

Partners in Action

A MENTORING TOOLKIT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDERS



“Mentors build upon the existing skills, behaviors, and attitudes of teachers and introduce them to new approaches. Mentoring fosters problem solving and reflection.”

—An early childhood mentor

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Published by the Texas Early Learning Council,
The University of Texas Science Center at Houston,
and the Children's Learning Institute

2013



T E X A S
EARLY LEARNING
C O U N C I L



This publication was developed by RMC Research Corporation with support from H&W Research Solutions under UTHHealth Contract #744-1305. Authors: M. Christine Dwyer, Sarah Hughes, Margaret Simon. Literature review: Angelica Herrera and Anne Ware. Editorial, design, and production services provided by C. Ralph Adler and Robert Kozman.

Preferred citation:
Texas Early Learning Council (2013). *Partners in action: A mentoring toolkit for early childhood providers*. Houston, TX.

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Welcome to Partners in Action, a toolkit to help administrators create and manage a mentoring program for early childhood settings.

The toolkit refers to 14 tools for administrators and mentors – tools such as checklists, planning guides, application forms, assessments, and observation planners. The tools are located on the Texas Early Learning Council's website at www.xxxxxxxx to make them easier to access and print. They appear in Word format so the text can be adapted to make the tools specific to any early childhood program and learning goals. A complete list describing each tool and its purpose can be found on page 31 of this toolkit.

In addition to the tools, the toolkit includes nine resource sets that mentors can use directly with protégés after they get started. These sets can be the beginning of a resource library. Like the tools, the resource sets are located on the Texas Early Learning Council's website. A complete list describing each resource set and its purpose can be found on page 33 of this toolkit.

1 Why mentoring?

What is a mentoring program?

This toolkit includes information that early childhood program administrators need to organize and operate a program to strengthen the skills of teachers and caregivers who work with young children. Through a mentoring program, teachers and teacher assistants receive support on a one-to-one basis from a trusted early childhood peer. In this toolkit we use the term *mentor* for the staff member who agrees to share knowledge and experiences with a coworker. We use the term *protégé* for the person who receives support from a mentor.

Mentoring is individualized support. Mentoring programs can take many forms, ranging from an informal relationship among two staff members who work in family child care settings to structured formal programs in large early childhood centers that have personnel whose primary role is to coach others. The core elements of a mentoring program are:

- 1) one-to-one relationships with individualized support to help adults improve their skills in working with young children,
- 2) on the job support to address practical issues that occur in daily work with children, and
- 3) a shared commitment to learning and using the best available knowledge to ensure positive results for all children.

Mentors take an active role. Mentors help others learn to observe, listen to, and talk with children. A mentor might share specific skills, such as showing a protégé how to focus children's attention on a story, giving ideas about how to make transition time smoother, or sharing how to guide a shy toddler.



Sometimes a mentor leads a protégé through learning a new curriculum or selects a reading to discuss with the protégé. A mentor might plan classroom activities with a protégé, demonstrate a skill, or talk with a protégé after observing her interacting with children. A mentor's observations could

help the teacher reflect on which comments and questions prompted children to talk more.

Mentors share their own experiences. Mentors are selected for their skills in working with children. They use their knowledge of children as the basis for working with others. A mentor listens to the challenges that another teacher experiences and helps her come up with solutions.

Mentors share what they have learned about being an early childhood professional—where to find resources, how to learn about best practices, and how to apply child development knowledge in classroom and home settings. A mentor might help a teacher review the results of a developmental assessment and decide what to do next. Later, a mentor might coach a protégé through a discussion with a parent about the child's assessment.

Mentoring synonyms

Terms that are also used to describe mentoring:

- coaching or peer coaching,
- consultation,
- teaming,
- one-to-one support, and
- staff or professional development.

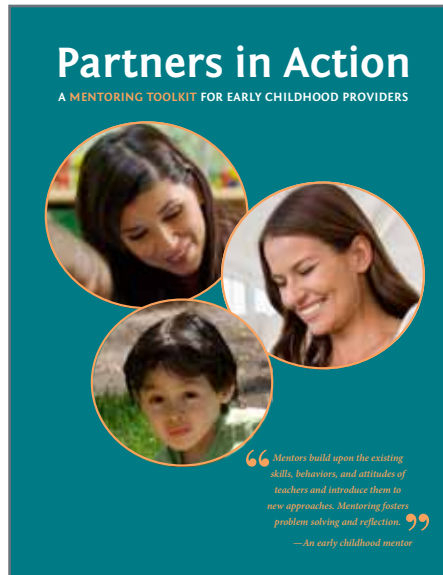
Mentoring is not the same as supervision. A protégé should feel free to ask a mentor for support in any area. Some larger early childhood programs even distinguish the roles of coaches and mentors. In those cases, coaches work on specific skills with staff members and lead training activities while mentors develop sustained relationships and individualized approaches covering a range of topics. It is best to separate mentoring from supervision when possible. Mentoring works best in the context of peer or colleague relationships—real partnerships.

A protégé should feel free to ask a mentor for support in any area.

The Partners in Action mentoring toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to guide the design and operation of mentoring programs. It contains: 1) *information* for early childhood administrators, 2) *tools* to support program planning and operating, and 3) *resources* that mentors can use in their support of protégés. The toolkit will help administrators determine the type of mentoring program appropriate for the early childhood setting, make practical decisions about selecting and matching mentors and protégés, and figure out how to schedule time for them to work together.

The toolkit also describes how to introduce the mentoring program to the early childhood program staff and how to provide training for mentors. It provides tips on tracking progress and evaluating the utility of the mentoring program.



Practical tools. The kit contains *tools* that a program administrator can use to implement a mentoring program. The tools can be adapted to fit a specific program and are provided in Word format for convenience. For example, an administrator might want to share the tip sheet on roles and responsibilities of mentors and protégés but finds that more material needs to be added, such as expectations based on the center's policies about involving parents.

The *resource sets* contain information that mentors can use directly with protégés. The resource sets include information about early childhood teacher competencies and best practices, short readings to discuss, observation and discussion guides, planning tools, self-assessments for reflection, and suggested resources.

Examples refer to infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and mixed age groups. We've also accounted for different types of settings—center-based child care, family home day care, Head Start, private and public preschools, and others.

We've included information to help mentors get started but over time mentors will add their own favorite resources to the toolkit.

A solid foundation

This toolkit was commissioned by the Texas Early Learning Council to address needs that Council members observed in early childhood programs across their state. In their commitment to preparing all children for success in kindergarten, early childhood practitioners recognize the importance of continuous improvement. Programs large and small require ongoing guidance and support for teachers and teaching assistants in their everyday interactions with children, and help for applying the best practices from child development research.

Sharing knowledge and experience. The Council recognizes that many experienced teachers are ready to share their knowledge with coworkers who want to improve their skills or who are new to the profession. As early childhood standards become more rigorous and teaching competencies more challenging, many early childhood practitioners will want support to improve their skills. The Council believes that well-designed mentoring programs can enable even programs with limited resources to offer meaningful in-depth support for teachers and caregivers.

The Texas Early Learning Council contracted with RMC Research and its partner H & W Research Solutions to develop the toolkit. We first conducted a thorough review of the research about mentoring, coaching, and professional development programs to find lessons about effective practices in mentoring.

We searched for studies about model programs, the connection between mentoring programs and children's outcomes, the characteristics of effective mentors, the different roles of mentors, the curricular focus of mentoring and coaching, and the use of tools and technology in mentoring programs.

The toolkit reflects the findings from what was learned from the research. Those interested in the synthesis of the research and summaries of major studies may download the review of the research literature at the Texas Early Learning Council website (www.xxxxxxxx).

