school, students can then be referred and the business of mentoring can begin. When a referral has been received, an appointment needs to be made to see the student. It is vital in this meeting to lay the foundations for a good

mentoring relationship between the student and the mentor. Whilst primary school students in my experience seem to be very amenable to this I have seen resistance on the part of secondary school students, and this frequently arises when there have been other unsuccessful interventions and people are becoming exasperated. There is a lot to be said for early intervention, good communication with the family and a well prepared referral form.

Building up a good relationship with the parent or carer of the student you will be mentoring is key, and included here are three examples of letters you can send home to parents when trying to set up the first meeting with them.

If you don't get a response to the letter then you'll need to follow up with a telephone call, and hopefully this will result in you setting up an appointment with the parent to discuss mentoring.

The Meeting with Parents or Carers to Discuss Mentoring

The important thing here is not to alarm the parent or carer. They are usually aware that there is an issue that needs to be worked through with the student, so a calm and sensitive approach is necessary. I would suggest covering the following in the first meeting:

- Explain the reason for the referral
- Be clear about what will happen at the mentoring appointments
- Reassure the parents about issues of confidentiality
- Explain how often their child will be mentored, when the appointments will take place, how long the appointments will be and how the school hopes the student will benefit
- Make sure parents know what records you will be keep, and why they're necessary
- Invite the parents to keep in contact with you, and make arrangements for this
- Explain when you will be available, and how they can contact you
- Always keep parents informed of any developments.

Sample letter to parents, example 1

[INSERT SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Name of Parent/Carer

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

Address Line 3

Date

Dear [insert name of parent/carer],

Re: [insert name of student]

Your son/daughter/grandchild [insert name of student] has asked to be supported by a Learning Mentor, with regard to some difficulties they are facing in school. I would like to talk to you about this, and kindly ask that you telephone the school to make an appointment for us to discuss the matter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[insert name of the Learning Mentor or name of the Head of Department]



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Sample Letter to Parents 2

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Name of Parent/Carer

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

Address Line 3

Date

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Your daughter/your son

We would like to offer the support and help of a Learning Mentor to your daughter/son [put the student's name in here]. Learning Mentors work with students to help them overcome barriers to learning. In our school, Learning Mentors run a range of workshops, sessions and programmes to help students to achieve their potential.

We would like to discuss this with you, and would ask you to telephone the school and ask for [put the name of the member of staff here] to make an appointment to discuss the matter further.

Yours faithfully,

[Name of Learning Mentor or the name of the Head of Department]

[This depends on your school protocol.]



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Sample Letter to Parents 3

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Your daughter/your son/your grandson, etc.

We are writing to invite you to a meeting to discuss support for _____.

The school Learning Mentors assist with issues affecting learning, and we would like to discuss allocating a Learning Mentor to _____.

Please do telephone _____ to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

Yours faithfully,



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Case Study – Transition

A Year 6 student had recently joined the school, and was finding the transition to her new setting difficult. The family had moved from one part of the country to another, and so the city was new as well as the school. The class teacher raised concerns about the fact that this 10-year-old girl was finding it difficult to make friends. Although the class teacher had made arrangements for the child to have a buddy, this had broken down when the buddy was away from school with chicken pox for over a week. The child did not seem to get along with the substitute buddy, and so the class teacher spoke to the Learning Mentor about the situation. The Learning Mentor was discussing the possibility of jointly running with the class teacher a Circle of Friends group, when the parents contacted the school. The parents said that the child had become withdrawn at home, was eating little and was not her usual self. The Learning Mentor made an appointment to see the parents, and explained what the school was thinking of doing. The parents were relieved that the school had in fact picked up on the unhappiness of their child and were in the process of arranging an intervention, which then took place.

In this case as the situation was moving at a brisk pace and conversations had already taken place between the class teacher and the Learning Mentor about a suitable intervention, no letter was sent to the parents. However, I would always recommend getting written consent from parents for mentoring, as usually intervention will require a student to be removed from classes and parental permission is needed for this. Sample Letter 2 invites the parent/carer into the school so that the Learning Mentor has the opportunity to discuss the referral further, answer any queries, obtain further information from the parent/carer and begin to establish a relationship with the family.

