

A Guide to Mentoring Peers

This handbook is designed to help young people explore ideas and learn skills in helping their peers. There is no right or wrong way to use this guide. A young person who's interested in taking on or improving a peer mentoring role might want to explore the guide on their own, perhaps starting at the beginning and simply working their way through the contents and exercises. An educator might use the manual to guide or supplement a peer mentor training program at school.

"Peer mentoring" means different things to different people. It commonly conjures up images of initiatives involving trained supporters working with equals (people about their own age or who share something in common). Such programs might be called peer mentoring, peer counseling or peer listening.

- In this resource "peer mentoring" is seen in a broader sense. It refers to what has been called "peer support" – people sharing information and knowledge with one another and offering emotional, practical help. The examples used in this guide all relate to addressing issues related to alcohol or other drug use, including addictive behaviours. The skills explored, however, can be used more generally and can be employed within a formal program, but they can also be applied in normal

These three icons indicate exercises and additional information throughout the guide.



...they sense you will listen in
...y.

Mentoring doesn't mean having all the answers or giving advice or even liking or agreeing with what a person is saying or doing. It means helping another person by giving them a chance to talk about something they're

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It may seem like a big responsibility to be a peer mentor but that's only one way to look at it. Some people argue that everyone is a mentor and a mentee, or should be, or that everyone ought to have a variety of mentors in their lives. In other words, the weight of the world is not on your shoulders when you are a peer mentor. You play a role but not the only role.

Some people seem born to be mentors. Their peers admire them and naturally look to them for guidance on a range of issues, from handling homework to dealing with difficult teachers to appeasing an upset parent. But, actually, you can choose to be a mentor. You can learn to be a mentor. It does take some work though.

The place to start is with some serious reflection on your own attitudes, beliefs and values. As a mentor, you likely want to help, to set things right, to fix problems. But **why** do you want to help your peers?



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Highlight or write in the most important reason(s) for wanting to help your peers.

- ‡ A desire to give back?
 - ‡ In order to prevent or relieve suffering?
 - ‡ To make a positive difference in the lives of others?
 - ‡ To serve God or humanity?
 - ‡ Other? _____
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Whatever your reason, it is possible to become overly focussed on "fixing" people or situations. You might find yourself trying to give people advice, trying to help them not make a mistake. But helping someone learn something involves guiding, not doing, not directing. When you are engaging with someone in a conversation about their life, you have to remember whose life it is.

tt t t q t . Then circle the ones that will be more useful in guiding. Cross out those that are more related to doing or directing.

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|---------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| awaken | tell | be with | lead |
| observe | listen | manage | offer |
| command | motivate | encourage | show |
| inspire | take charge | order | support |
| steer | decide | collaborate | determine |

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It takes practice to learn to be a good mentor. The next section will introduce you to some basic skills to use in developing your guiding abilities.

But before we go there, let's talk a bit about using alcohol or other drugs, gambling, and other potentially addictive behaviours. Helping peers around these issues is not about knowing all the facts. Your role is not telling them what to do. It is not actually about telling them anything. Nonetheless, it is important for you to reflect on your own attitudes, beliefs and values related to substance use and other potentially addictive behaviours.

One way to explore your own beliefs and attitudes about drugs is to take some time to work through the **t** workbook, **tt // . t . . / /y - - t - - t -t -t - t- - y -t - - q .**

Pop culture music videos are also useful for exploring different attitudes, beliefs and ideas about substance use or other potentially addictive behaviours. Think of some of your favourite songs or music videos. Do any of them allude to drugs or gambling? What do they imply? How could you use these songs or videos to start a discussion with your peers about decisions related to these potentially addictive behaviours?

You might also watch the **y** (**tt // . /764 2 1**) and reflect on your beliefs and values about drugs and mentoring.

At the beginning of this booklet we said that mentoring is about being a person that others feel comfortable talking to because they sense you will **listen**. When you really listen to a person and they know it, you are sending the message: "You are important, as a person, no matter what mistakes you've made, no matter what your problems may be. You are important and deserve to be listened to and cared about." That's a HUGE deal, especially for a person with a low sense of self-worth. Feeling like you matter makes you feel better inside, makes you calmer and able to see more clearly so you can take steps forward.

A lot of people aren't very good at listening. They assume they know about listening—that everyone does—because it seems to be part of everyday interactions at home, school or work. But, in practice, most of us are not good listeners.

