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Mentoring Skills

OBJECTIVE

In Section 3 you will learn about key mentoring skills in:

- Reflective listening
- Active questioning
- Overcoming barriers
- Managing responsibility and accountability

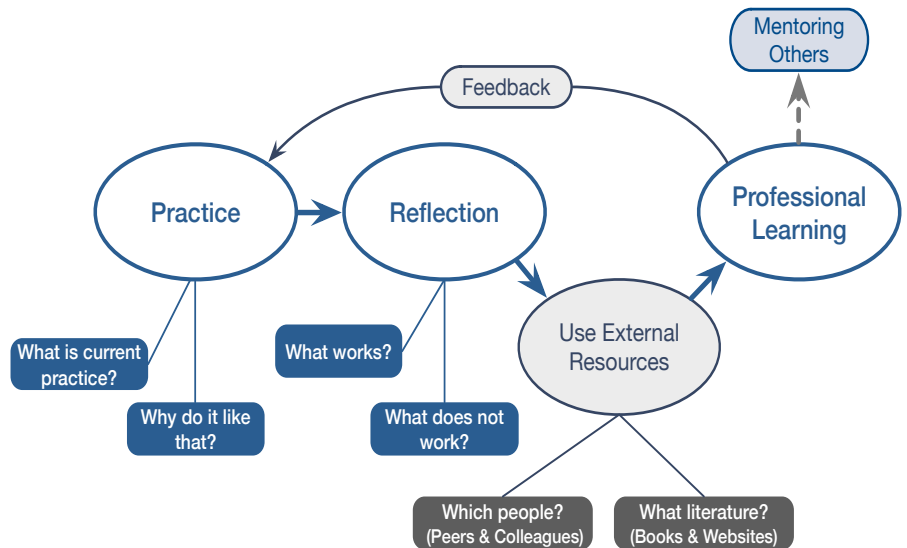
This section will take about two hours study time.

Where you see this symbol, allow yourself time to do an activity.



MENTORING SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

PoliceMentor follows the process of reflective practice and learning shown below. The mentee starts by identifying their current police practice, i.e. understanding what they do, why they do it and how they work. The next step is to reflect on how they can improve their work practices, by identifying what works and what does not work. At this point the mentee will identify gaps that may be filled by external learning resources. Resources can include people such as mentors, peers, colleagues, specialised websites and other useful resources. This iterative process leads to professional learning and feeds back into practice.



ACTIVITY 3.1

Discuss with your mentee what they feel works well and less well in police practice, Focus on your mentee’s own experiences and encourage your mentee to explore a range of external resources to support their reflections.



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ACTIVITY 3.2

Describe how you use reflective listening to lead a mentee towards a better understanding and make a note in your reflective journal of techniques that work best.

REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Reflective listening is a skill that involves:

- seeking to understand what your mentee is saying
- restating what was said by using a significant word or phrase the mentee has used
- paraphrasing what was said back the mentee to confirm that you have understood correctly
- encouraging the mentee to reflect on what they have said to clarify their understanding

Reflective listening implies reflective dialogue. Reflective dialogue has many components: environment, listening, questioning. An encouraging environment is important. Conversations should usually take place at times and in places where there will be no interruptions. The mentor's role is as a critical friend. Although mentors may be able to answer straightforward queries about evidence-based practice, you are not a tutor or teacher and you are not there to solve problems for the mentee.

Mentors should be positive, non-judgemental and encouraging whilst maintaining honesty and criticality. When mentors take care to listen attentively, resisting the impulse to interject, mentees may find it easier to develop trains of thought and come to new understandings. Questions about practice can be used to promote reflection but it is for the mentee, not the mentor, to provide the answers, if any.

"I'm very aware of listening more than talking so normally when there's something to feedback that they would see as negative it's come from them first. It's just teasing it out first and I think that's where you maintain the difference between mentoring and coaching" (EBC Police mentor).