Why mentoring matters

The right mentoring approach can contribute a great deal to an early childhood program. Well-designed and well-implemented mentoring programs enhance the quality of instruction and care and, in turn, children's skills improve.

As early childhood standards become more rigorous and teaching competencies more challenging, practitioners will want support to improve their skills.

Studies of mentoring programs show that teachers achieve better outcomes when the mentors work from consistent materials such as observation tools, a curriculum, or a coaching guide. The positive effects are seen in how teachers and

Texas Early Learning Council

The Texas Early Learning Council focuses on four priority areas in the early care and education system, developing strategies for continuous improvement, and facilitating high-quality outcomes:

1. Workforce and Professional Development—Creating systems and supports to strengthen the early childhood education and care professional workforce.
2. Parental Outreach and Communications—Understanding needs for high-quality education and services for children and increasing opportunities for participation.
3. Collaborations and Standards—Creating opportunities for collaboration and coordination of early childhood services and improving State early learning standards.
4. Data Systems and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems—Developing a systematic approach to assess, improve, and communicate about quality early learning and care.



children interact and in a reduction of children's disruptive or problem behaviors. More frequent contact between mentor and protégé produces better results. Teachers in high poverty settings are especially influenced by participating in mentoring programs.

Mentoring improves children's learning. Some studies have determined that children's learning improves when their teachers participate in mentoring. Those studies have usually focused on children's literacy.

When teachers receive support from a mentor, the children they work with are more likely to understand how print and writing work and they understand stories better. They know more letters of the alphabet and are better able to blend and match sounds.

*“It's great having someone
come into the classroom
and having that extra support
when you're new.”*

—Protégé

Mentoring seems to have a greater effect for children who have more extensive needs. For example, children with more limited language at the beginning of the year can especially benefit when their teachers receive mentoring support. In some cases, Spanish-speaking children have shown greater gains in vocabulary when their teachers participate in mentoring.



What we know from research

Children's learning is stronger when teachers participate in mentoring over a longer period of time—two years of mentoring support vs. one year. Some children gain more than others when their teachers participate in mentoring, including:

- younger children,
- English learners with limited vocabulary gain, and
- children who begin with less knowledge of print.

Effective mentoring programs influence:

- how teachers organize the classroom environment,
- the amount and quality of literacy activities,
- teachers' sensitivity to children's needs, and
- teaching of language and sounds.

2 Mentoring for success

Mentoring in diverse settings

Early childhood practitioners vary widely in their education and training experiences. Individualized and ongoing mentoring provides instructional support to the teaching staff at all levels and from diverse backgrounds. Mentoring focused on improving teaching strategies and teacher-child classroom interactions can help prepare young children for later success in the primary grades.



What are the most important features of a mentoring program?

Mentoring programs work best when they address the specific needs of the teaching staff, focus on improving children's learning, and build on the resources already available to the early childhood setting.

Mentoring programs vary widely in the type of components that make up the program and how they are combined. Across all settings, some key features need to be in place to ensure the program's success. See the box below for some examples.

Mentor selection

Establishing a mentoring program begins with the selection of mentors. Three approaches are commonly used in early childhood settings. The approaches differ from one another in terms of the type and extent of the mentor's responsibilities.

Head Start describes three types of mentors:

1. *Mentors who also have a teaching role*, often referred to as peer mentors (e.g., experienced teachers who serve as mentors in addition to their ongoing classroom teaching responsibilities)
2. *Mentors whose only role is mentoring* (e.g., additional staff or consultants hired to exhaustively provide mentoring support)
3. *Supervisors as mentors* (e.g., existing supervisors who incorporate mentoring and coaching strategies into their ongoing work)

Whether a program selects teachers to serve as peer mentors, hires more people, or uses existing supervisors depends on the unique characteristics of the setting.

Research tells us about successful mentoring...

- A mentoring program is superior to one-time workshops in improving teacher quality.
- Mentoring builds upon and extends the professional development already provided to teachers.
- Mentoring can be adapted to fit the needs of individual teachers.
- Mentors allow teachers to try new approaches with guided support from a knowledgeable partner who is not a supervisor.

For example, consider:

- Are funds available to hire more people to provide mentoring support?
- Do existing staff members have the necessary qualifications to serve as peer mentors?
- Do existing staff members have the time and willingness to take on additional responsibilities?
- Can existing staff members be neutral and distinguish their supervisory or teaching role from the mentoring support role?

Dual responsibilities of mentors and supervisors can be difficult to maintain.

Mentor training

Mentoring cannot work as a “one size fits all” program. It is an individual, relationship-based support system. Mentors need specialized training to understand how to support teacher development.

In effective programs that use peer teachers as mentors, most of the mentors have received intensive training for their roles. When mentors’ sole responsibility is mentoring, training is usually intense. Mentors with extensive prior professional development experience may not need intense training.



Training examples for mentors who also have a teaching role

- A college course covering supervision in early childhood settings and developmentally effective early childhood practices and supervisory management skills
- A 50-hour Mentor Teacher Seminar (two-day sessions over four months) focused on adult learning, skills for facilitating change, observations, communication, assessment, goal setting, joint problem solving, and reflective practices
- Training provided by The Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) as part of the Head Start Strategic Teacher Education Program (STEP)

Mentoring activities

Effective mentors typically use a combination and variety of activities and strategies in their work with protégés:

- collaborative goal setting,
- collaborative reflection,
- joint planning of classroom activities and lessons,
- shared development of action plans,
- focused observation and feedback, and
- modeling and demonstrations.

Other activities may include role-playing, identifying and sharing resources, exploration of teachers' beliefs and how those beliefs are applied in practice, and discussion of



child development and best practices in working with young children.

Mentor observations commonly focus on specific teaching practices. However, some mentors also observe teachers to help them implement a curricular program with fidelity.

Delivery

In a large majority of early childhood settings, mentoring is delivered face-to-face. However, some programs use a combination of face-to-face and web-based mentoring, and others use a web-based delivery of mentoring and professional development.

“[I will] walk into a classroom during instruction and just sit with the children.

I would initiate an informal conversation and discuss with the teacher what went well...”

—Mentor

Training example: For mentors whose only role is mentoring

- A college course on adult learning and development
- A four-day training session covering communication skills, classroom observation techniques, progress-monitoring approaches, and feedback methods
- A two-day mentor institute focused on collaborative goal setting, reflection practices, and action planning

Specialized training can be offered in...

- adult learning and development,
- professional development strategies,
- communication skills, especially active listening, and
- modeling and observation.

Scheduling

It will take time for the mentor to develop rapport, build trust, and establish a sustained relationship with the protégé. The length and number of mentoring sessions and duration of the mentoring program over time will affect the strength and sustainability of the mentor-protégé relationship.

Despite variability, general patterns have emerged across settings that can help inform mentoring program design:

- Mentoring sessions range from one to two hours long.
- Mentoring sessions occur either twice monthly or once weekly.
- Mentoring programs are conducted for a full year or an academic year, although duration can vary widely from eight weeks to three years.



Content focus

The primary content focus of most mentoring programs has been the teaching practices that improve children's early language and literacy skills. These practices include an emphasis on teacher-child interactions because of the strong link between language development and

the way teachers interact with children in early childhood settings.

Some early childhood settings follow a particular content-focused professional development or curriculum program. In these settings, mentors are often required to follow a coaching guide or to address specific professional development modules when mentoring teachers on classroom instruction.

Such programs need to administer mentoring in conjunction with the curriculum program to ensure alignment between teaching practices and the desired outcomes for children.

Example of a web-based mentoring program

1. Teachers videotape themselves in the classroom providing instruction and interacting with their children.
2. Teachers then either post the videos online to be reviewed and commented on by the mentor or mail them to the mentor.
3. Mentors then post their written feedback for the teacher online or, if settings do not have internet access, they mail it directly to the teacher.