Starting to Mentor

The Learning Mentor will need a private space to meet with the student, chairs for both student and Learning Mentor, paper, pen, sometimes colouring pencils, post-it notes or small cards and a computer for use in the mentoring session or for writing up notes afterwards. There should be a signing-in book for all students attending the Learning Mentor's base. This is useful for a quick check, should anyone wish to confirm the whereabouts of a student on a particular day.

The First Meeting with the Student

Some students may well exhibit bewilderment or bemusement at being asked to see you; some will be relieved that help is at hand and some will be worried and afraid. Students will often need reassurance. The first appointment is therefore crucial to establish the right tone, protocol and expectations for the mentoring relationship, which you want ultimately to be effective, positive and successful for the student.

The 'Step by Step Guide to the First Mentoring Appointment' guides the Learning Mentor through the initial meeting with the student.

I would suggest using this as a checklist for the appointment and it can also then be placed in the case file to show that the appropriate steps have been followed. The form helps to bring focus to the meeting and ensures some standardisation in practice for the initial meetings.

Instructions for using the Step by Step Guide to the First Mentoring Appointment follow.

1. Step 1 provides the opportunity to introduce the Learning Mentor service to the student. The student may have some preconceived ideas about mentoring, and they may be either very positive about the meeting or very resistant, even hostile. This is an opportunity to talk about the range of activities that Learning Mentors are involved in organizing, such as the one-to-one meetings, the homework clubs, the holiday schemes and the peer mentoring sessions. This should help to capture the interest of the student, and it provides an overview of what mentoring can offer them. It allows for a more general start to the meeting, so that you're not immediately focusing on the student's problems. Once you've set out the opportunities mentoring can offer, you can move on to talk about the reasons for their referral.
2. Step 2 is an opportunity for the student to tell the Learning Mentor what they think the reason for referral might be. The intention is not to wrong-foot the student but to slowly coax them into naming the issue for themselves, and prompt some recognition. I find that students often know exactly the reason for the referral and are only too happy to have someone to talk to about this. If the student is resistant and does not wish to speak, then gently explain what the concerns are. I have found that the reason the student gives for the referral is often quite different to the one stated on the referral form. Staff may well give you a referral that details symptoms, but the student is likely to give you the cause. This case study demonstrates what I mean.

Step by Step Guide to the First Mentoring Appointment

Step	Activity	Completed
Step 1	Introduce the Learning Mentor service	
Step 2	Explain and explore the reason for the referral	
Step 3	Discuss appointment arrangements	
Step 4	Broaden the discussion & answer questions	
Step 5	Book the next appointment	
Step 6	Closing the mentoring meeting	
Step 7	Writing up the case notes	



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Case Study – Year 10 student

A referral is received in the Learning Mentor office which states that the student Sheila in Year 10 is often late for lessons, with no reason given, and that she has refused to attend Coursework Club to catch up with and complete her missing assignments. Sheila owes her English and Science teachers two pieces of coursework and as well as refusing to stay behind to complete the coursework she has also refused to attend detentions. She has been rude to staff. It also appears from observation and anecdotal evidence that Shelia has a boyfriend who has been seen at the school gates. He appears to be an older boy. Shelia previously had a boyfriend in the school in Year 11 but they do not speak to each other now.

Action

On discussing the issue with the student, the Learning Mentor used open questioning, paraphrasing, summarising and close listening. Shelia explained to the Learning Mentor that although she realised that they wanted to help, she didn't want the teachers to 'know her business' and that she had 'a lot of family stuff going on'. The Learning Mentor made clear the mentoring procedures around confidentiality. Shelia eventually agreed at the end of the appointment that a Learning Mentor would be useful, and made a second appointment.

It is highly unlikely that a student will talk about what is happening in their personal lives at the first meeting. They do not know who they can trust, and they may have concerns about information about their personal lives being revealed to classroom teachers. It is absolutely vital that trust is built up gradually with students. It is important to accept what the student says at this stage, this is not the time to challenge a student; that will come later if necessary. The first appointment is all about laying the foundations for the mentoring relationship.