Some researchers say our society seems to be getting weaker in the art of listening. Maybe this is due to all the distractions in our high-tech world. But it may also be that we find it difficult to resist the urge to give advice and "fix the problem" for the person instead of letting them talk and figure out their own solutions.

Now more than ever it seems we need to rethink the value of listening and put some effort into getting good at it. Developing good listening skills, after all, takes skill and practice.

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Listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us. Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

Why, then, do we often fail to listen? What is the difference between hearing and listening? What do you think the author means in saying that listening is an active process? Is responding to what we hear really an essential part of listening? Why, or why not?

Before a person speaks, he or she has a certain meaning to communicate. The meaning is encoded into words, often imperfectly. People don't always say exactly what they mean. The listener has to



0) describes the active process of listening as “accurate empathy.” In doing so he draws attention to the fact that in order to fully understand a person we must try to see the world through the other person’s eyes, feel the world from their perspective. This is more than the shallow response that we sometimes pass off as sympathy. Take a look at Brené Brown’s discussion of this in her (// .y t . / t 1 q 36).

q t q t t t , t t According to Brown, it is “connection.” How can we listen so as to create and communicate connection? Jot down your ideas.

t q q t (// .y t . / t - q) highlights how listening is fundamental to real connection between people yet is undervalued and usually viewed with less importance than speaking.

t t t. Can you think of people you know who embody the skills and vibe in the video, i.e., people who are good at listening, good at speaking, good at both?

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Four key skills for helping other people in a person-centred way have been identified. They can more easily be remembered by using the acronym .

- open questions
- affirming
- reflective listening
- summarizing

An **open question** encourages a person to explain something, to think a bit before answering. An open question is like an open door – it is not clear where the person will go with it. The opposite, a closed question, elicits a short factual response and limits the person’s options for answering it. If you think about it for a moment, it’s pretty clear why open questions usually provide a better opportunity for you to come to understand the person – how they are feeling, why they are feeling that way – and to make a connection to them. Likewise, the process of answering open questions helps the other person better understand themselves and their situation.

Affirming redirects our attention from focusing on the problem to focusing on the positive. This is not in some shallow “well, at least ...” kind of way. To affirm is to support and encourage. In listening with a desire to accurately understand the other person, we communicate, “What you say matters, and I respect you.” Early on you might say something like, “It’s good you are reaching out and want to talk. I’d be really interested in hearing more about how you see your situation.” As you come to understand the person through this process of active listening, you will be able to identify specific strengths. For example, you might say, “You seem to really care about your mom even though she frustrates you.” By affirming them, you draw attention to the positive resources the person has and that they can use in responding to their current challenges. Affirming also builds connection in that people are more likely to trust, be open with, and listen to people who recognize and affirm their strengths.

Reflective listening is a way to improve the decoding process mentioned earlier. Reflective listening involves responding to the other person in a way that suggests what you think you heard and encourages a further response to either correct your assumption or build on that understanding in a way that develops the thought further.

- M t My best friend is getting on my case about smoking. But I barely ever smoke!
- M t So, you think she’s overreacting.
- M t Totally. I mean I only smoke one, maybe two, and not even every day. More like occasionally.
- M t So, she thinks you’re “a smoker” and you don’t.

Reflective listening is not always just checking the decoding process. It also allows you to guide the conversation toward “change talk” by drawing attention to those elements where the other person talks about ways they could change or bring about change.

- M t So, she thinks you’re “a smoker” and you don’t.
- M t Yeah, something like that.
- M t So, why, do you think, she thinks you are a smoker?
- M t Well, like last night, I was kind of stressed out and I smoked a couple.
- M t So, you always tend to smoke when you are stressed.
- M t Well, not always, but, yeah it does seem to be a pattern.
- M t So, what other ways do you have for dealing with stress?

Summarizing involves pulling together several things the other person has told you. Summaries can be affirming because they show that you have been listening carefully. They are also important in helping the other person make sense of their own reflections. In summarizing you can shine a light on positive qualities the person can build on or draw attention to certain elements of the conversation that, if explored further, might lead to greater insight. You can make connections between different things the other person has said at different times that might provide new insight. Getting good at summarizing takes a lot of practice. But just being aware of this skill and trying to develop it is a good start.