Mentor support

Mentoring programs with strong, ongoing administrative support for mentors tend to have better outcomes. Providing mentors with the time, resources, and dialogue they need to perform their role supports the consistency of the mentoring practices within a setting.

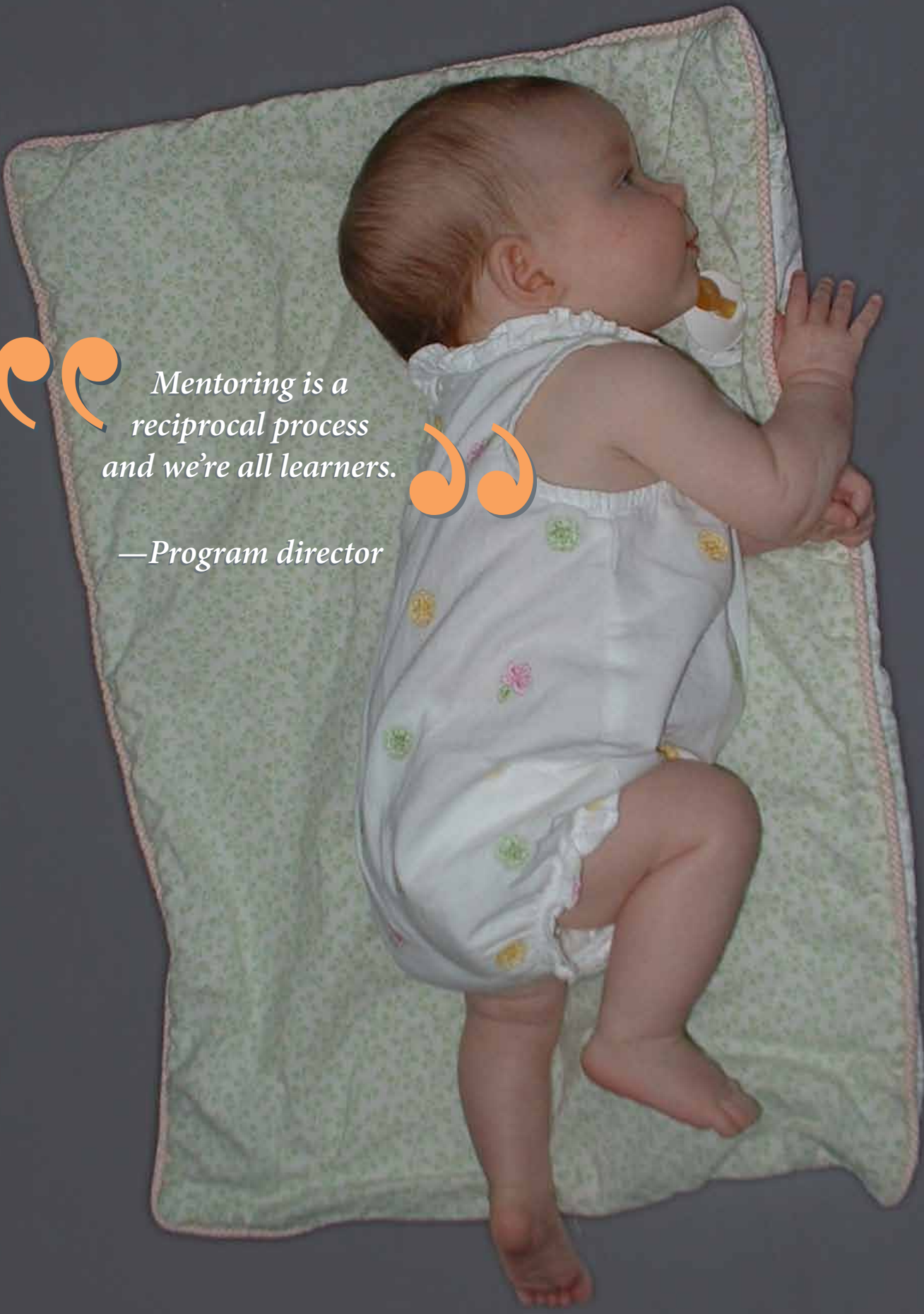
Mentor accountability

Successful mentoring programs use some form of mentor accountability; in other words, the mentors are supervised. Stronger positive effects on teacher practices occur when mentors are required to use logs, written notes/forms, or other forms of documentation.

The research tells us:

- Focus mentoring on children's cognitive and social-emotional development.
- Provide mentors with intensive training.
- Follow a structured set of activities/protocols.
- Promote the development of a one-to-one relationship between mentor and protégé.
- Include ongoing monitoring and support of the mentor.
- Ensure that the mentoring program is sustained over time.





*Mentoring is a
reciprocal process
and we're all learners.*

—Program director

3 Planning a mentoring program

This section describes four steps in planning a mentoring program. It describes how to:

1. commit to an investment in mentoring,
2. determine goals for mentoring,
3. build a framework to support mentoring, and
4. gather staff support.



Clear commitment to mentoring from program administrators matters because:

- Teachers are more likely to be on board if they know leaders believe in the power of mentoring.
- Mentoring activities can improve practitioners' core competencies.
- Administrators need to allow time in the regular schedule for mentoring.
- Mentors need access to information and resources to do their jobs well.

Step 1: Commit to an investment in mentoring

Partners in Action is about setting up different types of mentoring programs to help early childhood staff develop or advance the core competencies necessary to provide quality care and teaching for strong child outcomes. Mentoring is a hands-on, supportive, on-the-job training opportunity—a bridge between training workshops and classroom practice. Mentoring helps teachers apply what they know.

Studies show that mentoring programs succeed best when everyone in the program shares common understandings and program administrators, mentors, and protégés invest in the same goals.

Step 2: Determine goals for mentoring

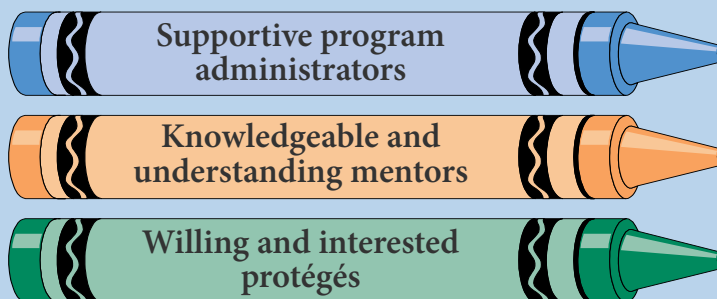
Review program needs. Once a program administrator decides to invest in mentoring, the next step is determining specific goals. Goal setting begins with a realistic overview of the program with answers to two important questions:

Are all children developing and learning to their potential?

What competencies do staff members need to advance teaching practices?

Information to answer these questions can be found in past teacher observations and

Factors leading to success



evaluations, outside program reviews, children’s progress assessments, and systematic reviews of the expectations outlined in Texas’ Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators. The detailed list of core competencies can help beginning teachers understand essential knowledge and skills and help more experienced teachers advance their practices.



Most important in determining needs is honesty and clarity about staff and program strengths and needs so the mentoring program can be tailored appropriately.

Establish mentoring program goals. Mentoring goals should directly address program and staff needs. Goal statements should be specific, attainable, and clear. Clearly stated goals make it easier for everyone to see the value of mentoring.

Some needs may be subtle. For example, even teachers with experience may be surprised by the wide range of children’s developmental needs in a new class. Beginning staff members may be struggling to connect with all of the children in their care.

Program administrators may consider brainstorming a list of possible goals (see the examples in the box below) to share with the staff as a starting point for discussion. Including everyone in goal-setting helps get buy-in and support.