3. Step 3 is the time that the appointment system can be explained to the student and it gives the student an opportunity to highlight any concerns about this. This is important, particularly if mentoring is taking place during lesson time and the student is being withdrawn from class for the meetings. Many schools have a mentoring policy that permits this, as they regard mentoring interventions as valuable. Examples of good practice demonstrate that schools that are inclusive and provide strong interventions raise achievement in this way. The OfSTED (2009) report, *Twelve Outstanding Secondary Schools* makes this point about intervention and meeting student needs.
4. Step 4 gives the student the opportunity to ask questions about the process of mentoring. If they are reluctant or slow to start, again give

them a few prompts. The purpose is to broaden the discussion, and take the spotlight off the student for a few moments. This will allow you to engage the student without talking about 'their problem'. A good tip is to tell them about another student (unnamed/one that has left), who has had Learning Mentor intervention in the past and has successfully overcome their difficulties. If the student wants to talk about the reason for their referral, or dispute it, then let them; my advice is to let the student get this out of their system. The student is then likely to be more receptive to what you have to say, if they feel that they have been listened to and that there is an understanding of their situation.

5. Step 5 is when the next appointment is booked with the student. Ask the student to get their planner out, and make the next appointment with them. Do this in an upbeat, positive and optimistic way. The message we want to convey to the student is that we expect to see them again, that we will be working with them to improve things and that this is the beginning of something positive for them.
6. Step 6 is when the mentoring appointment is brought to a close, and it is important to explicitly thank the student for attending the appointment. The student should leave with the impression and understanding that the Learning Mentor and the school value their well being so highly that this provision has been made for them.
7. Step 7 is when a note is made for the file, either handwritten or on the computer and a diary note is made for the next appointment.

A Model for Mentoring – the I SEE Matrix

I have developed a model for mentoring which has been tried and test by Learning Mentors. It is called the I SEE Matrix for Learning Mentoring (see blank form given here).

I SEE is an acronym for Issue, Start, Engage and Evaluate. The matrix guides the Learning Mentor through the mentoring process when working with the student. Firstly, the Learning Mentor uses open questions, paraphrasing and summarising skills to identify the issue of concern or area to be developed with the student and this is plotted on the matrix. Secondly, the Learning Mentor explores the issue identified; this is a brainstorming session to establish how the student feels about the issue. Thirdly, the main part of mentoring takes place where there is a search to engage the student with looking at possibilities to address the issue or area for development. This Engage aspect of the I SEE Matrix is used to develop the action plan that I will be discussing in Chapter 5. Lastly, evaluation will take place and also support for the student. The evaluation aspect of the I SEE Matrix is completed at the end of the action planning implementation period. Figure 3.1 is a completed example of the I SEE Matrix.