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Imagine a peer has come to you and wants to talk about their drug use. Make a list of six to ten questions that quickly come to mind. Then examine your questions. Try to imagine the response that the other person might give to each question. How many are open questions? How many are closed? If you have included closed questions, try to rewrite them in a way that would make them into open questions. How would the response to the new question be different?

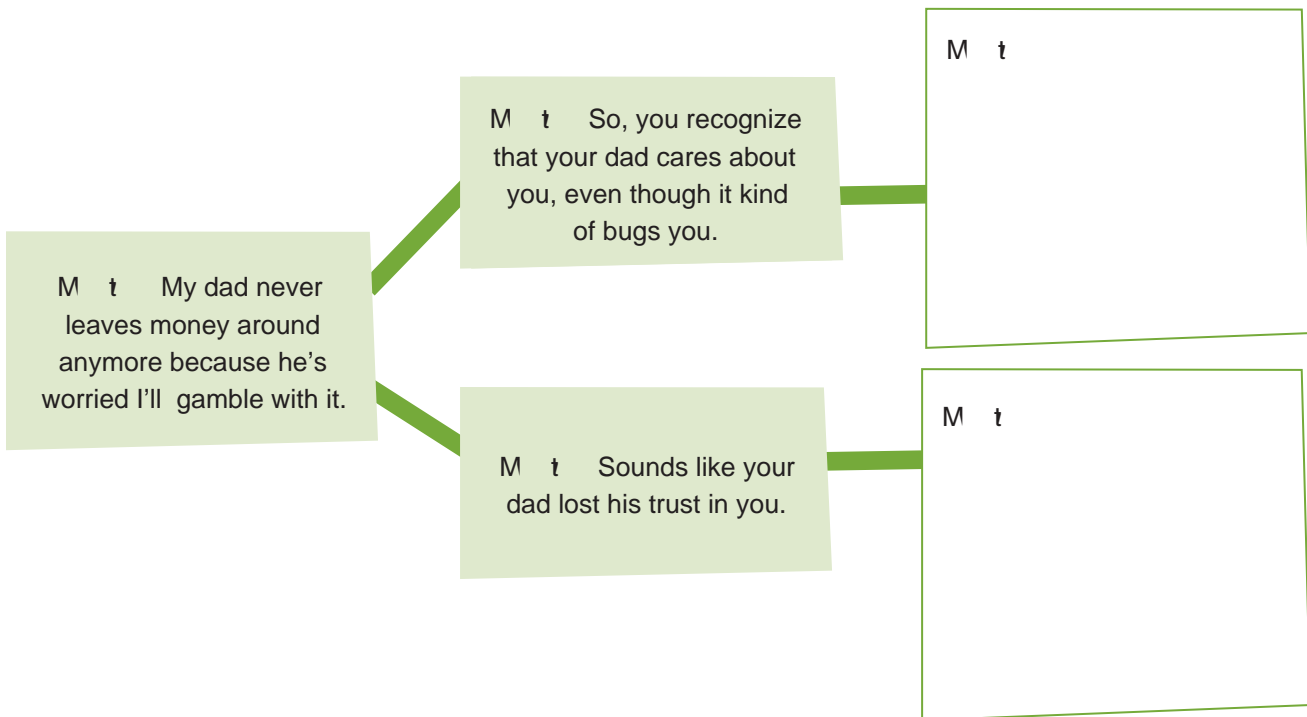
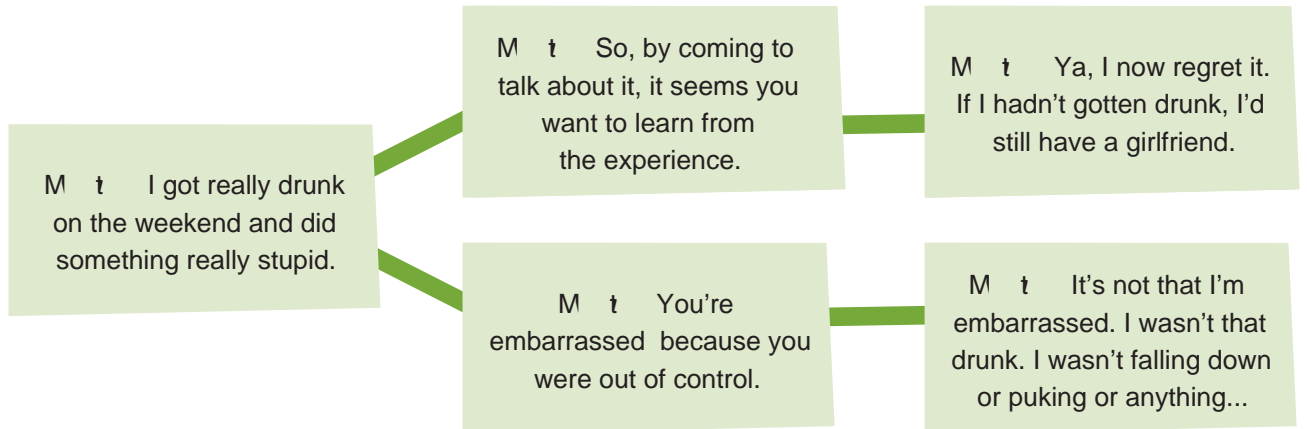
You could build on the above exercise by working with another peer mentor to role-play the questions and answers, and then work together to reframe any closed questions you discover.