Sample goal statements

- ✓ Our mentoring program will help new members of the teaching staff strengthen their core competencies in supporting skill development.
- ✓ Every staff member will learn how to use formative assessments in the preschool classroom.
- ✓ We will create more opportunities for experienced staff members to share their skills and knowledge.
- ✓ We will support all teachers to implement and modify the new curriculum.
- ✓ Teachers and assistants in the infant and toddler room will improve responsiveness to children with special needs as well as detect children’s needs for intervention early on.
- ✓ Our mentoring program will enhance staff members’ sensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences among children.
- ✓ Mentoring will help teachers apply the skills related to observation and assessment that have been presented in program-wide workshops and trainings.
- ✓ We will build career pathways for entry level staff to move them from beginner to intermediate status in the core competencies.
- ✓ Our mentoring program will create a collaborative, trusting culture where everyone feels supported.

Step 3: Build a framework to support mentoring

Every early childhood setting—no matter how small—can offer a mentoring program. The basic ingredients for building a mentoring program are designation of a

person to coordinate mentoring activities, clear descriptions of **roles** and **responsibilities** for mentors and protégés, and plans for **delivering** and **scheduling** mentoring activities.

Mentoring program coordination. The early childhood program administrator often coordinates mentoring activities. But there are other options. The coordinator could be a board member, lead teacher, volunteer, consultant, staff developer, or clerical staff member. In a very large program, the mentoring coordinator may become a dedicated role.

Duties of mentor program coordinator include:

- managing the application and selection process,
- scheduling mentor trainings,
- facilitating scheduling of meetings,
- maintaining inventory of resources/tools,



- scheduling and conducting check-ins to determine the success of the mentor/protégé relationship, and
- problem solving (e.g., mentor/protégé mismatch, lack of commitment, lack of progress).

Roles and

responsibilities for mentors and protégés.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for mentors and protégés are essential for successful relationships.

Primarily, mentors provide guidance and support based on protégé needs. In doing so, mentors act as a source of encouragement and share information and resources. Mentors listen actively, and offer non-judgmental feedback. They maintain confidentiality.

Mentoring programs must be clear about expectations such as the time involved, location of consultations, and reporting. Be sure to distinguish mentoring from supervisory and evaluative roles. Further define the mentor role with examples of mentoring activities such as developing action plans, conducting observations, giving feedback, reviewing lessons, interpreting assessment results, and problem solving (see Section 5—Managing a mentoring program).

Administrators demonstrate support for mentoring programs when they:

Make a **clear link** between practitioners' **core competencies** and mentoring

Encourage staff members to volunteer for the mentoring program

Respect **confidentiality** and the **non-judgmental nature** of mentoring

Welcome suggestions from mentors and protégés

Respond directly when asked for advice by mentors

Strategize ways to **make schedules work** for both protégés and mentors

Address **requests for resources**

Provide **comfortable adult meeting space** and **review programs** periodically for improvements

The expected responsibilities of protégés include:

- self-assessing strengths and needs in terms of core competencies,
- developing knowledge and skills,
- asking questions,
- taking risks and trying new behaviors,
- investing time in observing and listening,
- reviewing suggested resources, and
- reflecting honestly on progress.

Both mentors and protégés should review and discuss desired core competencies and set goals collaboratively. They should adhere to a regular meeting schedule, participate in check-ins, and complete required paperwork. Both should feel free to alert the mentoring coordinator if problems occur.

Plan for delivery of mentoring activities.

Mentoring programs can take many shapes. They may be formal with well-defined activities and expectations or less formal with only a few staff members involved. Mentoring programs can be conducted face-to-face or long distance via virtual methods or combine both approaches.

Most early childhood mentoring programs that have been studied have been formal face-to-face models. But several studies have shown that web-based mentoring can also be effective in changing teachers’ practices. Virtual mentoring

relationships hold promise for small and isolated programs as well as those with limited access to mentor expertise locally.

Regardless of the delivery method, rapport between mentor and protégé must be established. Here’s how it might look in a virtual model:

Example: Mentoring using a combination of face-to-face meetings and remote supports

A mentor might be hired as a consultant to conduct several site visits to teachers and also connect remotely via telephone.

Site visits. After developing rapport with the protégé, the mentor may conduct a site visit at the beginning of the year, another in the middle of the year, and a final visit at the end of the year.

Regular check-ins. The mentor may set up weekly phone calls with the protégé to discuss lesson planning, answer questions, and review materials sent by email.

Video. Mentors may ask protégés to videotape certain interactions, and post or send them online so they can discuss and review what occurred. Likewise, the mentor may videotape a demonstration lesson or activity and send it to the protégé for discussion.

Do staff members need help with core competencies related to:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ✓ responding to children who are stressed? | ✓ supporting dual language learners? |
| ✓ learning to observe children’s cognitive development? | ✓ planning instructional opportunities to build vocabulary? |
| ✓ helping children develop self-regulating behaviors? | ✓ interpreting assessments? |
| ✓ establishing routines? | ✓ maintaining health and safety practices? |
| ✓ modifying the curriculum? | ✓ creating a more nurturing environment? |

Adjust for your setting: Introducing mentoring

In a large setting

- Hold a meeting for all staff members and other stakeholders.
- Discuss the program's professional development plan.
- Talk about how mentoring fits within the plan and what it entails.
- Provide opportunities for staff to sign up to participate.

In a small setting

- Talk with individual staff members about mentoring.
- Consider a brown-bag lunch to talk about mentoring.
- Ask if staff have any questions about the program.
- Check in again later about questions that have emerged and determine individual interest.

Scheduling. The frequency and duration of mentoring activities depend on local resources. Generally, the more the better! We know from studies that the length of mentoring sessions, number of sessions, and duration of the mentoring program impacts the success of the program.

Successful mentoring is built on relationships that take time to develop. Plan for a minimum of several months in each period of mentoring. Strive for at least bi-weekly consultations between mentor and protégé that are one to two hours long.

Considerations for deciding the frequency and duration of mentoring activities include:

Mentor program goal—what level of mentoring will help achieve the goal?

Available resources—how much of a mentor's time can we support? How much could be in-classroom work with the protégé?

Mentor availability—how much time can mentors dedicate?

Protégé request—how often do protégés want to meet with mentors?

Step 4: Gather staff support

As we noted earlier, program administrators must be invested in the value of mentoring for a program to succeed. But it's also important that everyone else on staff understands the goals of mentoring and how they can participate. Some may be unsure about how mentoring programs will affect their work or even feel intimidated by the idea of a mentor.

TOOL
1

ADMINISTRATORS

PUTTING THE MENTORING PROGRAM FRAMEWORK TOGETHER

Administrators can use this planning tool to help to make decisions about the components that define a mentoring program.

TOOL
2

ADMINISTRATORS

GATHERING STAFF SUPPORT ACTIVITY: LEARNING ABOUT NEEDS AND INTERESTS

Administrators can use this staff development tool to conduct an activity to help staff members identify which core competencies they would like to strengthen through mentoring activities.

The approach to communication about mentoring will depend on the setting and its culture but some key points apply in all cases. An introductory meeting or discussion is an important opportunity to help practitioners reflect and ask questions about how a mentoring program could help them in their work.

Explain mentoring as part of an overall staff development plan to improve core competencies. Ensure that everyone understands how mentoring differs from supervision and teacher evaluation. Most important, explain the goal of mentoring as strengthening teaching and care to support children's development.



*“You need to design your mentoring program so that it can be flexible;
it could change based on feedback from mentors and mentees.”*

—Program Director



4

Recruitment and selection

This section describes how mentoring programs:

1. identify resources,
2. recruit mentors,
3. select protégés,
4. pair mentors and protégés, and
5. assess the program's readiness to initiate a mentoring initiative.