I SEE Matrix

I SEE Matrix – a Model for Learning Mentoring

Issue

Start

Engage

Evaluate



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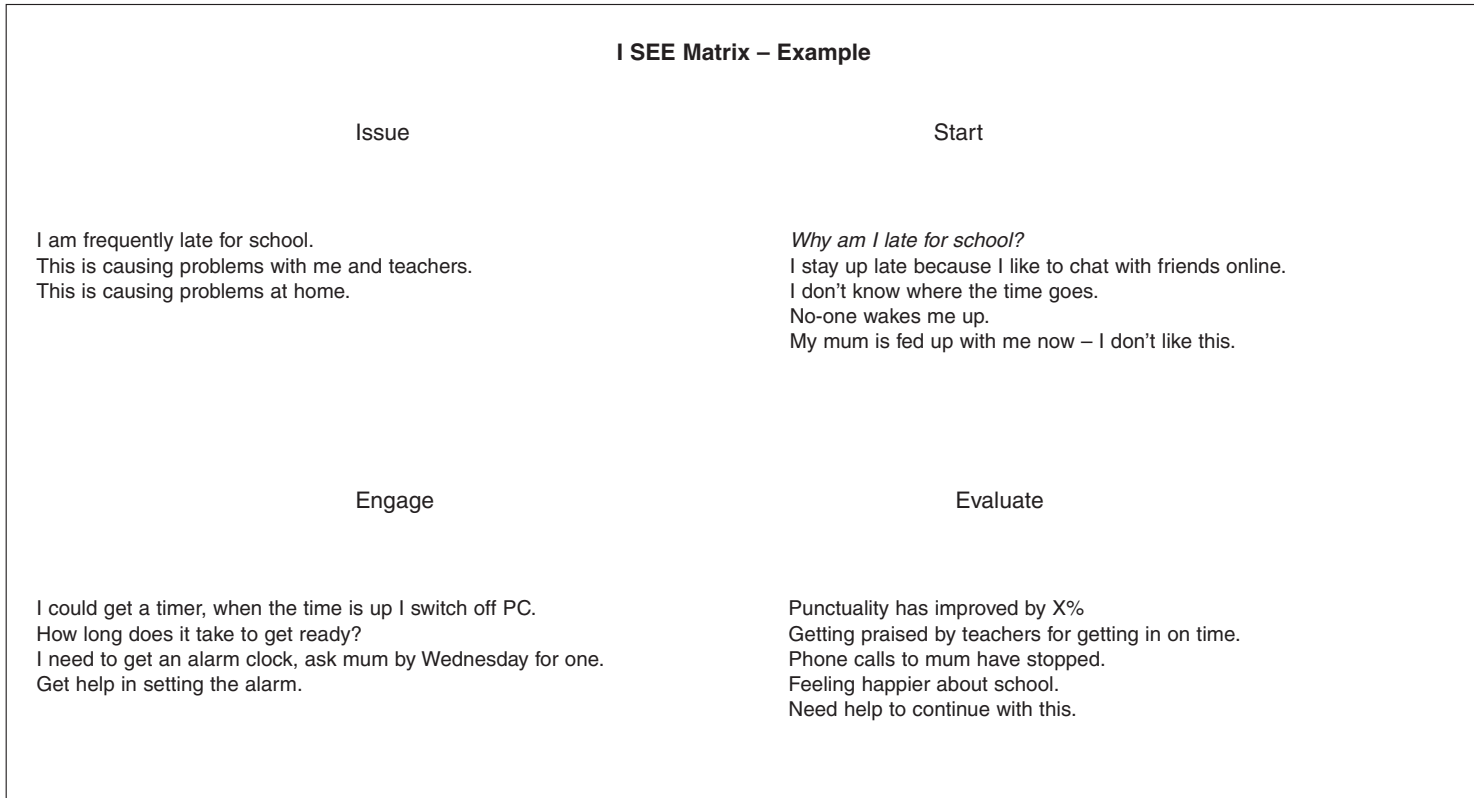
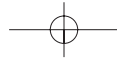


Figure 3.1 I SEE Matrix – Example



Confidentiality and Learning Mentors

In Chapter 1 I talked about the Learning Mentor policy and procedures and how important it was to know about these, as well as the departmental handbooks and other school documents. One of the things that does concern students is the issue of confidentiality, and it is important. It should be made clear during the first mentoring appointment what the position is on confidentiality in any discussion between the Learning Mentor and the student. It should also be made clear what the implications are with regard to Child Protection and any discussion between the Learning Mentor and the student. Be very clear about what the school's Child Protection Policy is and how this impacts upon the Learning Mentor intervention. I think it is useful to have a written statement, particularly for secondary school children, that can be read to the student and signed by them showing that they understand what is meant by confidentiality and what the Learning Mentor will be able to keep private and what must be disclosed. In a primary setting, it is important again to explain confidentiality simply to children so that they have some understanding of what it means, so that they can feel more open about discussing things with the Learning Mentor. Policy and practice will vary from school to school, so it is essential that you and your students know what your school policy is and what this means for both of you in practice.

Key Points

1. Starting things off in the right way at the beginning of the mentoring process will give you the best chance of succeeding with the student.
2. The referral criteria for referring a student to a Learning Mentor needs to be developed in consultation with pastoral staff, and it must be a transparent process that all staff understand.
3. Working and communicating with parents and carers from the start is vitally important.

Electronic resources

Go to www.sagepub.co.uk/george for electronic resources to this chapter

Preparing to Mentor Checklist

Referral to Learning Mentor

Request for Learning Mentor Intervention

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Sample Letter to Parents 1

Sample Letter to Parents 2

Sample Letter to Parents 3

Step by Step Guide to First Mentoring Appointment

I SEE Matrix

Further reading 

Egan, Gerard (2001) *The Skilled Helper: A Problem-Management and Opportunity-Development Approach to Helping*. Florence, KY: Wadsworth.

Rogers, Bill, (2006) *Cracking the Hard Class*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.