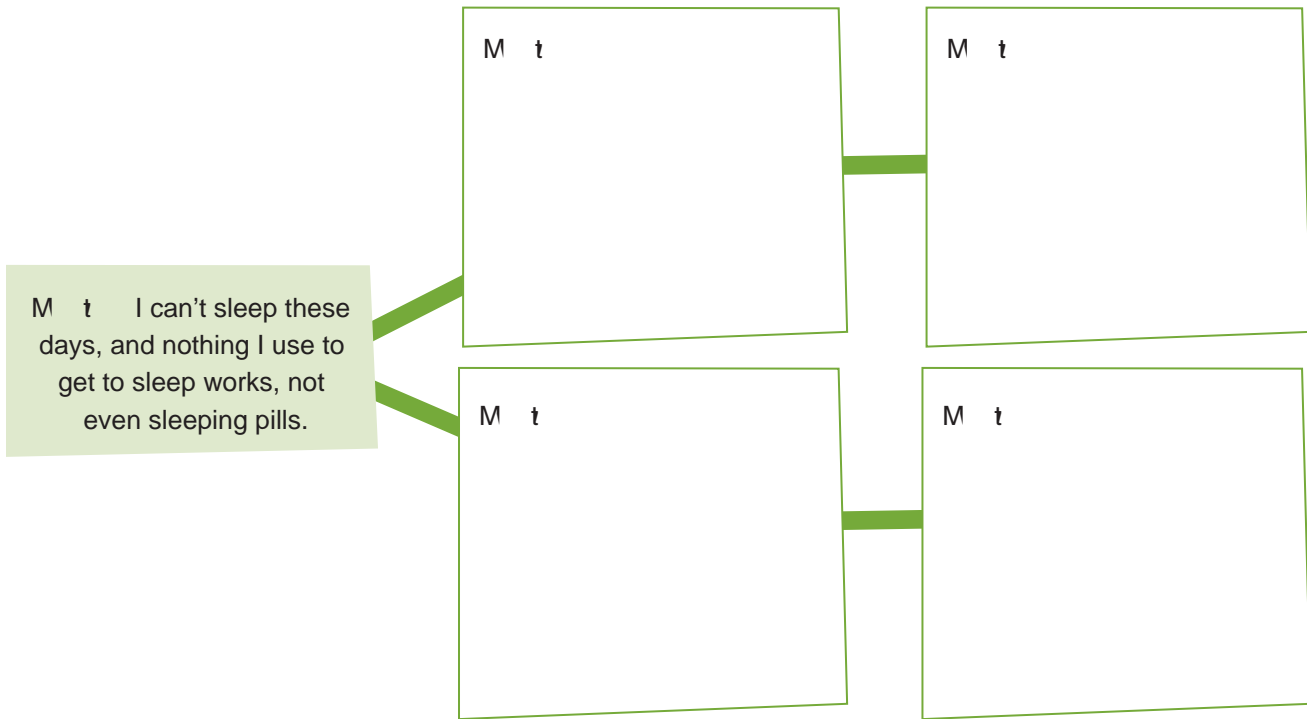
In our fact-oriented world, we often go first to closed questions because they go straight at the facts. But in trying to support or help someone deal with challenges the **why** and the **how** are usually more important than the **what** and the **when**. This is where open questions shine.

Imagine what they will say

In the first scenario below, reflect on how the conversation is shaped by the mentor's responses. You might notice how the affirming response encourages the mentee to open up or take a risk whereas the non-affirming responses tends to result in defensive or more closed reactions.