The size of the setting will affect the options for recruitment, selection, and training. In this section we describe varied approaches that reflect different levels of resources.

Step 1: Identify resources

The resources required to set up a mentoring program will vary depending on the number of protégés, the number and schedule of meetings, and availability of mentors. An informal model that depends on volunteer staff mentors will cost less than a formal structure that requires paid consultants. School-based early childhood education programs may have veteran or even retired teachers willing to serve as mentors. Small child care centers or family day care settings will likely need to seek outside mentors.

Some early childhood programs look within their own organizations to identify mentoring assets and resources. Other programs look to the

larger community for potential partnerships to support mentoring. Early childhood programs housed within larger organizations (e.g., a school or community action agency) might seek out coaches and consultants available within the parent organization.

Community services that may be sources of mentors:

- other early childhood education providers,
- schools, district offices, and children's libraries,
- local colleges, universities, and training providers,
- faith-based organizations, and
- civic and community groups that serve young children such as YWCA or health providers.

Larger early childhood organizations may decide to develop an in-house mentoring program and hire or designate staff members whose only role is mentoring.

In planning a mentoring program, start small and expand with success. The basic foundation built through the steps in this toolkit is easily scalable. Begin by considering the number of mentor-protégé pairs that can realistically be accommodated and adjust recruitment and selection strategies accordingly.

Adjust for your setting: Selecting mentors

Larger programs

- potential for in-house mentoring
- potential for dedicated staff mentor role
- can start with more mentor/protégé pairs
- formal recruitment and selection process
- formal process of pairing teams

Smaller programs

- may need to seek mentors externally
- availability of mentors will limit number of protégés
- informal process for identifying mentors and protégés
- potentially few choices when pairing teams

Step 2: Recruit mentors

Finding the right people to serve as mentors will set a program on a path to success. Highly experienced teachers with specialized training in mentoring or coaching or experienced caregivers with no previous mentoring or coaching experience might serve as the pool of potential mentors.

Mentors can be recruited from within the setting or through an outside search. Mentors may serve more than one role—as teachers within the program, or as mentors only. We do not recommend that supervisors serve as mentors because the dual relationship of evaluator and mentor can be difficult to manage.

We know from studies that successful early childhood mentors must have four qualities:

- a firm understanding of early childhood development and care,
- sound knowledge about how children learn,
- successful teaching experience, ideally with the same age group, and
- an ability to connect and share their experiences with other adults regardless of starting place.

In other words, mentors must understand how both adults and children learn and develop.

Using core competencies. *The Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators* (see Section 6, Further reading) can serve as a guide for determining the knowledge and skills required of mentors. The document lists the observable skills of beginning,

intermediate, and advanced practitioners in each core competency area. Typically, mentors would demonstrate advanced skills (or a mix of intermediate and advanced skills) in the core competencies that apply to mentoring goals.

Major considerations for selecting high quality mentors:

- Mentors have **experience in early childhood education** and **observable competencies** (at least at the intermediate level) **in the content area** that is the focus of the mentoring program.
- Mentors possess a combination of personal qualities including **excellent interpersonal skills, patience, flexibility, open-mindedness, optimism, and the belief that people can change.**
- Mentors share the essential value of **building and maintaining positive and productive mentor-protégé relationships.**
- Mentors feel **comfortable providing feedback based on observations** and other types of information, including student data.

Mentoring program goals suggest selection criteria. For example, the sample goal “to support practitioners working with infants to strengthen responsive interactions and identify developmental issues for screening and intervention” suggests the competency areas required of the mentor.

TOOL
3

MENTOR APPLICATION

ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators can use this template or adapt it to fit the early childhood setting and meet staffing needs.

TOOL
4

MENTOR SELECTION CHECKLIST

ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators can use this decision-making tool to select mentors.

The mentoring program coordinator would then consult the *Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators (Core Competency Area 2: Responsive Interaction and Guidance)* to identify the specific knowledge and competencies that a mentor requires to be helpful to a protégé. In this case, a highly experienced retired second grade teacher may not be the right fit, whereas a parent education trainer with child care experience may be the perfect mentor.

Step 3: Select protégés

The right selection process will determine who is ready for mentoring and help prioritize candidates. Several considerations will help in deciding who could benefit from mentoring, but the most important is willingness to learn and change.

To select protégés, the program coordinator can develop a short list of criteria aligned to the mentoring program goals and which take the core competencies into account.

For example, the goal to assist staff members in adapting a new curriculum to individual children's needs might include these selection criteria:

- teachers who are using the new curriculum for the first year,
- teachers serving large proportions of special needs students, and
- teachers who have not had formal training in working with English learners and children with special needs.

Specific selection criteria will help to communicate clearly the purpose of mentoring and attract those who can benefit.

Reluctant staff members. Program administrators may be disappointed when certain staff members don't sign up to be protégés. When this happens, first recognize that reluctance to enter into a mentoring relationship is a natural reaction. Assure reluctant colleagues that the mentoring program will pair them with an experienced collaborator—someone who will share in brainstorming and planning and help with practical matters.

Emphasize that the mentor-protégé relationship is based on trust. The content of the mentor-protégé consultations remains confidential. Consider asking a reluctant candidate to try out the mentoring program as a pilot. Make it clear that protégés have the option to change mentors or step away if the mentoring program does not work for them.

Major considerations for selection of protégés include:

- Base recruitment plans on a manageable number of mentor-protégé pairs.
- Prioritize potential participants for the mentoring program, e.g. beginning teachers, struggling staff members, or infant care providers.
- Determine whether participation will be completely voluntary or part of a staff development plan.
- Use core competencies as a guide in framing criteria for selection.
- Consider different levels of mentoring intensity and duration as a way to accommodate more protégés.

TOOL
5

ADMINISTRATORS

PROTÉGÉ APPLICATION

Administrators can use this template or adapt it to fit the early childhood setting and meet staffing needs.

TOOL
6

ADMINISTRATORS

PROTÉGÉ SELECTION CHECKLIST

Administrators can use this decision-making tool to select protégés.

Step 4: Pair mentors and protégés

Mentoring programs rely heavily on successful mentor-protégé matches. If the mentor and protégé don't click, the work will be challenging, and may not succeed in the long run.

Several considerations come into play when pairing mentors and protégés. Some focus on logistics or program factors while others are interpersonal. Because mentors and protégés will build a relationship, the right connection really matters.

Considerations for pairing mentors and protégés include both logistical and interpersonal factors as well as content and goal focus.

Logistical/programmatic factors include:

- experience with same age group of children,
- experience in similar settings,
- content expertise in area of need,
- compatible time availability, and
- convenience of locations.

Potential interpersonal factors include:

- the mentor and protégé have similar backgrounds, e.g., language, age, and ages of the mentor's and protégé's own children;
- the mentor has more years of service than the protégé;

- the mentor has clearly more advanced skills than the protégé; and
- the mentor and protégé share similar personal interests.

Matching mentors and protégés is more art than science and will rely at least in part on the program coordinator's personal knowledge of candidates. But some additional information helps to refine choices. Mentor and protégé applications can be used as tools for matching interests, competencies and needs, backgrounds, and goals.

Step 5: Assess program readiness

Make sure that all the necessary components are in place for an effective mentoring program before protégés and mentors hold their first meetings. Program administrators will want to be prepared for the questions that will undoubtedly arise based on the first sets of discussions. It's a good time to make sure that the features are well defined and the supports are in place. Take stock of progress so far and make plans to take care of any remaining loose ends.

“Know that just because someone is an excellent teacher doesn't mean that they'll be an excellent mentor. Because it really requires different skill sets to mentor someone.” —Program Director

**TOOL
7**

ADMINISTRATORS

STAGE OF CHANGE SCALE

Administrators can use this assessment tool to gauge the readiness of potential protégés.

