



This NEPS Handout has been developed by educational psychologists and is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the advice here may apply to any one student or situation. Teachers and parents may wish to identify the strategies that will work best for them.

## **Mentoring a Student in Post Primary Schools**

For the purposes of this information 'mentoring' means a regular, scheduled meeting between a teacher and a student with the primary aim of promoting 'school attachment'. School attachment (or 'school bonding') is about the child's feelings of belonging in school and having a network of relationships with peers and teachers. School bonding is linked with behaviour, academic achievement and mental well-being. There are two elements to the mentoring meeting itself

1. Check-in
2. Connect

### **Check-in** will involve

- Review of progress (often against specific behavioural targets)
- Review of any incidences of poor behaviour. Approaches such as restorative practice which support the student in understanding the perspective of others and in making amends have been shown to be linked with pro-social behaviour. (See the NEPS Handout on Restorative Justice).
- Sharing and recognition of any good news.

### **Connecting** will involve

- Taking an interest in the student and 'connecting' with what is important to them in their world; their interests, activities, family, community connections, likes and dislikes.
- Being curious rather than knowledgeable.
- Being aware of and responding to broader needs (physical care, safety, mental well-being and positive regard)

**Important note:** Be alert to the need to advise student of the limits of confidentiality should it seem that concerning information may be shared.

The mentoring session shouldn't be overly structured – there is no need to stick to a 'check-in' and then 'connect' model. Insofar as possible the interaction should flow naturally.

## Setting up a mentoring system for an individual student...

- Look for a volunteer from staff to act as mentor. This should be someone who feels positively disposed to the student and who feels that they can act as an advocate for him/her. This can be a class tutor, Year Head, guidance teacher, SNA or any willing teacher who knows the student.
- Identify what are the 'hopes' or targets for the intervention, for a particular student. How will you know that this has been helpful: Better attendance? Reduction in reports of misbehaviour? An increase in classroom participation? It is helpful to ask, 'How will I know that targets are achieved? What will positive change look like? It can be very helpful to note how often target behaviours are happening *before the intervention*, to facilitate review. Of course, not everything can be measured and there can be considerable value in mentoring which cannot easily be quantified.
- Decide on a workable pattern of mentoring 'meetings'. (Every morning at 8.50am in the resource room? Every Tuesday and Thursday at 2.15pm in the library?) Would a morning or afternoon slot make most sense? Where will you meet and is this space available when you need it?
- A student for whom mentoring is being considered is likely to have generated a significant amount of concern already and other approaches to supporting their behavioural, social and emotional development may have already been tried. The mentoring meetings should be introduced as a support to them in getting the most out of school and should form part of the Student Support Plan (within the NEPS Continuum of Support).
- An early mentoring session might involve going through the 'My thoughts about school' questionnaire (NEPS Continuum of Support, Resource pack for teachers, page 30) OR 'What's Going On? A Student Interview' (available from NEPS). The purpose of this conversation is to learn more about the student's perspective and what s/he sees as important.



Information here includes some drawn from the websites of the Special Education Support Service ([www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank](http://www.sess.ie/behaviour-resource-bank)) and the National Behaviour Support Service ([www.nbss.ie/interventions-projects/social-and-emotional-literacy/check-and-connect](http://www.nbss.ie/interventions-projects/social-and-emotional-literacy/check-and-connect))