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Reflective listening encourages mentees to think about:

- *What* they did
- *Why* they chose to do it this way
- *So what?* i.e. to evaluate the impact and success of their approach
- *And now what?* i.e. think how their practice might develop in future

ACTIVITY 3.3

Describe how you last used active questioning to lead a mentee towards a solution? Which techniques did you use? Did they work? Which did not work so well? Why was this?

ACTIVE QUESTIONNING

Active questioning complements reflective listening, and can help the mentee to achieve goals. There are two ways active questioning can be used, either on initial contact to establish rapport at the beginning of the mentee-mentor relationship; or more commonly to probe or prompt discussion. Probing questions can be helpful to seek further information and encourage the mentee to think and find solutions themselves (MacKay, 1980).

Active questioning

- is likely to open questions that begin with the words 'what', 'where', 'how' or 'who'
- is concise
- improves the mentee's self-awareness by stimulating critical thought
- triggers truthful answers by cutting through the waffle
- encourages mentee to think outside habitual constraints
- encourages the mentee to take responsibility
- focuses on the mentee's objectives
- leads to learning for mentee and mentor



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Open questions frame outcomes or goals and include, for example:

- What are your goals?
- How will you know when you have achieved them?
- What else will improve when you achieve them?
- What resources can you think of that might help you achieve your goals?
- What past strengths can you draw on?
- What are your next steps to achieve your goals?

Open questions are more useful than closed questions as they demand a fuller response than 'yes/no' answers. 'Why' questions can be unhelpful as they can put pressure on the mentee to justify their reasons.

Open questioning can help overcome barriers by focusing on goals instead of blockages.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

If progress stalls, it can be useful to:

- Help the mentee to identify the barriers to progress
- Discuss the priority which evidence-based practice has for the mentee; the confidence they feel and the commitment they have

"The biggest challenge is maintaining people. Normally the first meeting is really good, really productive, but then there's a real high attrition rate. So it's trying to keep people, well, it's both sides being a mentee and being a mentor - how do you maintain that relationship? To a certain extent, I think if the relationship was based around something different, say it was more of a coaching element or a specific training requirement, I think you'd feel more pressure to make, as the manager or the mentor, so separating the two, to keep the relationship going and make sure there was some outcome. Whereas I think with mentoring that you really need to rely on the mentee to come for them to take the lead" (EBC Police mentor).

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ACTIVITY 3.4

Think of some more techniques to overcome barriers and construct your own plan of how you would use these to support your mentee-mentor relationship. Note these in your reflective journal using the tool situ8 (<http://www.situ8.org/>).

Occasionally barriers can occur due to a number of reasons:

- Incorrect matching of mentee and mentor
- Dissatisfaction about the mentoring process
- Unrealistic expectations about what mentoring can achieve
- Lack or blurring of boundaries in the mentee-mentor relationship
- Lack of motivation, commitment and time
- Overdependence of the mentee or mentor

Techniques to overcome barriers include:

- Jointly agree the first meeting should be a 'get to know you' session without the commitment to continue
- Construct and agree a set of ground rules in the second meeting to include:
 - A common understanding of the mentoring process
 - Realistic timetable of meetings
 - Areas of responsibility
 - How to deal with problems.

This is not an exhaustive list of techniques. Activity 3.4 prompts you to develop techniques that work for you.



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RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Two key aspects of mentoring are responsibility and accountability.

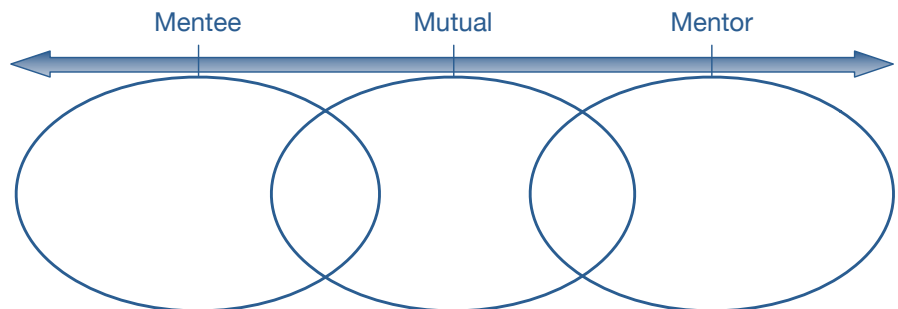
The **responsibility** for the mentoring relationship is shared between mentor and mentee:

- Whose learning is it?
- What collaboration is required?
- Who is responsible for the mentee's personal goals

Therefore, you get a spectrum of individual and shared responsibilities as in spectrum of responsibility.