**TOOL
8**

ADMINISTRATORS

MENTORING PROGRAM START-UP

Administrators can use this planning tool to check progress in planning a mentoring program, examine what is currently in place, and identify needed guidance and/or resources.

5 Managing a mentoring program

This section describes how mentoring programs:

1. define mentoring activities and expectations,
2. design record-keeping tools for mentors and protégés,
3. develop a mentor training program, and
4. check-in and reflect on progress of the mentoring program.



The process for starting a mentor-protégé relationship includes:

- Initial contact between mentor and protégé
 - Get to know each other by sharing information about backgrounds and experiences.

Step 1: Define mentoring activities and expectations

Mentors will need to know how to begin their work with protégés and the strategies they will use. We know from studies that particular strategies—including starting out right!—support development of the mentor-protégé relationship, strengthen buy-in, and lead to better outcomes for children. Success depends on building and maintaining a positive and productive mentor-protégé relationship.

Starting the mentor-protégé relationship. Be clear about how and when mentors should initiate contact with protégés.

- Set the ground rules (see more below).
- Ask the protégé to share the information from the completed tool, *Gathering Staff Support Activity: Learning about Needs and Interests*, and discuss themes.
- Begin discussion of goal setting based on the survey.
- Describe what happens during an initial classroom observation.
- Schedule a time for the first classroom observation.
- Schedule a time following the classroom observation to set short- and long-term goals and develop a plan.

Considerations for setting ground rules

- Determine the best ways to communicate (e.g., via email, phone, text; certain days of the week).
- Review the mentoring goals and process.
- Confirm roles and responsibilities.
- Determine expectations (e.g., what each hopes to get out of the relationship).
- Discuss confidentiality; clarify distinctions between mentoring and supervision.

- Observation and second meeting
- Conduct a first observation (see Initial Observation Protocol).
- Continue developing long-term goals (e.g., 4-6 month goals).
- Plan short-term activities (e.g., lesson planning, skill demonstration, discussion of child development, setting up the learning environment).
- Schedule future visits and meetings.

Collaborative goal setting and action plan development. Mentors and protégés are guided by mutually agreed upon goals for their work together. Setting goals together strengthens commitment to the outcomes of the relationship. Mentors use information from the first meeting and observation visit to guide the goal-setting process.

We recommend starting with one or two goals that can be realistically addressed (if not fully achieved) during a four to six month period. In most cases, the goals should be about desired changes in teaching practices or interactions with children—specific, observable behaviors in core competency areas.

As the relationship develops, the goals might shift, become more specific, or expand into other areas. At first, for example, the protégé may want to focus on selecting books to read to groups of children, but later she may express an interest in learning how to incorporate interactive reading discussions.

Each goal will be further developed into an action plan that will specify the information, resources, observations, discussions, practice opportunities, and other activities that will help the protégé achieve the goal. The plan lists a sequence of activities, noting the schedule and responsibilities. A goal of implementing a portion of a new curriculum might include activities such as exploring curriculum objectives to be sure they are well understood, planning lessons, observing protégés' use of strategies, and discussing adaptations needed for individual children.

Mentoring activities that strengthen early childhood care and teaching. Studies show that successful mentors combine mentoring activities to help teachers understand and apply learning. Structured, consistent activities work best, especially when mentors observe protégés and give them feedback.

These five activities can help establish a strong basis for successful mentoring:

1. **Focused observation.**
2. **Collaborative reflection and feedback.**
3. **Joint planning of classroom activities and lessons.**
4. **Modeling and demonstration.**
5. **Sharing and interpreting child data.**

We describe each activity below. The tools that accompany this guidebook provide examples of observation protocols and other resources for specific settings and content areas.



TOOL
9

INITIAL OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

MENTORS

Mentors can use this observation tool during initial classroom visits to gain a better understanding of how the protégé currently sets up the classroom environment and interacts with children.



TOOL
10

MENTOR/PROTÉGÉ GOAL AND ACTIVITY PLANNER

MENTORS

Mentors and protégés can use this tool to record long-term goals and develop an activity plan together.

1. Focused observation. Mentors observe protégés at work to gain insights and gather information to strengthen protégés' skills and practice. Observations should focus explicitly on the goal areas collaboratively set in advance by mentors and protégés. Both parties should agree upon the content and format of the observation before it begins.

Mentors have several observation tools at their disposal. Some programs develop their own checklists or use observation protocols such as those provided in the resource sets of this toolkit. Other programs use standardized observation rating scales such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). For some goals, mentors may decide to use a section of the program rating scale to conduct an observation.

Studies show that teaching practice improves when mentors use information from observations to plan, provide feedback, and guide teachers' self-reflection.

Although mentors usually conduct observations in person, some now use video to record the teacher, then use the videotape as a common lens for reflection with the protégé.



Some mentors combine video and online technologies. For example, some review videotapes submitted by teachers and provide written feedback by email or an online chat. In addition, some mentors direct protégés to online sites that feature demonstrations of exemplary teachers and provide written guidance for watching those demonstrations.

Video and online technologies have advantages. Mentors and protégés can start and stop a video to focus on specific aspects of teacher or child behaviors. Remote viewing over the internet can provide cost-saving mentoring, especially in rural areas.

2. Collaborative reflection and feedback. A shared process between mentors and protégés, reflection and feedback occur either in real-time (for example, while co-teaching a lesson) or during a debriefing session after focused observation. Mentors use prompts and guiding questions to help protégés develop and deepen their own understanding.

Mentors and protégés should agree in advance about both the topics and format for feedback. Mentors often use their observation notes to directly describe what they saw in terms of teacher and child behaviors.

How mentors use focused observation for feedback and collaborative planning

- Record observations of teaching strategies, behaviors, and interactions with children using standardized observation tools, program-developed tools, or video.
- Record observations of children's reactions and behaviors.
- In the observation summary, include positive examples of the teacher's work, missed teaching opportunities or gaps, and children's reactions and behaviors to specific teaching strategies.
- Use prompts to stimulate reflection and feedback. (See examples of prompts on page 24).

While some programs use a set procedure or tool to provide feedback, others prefer to use a set or sequence of activities. A typical sequence might include:

- protégé reflection on the observation,
- mentor review of observation and feedback,
- sharing of video exemplars relevant to the feedback, and
- collaborative planning and goal setting.

Studies show that protégés who have access to mentor feedback and video exemplars improved their teaching skills.

3. Joint planning of classroom activities and lessons.

Mentors work with protégés to plan activities and lessons based on observations and goals. For example, if a new teacher needs support to increase vocabulary and strengthen oral language in a bilingual classroom, a mentor might help the teacher plan a picture walk before looking together and discussing a story. She might highlight particular words to practice and suggest ways to work new words into conversation. Mentors should explain the process and guide teachers to reflect on how activities support different learning levels.

4. *Modeling and demonstration.* Modeling and demonstration are valuable tools for mentors working with new or inexperienced teachers. These techniques can be applied during a co-teaching opportunity, a visit to the mentor's

classroom, or as a role-play. For instance, a mentor working with caregivers in an infant toddler room to strengthen responsive interaction might model how to hold the baby, gaze at the baby, and respond to the baby's initiations.

The mentors can use prompting questions to help protégés make their own observations. For example, "Did you notice how I responded to the baby's cues?" (e.g., when the baby sighed, I sighed; when the baby smiled, I smiled and brought her

Example: How a mentor uses child data to facilitate feedback and collaborative planning

- Plan together how to collect child data in a developmental or content area to identify each child's skills and progress.
- Display individual child data and classroom data to ease protégés into understanding how charts and other graphics are used to summarize data.
- Describe and interpret the child data and assist protégés to understand where children are and how teaching can support their progress.
- Use information to develop teaching strategies and a plan for each child.