In the second scenario, try to imagine what your mentee might say if you responded as indicated. Then in the third, craft possible mentor responses (one affirming and one not) and imagine how the mentee might respond to each.





“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch,
a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an
honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring,
all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

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Mirror, mirror

There's an almost endless variety of ways to reflect back what you have heard in ways that may build understanding and connection or be helpful to the other person. Consider each of the following:

Example 1

- M t My parents won't give me money anymore because they think I'll just spend it on weed.
- M t So, your parents are worried about your use of marijuana.
- M t Yeah, but it is not as if I smoke that much. But I guess they worry that I'll be like my cousin.

Example 2

- M t My mom found some pills in my room and now she's super pissed.
- M t She basically freaked out over nothing.
- M t Well, no, I guess she's just worried. With everything in the news about overdoses, I guess I can sort of understand.

Example 3

- M t My friend was over and we had a few drinks at my place. Her mom found out and now she's not allowed to come over any more.
- M t So, just a whiff of alcohol and you are both being punished.
- M t Yeah, it seems unfair. Though, to be honest, my friend did get a bit a drunk. She's not used to drinking the way I am.

One way to think of reflections in reflective listening is to think of flat, concave and convex mirrors. Each is useful, but it is important to know how they work in order to use them appropriately.

The mentor's response in Example 1 is like a reflection from a flat mirror. The mentor is basically repeating what the mentee has said but has dropped the part about the money because that is not the most important part. The response encourages the mentee to reflect on his or her personal use or on the parents' concern. The mentee's response opens up the possibility to further explore the legitimacy of the parents' concern, and to reflect on the difference between his or her use and that of the cousin, and may lead to further discussion around ways we can protect ourselves from drug-related harms.

Example 2 is like a convex mirror that exaggerates the reflection. Here the mentor is intentionally overstating what the mentee has said. This encourages the mentee to empathetically defend her or his mother and in the process begin to understand the mother's position. This creates a foundation for further discussion.

In example 3 the mentor focuses in on "how much alcohol?" by understating the amount ("a few drinks" was reduced to "a whiff" – like a concave mirror shrinking the image down). This encourages the mentee to honestly reflect on the nature of that element and maybe reframe the issue of risk. As it turns out, the mentee then provides an opportunity to explore his or her own drinking relative to that of the friend.



ty , in or out of school that you may have experienced or could experience. Create dialogue snippets like those above to illustrate different kinds of reflections. Then make some notes about why you might use that particular reflection.

Looking back – looking forward

Take a look at the following sequence. And then provide a variety of short summary statements that serve different purposes in the ongoing dialogue. Which summary you use will depend on several things: the nature of your relationship with the other, the level of trust that has been built, the confidence you have that you understand and feel where the other person is at, and the opportunities you see to move the conversation forward to achieve greater insight.

- M t I have a pretty high tolerance for alcohol. And my mom doesn't really care if I drink because she knows I can handle myself.
- M t It sounds like you feel pride in knowing you can drink with your friends and are trusted not to overdo it.
- M t I wouldn't say pride exactly but it's nice to know I can stop before I get too drunk.
- M t So, at some point you worried you might not be able to gauge yourself.
- M t Well, my mom said she used to drink too much so I wonder sometimes if I'm like her or not.
- M t You want to monitor yourself to make sure you don't overdo it, like your mom sometimes did. How do you think you could do that?
- M t

To learn more about skills for helping other people in a person-centred way, check out the [Mentoring Toolkit](#) ([https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/mentoring-toolkit](#)).

Listening to and helping peers with their challenges takes energy and focus, both of which can be sapped if you're not taking care of yourself. A big part of caring for yourself is being clear about the people in your life who can help you when you're struggling with something yourself. It's important to know where you draw your strength to be resilient – the ability to adapt in the face of adversity – and who you can turn to when challenges seem over your head.

Other important ways to take care of yourself include

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Login to [q & q \(tt // q q. /\)](#) and use the Your Social Circle app to explore the resources within your social networks. Who might be most helpful in supporting you in your peer mentoring role? Why?

What are some of the things you do to care for yourself? Are there things you'd like to add to your list? Write down what you're doing and what you would like to do to live and feel your best so you can help others.

The skills and ideas you have been introduced to here can be used in all areas of your life. As you practice