ACTIVITY 3.5

Identify some goals for both mentee and mentor. Write these goals in the Spectrum of responsibility diagram opposite according to who is responsible for the goal.



Spectrum of Responsibility

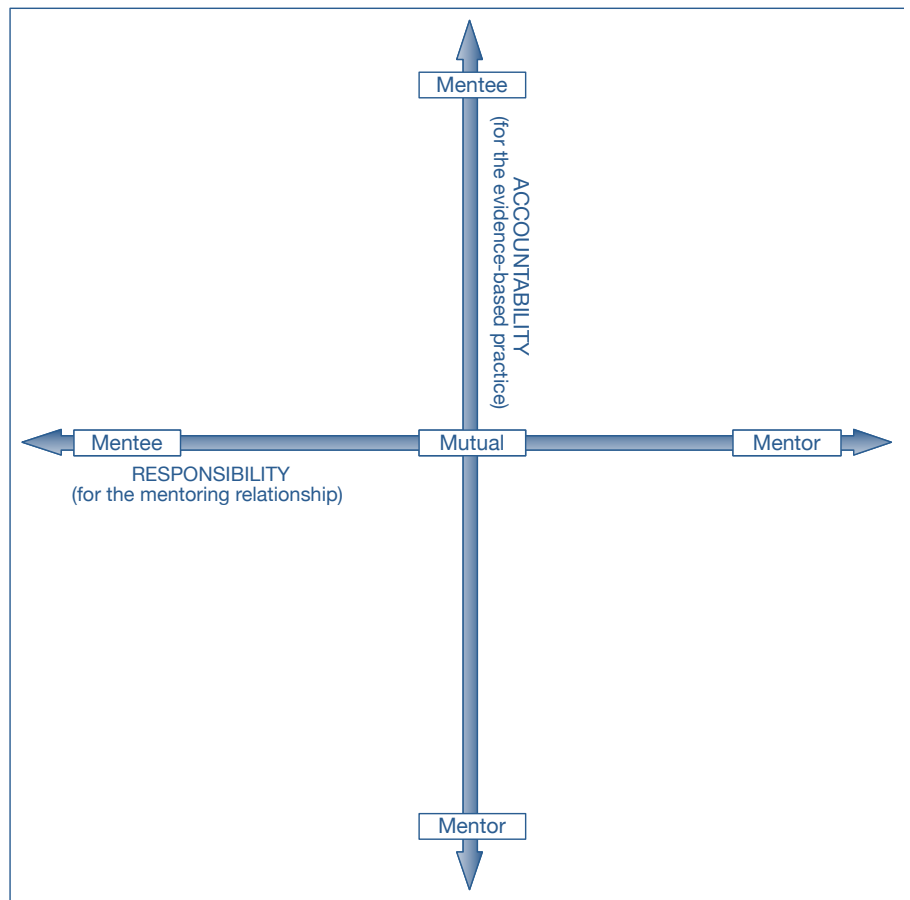


Mentors and mentees share **accountability** for setting and achieving goals (interim and final). You need to agree with your mentee who will be accountable for the actions and goals you set at your meetings.

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The following diagram combines the spectrum of responsibility between mentee and mentor on the horizontal axis, with accountability on the vertical axis. In the diagram, consider who has responsibility and who is accountable for learning, collaboration, setting project goals and achieving project goals.