Reflective feedback prompts and guiding questions

- What did you think about when you saw ...?
- When do you think you could encourage more time for talk?
- I know that was a hard lesson to teach yesterday. What would you do differently next time?
- How might we shorten or take better advantage of transition times?
- I've noticed that the same children choose the same play center every time. Have you considered trying to mix them up a bit?
- I noticed the teacher assistant was struggling to keep Joni engaged. What have you suggested to her?

up a little closer to my face and spoke with a soft, happy tone. How did the baby react? What did you notice about my voice?).

5. *Sharing and interpreting child data.* Studies show that when mentors and protégés review child assessment data and discuss children's progress, teachers better individualize instruction and observe children's growth. See more about how to work with protégés on interpretation of assessment data in the resource set about progress monitoring.



Step 2: Design record-keeping tools for mentors and protégés

Mentors should develop the habit of documenting activities and meetings with protégés. Simple written notes will track the range of activities over time and help determine whether the activities are meeting the needs of protégés. Documentation promotes sharing and celebration of progress towards program and protégé goals. Reports of milestones and accomplishments will also help gauge whether the staff has come to value the investment in mentoring.

Programs use many recording techniques, including activity logs, checklists, and planners. Additional formats for recording the mentoring experience include:

- visits and activities lists (weekly schedules and activity logs),
- observation protocols (classroom walkthrough checklists, observation inventories, and videotapes of instruction),
- templates for planning (lesson planners and action plans), and
- forms for review and feedback (mentor-protégé reflection guides, videotape reviews, and observation-feedback templates).

Mentors hold the primary responsibility for record-keeping but protégés should keep copies of goals, self-reflections, and activity plans as well. Encouraging protégés to make notes about how well activities worked for them underscores good practice and prepares them for discussions with their mentors.

Avoid overburdening mentors and protégés with record-keeping responsibilities and be aware of

the time and effort required to complete the forms. Brief record-keeping forms and simple formats work best, such as one-page mentor observation checklists and action plans.

Step 3: Develop a mentor training program

While mentors have great expertise and experience as teachers and caregivers, the role of mentoring will be new to most and requires training. Approaches to training will vary depending on the mentors' qualifications and backgrounds, the numbers of mentors, size of the early childhood setting, and available resources.

Administrators should learn about mentors' prior training and experience. Some may have already been trained to be a coach or mentor while others may be completely new to the experience.

Training for mentors typically includes:

- an **orientation** before mentors and protégés meet. It covers basic information such as the



MENTORS

MENTOR LOG

Mentors can use this record-keeping tool to record and track mentoring activities.

Adjust for your setting: Evaluation

Larger programs

- develop a program evaluation plan
- select representatives to be involved
- survey mentors and protégés

Smaller programs

- schedule time for a reflective review
- engage all participants
- give mentors and protégés questions to think about prior to the review

program goals, roles and responsibilities, how to start the mentor/protégé relationship, record keeping, scheduling, and collaborative goal setting,

- **mentoring skills training** such as a mentoring curriculum or course that covers adult learning and development, professional development strategies, communication skills, modeling, and observation, and
- **mentor networking and sharing.** In smaller settings, mentors may be able to join online groups or connect occasionally with mentors or coaches from nearby schools.

Mentor training requires resources and protected time. Make provisions for ongoing networking because mentoring relationships evolve over time and mentors' needs for information will change. One-time workshops usually aren't adequate. Mentors need up-to-date information for continued growth and skills development.

Create a mentor resource library. Mentors will have many resources and materials at their disposal: curriculum materials, journal articles,

book selection lists, teaching aides, and more. Finding a central location for resources will benefit all.

The library may start small, as a binder or notebook with materials on a dedicated bookshelf in the program office. Log items into a computer inventory to make access easier; include a field where mentors can add comments about how they and protégés use the materials and if they found them useful. Encourage mentors and protégés to make contributions to the library over time.

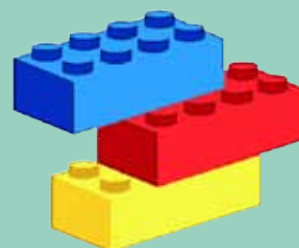
Develop simple procedures for mentors to request or purchase additional resources and materials.

Step 4: Check-in and reflect on progress of the mentoring program

Strong programs give everyone ways to think about what's happening and to check in. *Is the program working? Are the proper supports in place? Do mentors and protégés have what they need to develop competencies and improve outcomes? What do we need to improve?* Mentors, protégés,

How to support mentoring skills training:

- Provide in-house training.
- Send mentors to training workshops or courses.
- Partner with community agencies that provide training to mentors or coaches, such as schools or teacher centers.
- Suggest online courses or trainings for mentors.



and administrators should have opportunities to pause and reflect on the program and determine if the program is providing the type of supports needed to develop competencies and improve outcomes. The check-in process gives people a voice. It can strengthen buy-in, build trust, and make the process comfortable for everyone. It preserves time to think about what the program does well and where improvement is needed. Check-ins give staff members a way to make suggestions that promote program goals.

We recommend a semi-annual review of the mentoring program. Allow about one hour for mentors and protégés to reflect and discuss. In the first year, a review after three or four months of operation may prove worthwhile.

Smaller settings may need only an informal meeting, while larger settings with more participants and programs with a larger investment in mentoring will likely want to plan a more formal evaluative review.

Typically the mentoring program coordinator or program administrator leads the review process and facilitates discussion. Ask staff members (mentors, protégés, representatives from different roles or, in larger programs, supervisors or program administrators) to describe the features of the mentoring program. In some settings, teaching assistants, instructional support



specialists, and others may also be sources of good descriptive information.

Prepare for the review. Every review session—formal or informal—should be based on records of activity kept by mentors and protégés. Ask everyone to review their notes in advance to prepare for practical questions such as:

- Do the notes in mentor activity logs typically reflect goals and competencies?
- Do the records indicate follow-up from recommendations?
- How often is the focus of a meeting related to interacting with children?
- Are discussions usually based on observations?
- How often did mentors and protégés meet? What types of communication happened between sessions?
- How many times were sessions cancelled, and for what reasons?

In a large program, the coordinator may survey participants to collect information to answer these and other questions; this gives everyone a chance to provide data, offer an opinion, or make an observation, or ask questions.

The administrator or coordinator may want to think in advance of the review about how

TOOL 12

ADMINISTRATORS

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Administrators can use this handout to ensure that mentors and protégés understand the expectations of their roles.

TOOL 13

ADMINISTRATORS

MENTOR ORIENTATION WORKSHOP

Administrators can use the professional development tool to structure and plan a series of mentor orientation workshops.

mentoring relates to other staff development activities offered by the program.

Conduct the review session. Whether formal or informal, the check-in begins with a review of the goals of the mentoring program and the core competencies it is designed to address. This review provides a benchmark or measure for determining progress, comparing where the program stands now in relation to its goals.

Reflection on the main features of the mentoring program guides the process of the review. Talk about the features that seem essential for successful mentoring, regardless of the type or size of the early childhood program. Discuss:

- How are the mentor-protégé relationships developing?
- How do mentors think they are doing?
- Are protégés improving their skills and expertise?
- Is enough mentoring taking place?
- Are the expected mentor activities (e.g., observation, feedback) happening?
- Is there adequate administrative support for the program?

Encourage everyone to provide specific examples of how they have worked together:

- What would you like to have more time to do?
- What would be a helpful resource?
- Is there anything you've wanted to try out that hasn't been possible?
- Are there some parts of the mentoring program that could be eliminated?
- What do you wish you had known before volunteering to participate?

Documentation. As the discussion proceeds, the program coordinator (or another volunteer) should record the main points of the discussion on chart paper for all to view. To wrap up the session, ask the group to identify a small number of main actions for improvement.