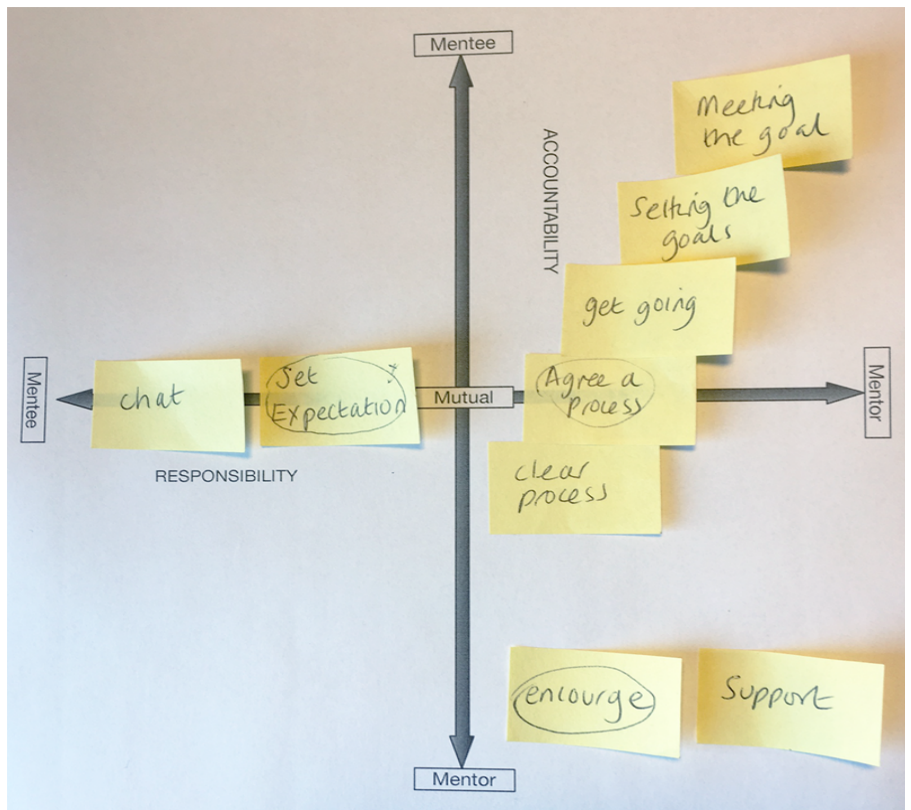


In face-to-face workshops on mentoring, mentors have tended to place goals in a diagonal line from bottom-left-hand corner to top-right-hand corner.

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So for example, it would be the mentee who is responsible for agreeing a timeframe and they would be accountable for achieving them, whereas setting expectations maybe the mentor's responsibility, with both mentee/mentor being joint accountable for achieving them. See image below. Do you agree?



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ACTIVITY 3.6

Read *The Mentoring Pocketbook* by Alred & Garvey, (1998) to understand the differences between mentoring and coaching. You will find this in the References section at the end of this document or on the website.

This is the final section of PoliceMentor. If you would like to take this further, you may be interested in taking a free coaching module in the Centre for Policing Research and Learning Resources: <http://centre-for-policing.open.ac.uk/learning>. The differences between Mentoring and Coaching will be made clearer by undertaking the last PoliceMentor activity (3.6).



Resources and literature references can be found on the Centre for Policing Research and Learning Knowledge Exchange pages: <http://centre-for-policing.open.ac.uk/knowledge-exchange/policementor>. If you refer to the Free Learning section of this website you can find many free Open Learning Resources: <http://centre-for-policing.open.ac.uk/learning> that can assist you to develop various skills and knowledge that can support your mentoring experience. You can also read research publications on Evidence-Based Practice within policing in the Research Sections of the website: <http://centre-for-policing.open.ac.uk/research>

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Mentoring Skills

A pocketbook full of tips and techniques for mentees and mentors.

Useful book that analyses open, closed and counter-productive questioning.

Situ8 is a tool that enables you to annotate using different media types (text, image, video, audio etc.) within any location and can be used to record your mentoring experiences.

REFERENCES

ALRED, G., & GARVEY, B. (2010) 'Mentoring Pocketbook: 3rd Edition, New York: Management Pocketbooks Ltd.
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