Maintain and circulate a list of those suggested improvements. Begin the next program review by revisiting the progress made to address them, beginning an effective review cycle for improving mentoring over time.

Questions to guide reflection and discussion

- Do the features of our mentoring program match up with the program goals?
- Have we been doing what we planned?
- Are we still on the right track or have program goals changed?
- Are we where we want to be at this point in time in terms of number of protégés?
- How can we tell if most mentor-protégé pairs are making progress?



ADMINISTRATORS

REFLECTING ON MENTORING FEATURES

Administrators use this assessment tool to check-in with mentors and protégés about the program.

6 Further reading

This section suggests publications and online resources that administrators and mentors can use to learn more about effective mentoring practices.

Publications

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- *Decision Maker Guide*
- *Professional Development Plan*
- *Protégé Journal*

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Online Resources

- **Academy for Educational Development/ Center for Early Care and Education** (<http://www.ece.aed.org>). AED supports special populations within Head Start and the larger child care community in their continual process to improve services to low-income children and families. They strive to enhance the lives of all under represented, at-risk children and families through research, technical assistance support, knowledge and provision of innovative strategies within early childhood programs throughout the United States.
- **Children’s Learning Institute** (<http://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/>). The Institute’s website offers early childhood tools and teaching resources in English and Spanish to help create a quality learning environment for all children through classroom curriculum, teacher mentoring, clinical programs, and applied research.
- **Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program** (<http://www2.ed.gov>). This U.S. Department of Education program promotes school readiness and improved learning outcomes of young children, particularly disadvantaged young children, by providing high-quality professional development programs to improve the knowledge and skills of early childhood educators and caregivers.
- **Head Start** (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>). This federal program promotes the school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. The website offers a variety of print and online resources for early childhood administrators, mentors, and teachers and caregivers.
- **¡Colorín Colorado!** (<http://www.colorincolorado.org>). A bilingual website that provides information, activities and advice for educators and Spanish-speaking families of English language learners (ELLs).
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children** (<http://www.naeyc.org>). NAEYC provides a wide array of publications, online resources, and services that promote high quality early childhood education for children from birth through eight years.
- **Reading Rockets** (<http://www.readingrockets.org/>). A website that offers a wealth of strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help young children develop language skills and learn how to read.
- **Zero to Three** (<http://www.zerotothree.org>). A national organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

Throughout this toolkit, we have called attention to 14 tools for either administrators or mentors to use to build, manage, and assess a mentoring program. A complete list of the tools follows.

The tools can be accessed in one of two ways on the Texas Early Learning Council website (www.xxxxxxxx) along with this toolkit: either singly, so that users can retrieve one tool at a time, or in zip files by section, should users want to retrieve more than one related tool at a time.

Tools for Section 3: Planning a mentoring program

TOOL 1 / Administrators

PUTTING THE MENTORING PROGRAM FRAMEWORK TOGETHER

Administrators can use this planning tool to make decisions about the components that define a mentoring program.

TOOL 2 / Administrators

GATHERING STAFF SUPPORT ACTIVITY: LEARNING ABOUT NEEDS AND INTERESTS

Administrators can use this staff development tool to conduct an activity to help staff members identify which core competencies they would like to strengthen through mentoring activities.

Tools for Section 4: Guidance for recruitment, selection, and pairing mentors and protégés

TOOL 3 / Administrators

MENTOR APPLICATION

Administrators can use this template or adapt it to fit the early childhood setting and meet staffing needs.

TOOL 4 / Administrators

MENTOR SELECTION CHECKLIST

Administrators can use this decision-making tool to select mentors.

TOOL 5 / Administrators

PROTÉGÉ APPLICATION

Administrators can use this template or adapt it to fit the early childhood setting and meet staffing needs.

TOOL 6 / Administrators

PROTÉGÉ SELECTION CHECKLIST

Administrators can use this decision-making tool to select protégés.

TOOL 7 / Administrators

STAGE OF CHANGE SCALE

Administrators can use this assessment tool to gauge the readiness of potential protégés.

TOOL 8 / Administrators

MENTORING PROGRAM START-UP

Administrators can use this planning tool to check progress in planning a mentoring program, examine what is currently in place, and identify needed guidance and/or resources.

Tools for Section 5: Managing a mentoring program

TOOL 9 / Mentors

INITIAL OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Mentors can use this observation tool during initial classroom visits to gain a better understanding of how the protégé currently sets up the classroom environment and interacts with children.

TOOL 10 / Mentors

MENTOR/PROTÉGÉ GOAL AND ACTIVITY PLANNER

Mentors and protégés can use this planning tool to record long-term goals and develop an activity plan together.

TOOL 11 / Mentors

MENTOR LOG

Mentors can use this record-keeping tool to record and track mentoring activities.

TOOL 12 / Administrators

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Administrators can use this handout to ensure that mentors and protégés understand the expectations of their roles.

TOOL 13 / Administrators

MENTOR ORIENTATION WORKSHOP

Administrators can use this professional development tool to structure and plan a series of mentor orientation workshops.

TOOL 14 / Administrators

REFLECTING ON MENTORING FEATURES

Administrators use this assessment tool to check-in with mentors and protégés about the program.

Included in this toolkit are nine resource sets for mentors to use after they have completed mentor training and have started working with protégés. The resource sets do not cover all possible topics, but they may become part of the mentor's resource library.

Resource sets focus on select topics within the developmental domains that mentors may work on with protégés to strengthen their skills. The sets are geared to specific age-ranges of children - infant, toddler, and/or prekindergarten. Mentors can use the sets to focus their observations, encourage protégés to reflect on their own practice, provide frameworks for feedback, guide activity planning, and share about children's progress.

The resource sets can be accessed on the Texas Early Learning Council website (www.xxxxxxxx) along with this toolkit.

BUILDING LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING

Infant and Toddler

1. **Key Points about Supporting Infant/Toddler Language and Communication**—background information for the mentor and protégé.
2. **Practitioner Self-Reflection Checklists**—detailed checklist of actions that support children's language and communication development.
3. **Observation Model: Guided Reflection Using Video**—a step-by-step process for using video to observe and reflect on the interactions between practitioners and children.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Prekindergarten

1. **Building Vocabulary Resources**—background information for the mentor and protégé about building vocabulary in early childhood.

2. **Guidance for Modeling Teaching Vocabulary**—a step-by-step approach for intentionally teaching word meanings in the context of storybook reading.
3. **Designing Play Settings to Build Vocabulary**—guidance for how to set up an environment that is productive of language development and use of new vocabulary.

INTERACTIVE READING

Prekindergarten

1. **Key Points about Interactive Reading Strategies**—background information for the mentor and protégé.
2. **Instructional Model**—detailed example that illustrates how to apply strategies to a page from a children's storybook.
3. **Interactive Reading Planner**—tool to facilitate preparation of a story for interactive reading.
4. **Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory**—an observation tool that assesses the quality of adult and child interactions during joint book reading.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Prekindergarten

1. **Continuum of Phonological Awareness Study Guide**—background information for the mentor and protégé that includes.
 1. **Protégé Self-Reflection Checklist**—two worksheets to help protégés think about their current practices related to children's phonological awareness skill development, activity planning, and use of effective instructional strategies.

DEVELOPING MATHEMATICS SKILLS AND CONCEPTS

Prekindergarten

1. **Auditing the Mathematics Environment**—guidance for identifying materials that facilitate formal and informal mathematical learning.
2. **Mathematical Talk: Vocabulary and Open-Ended Questions**—information that the mentor can share with the protégé to structure the content of mathematical conversations with children.
3. **Progress Monitoring**—guidance for devising tasks for monitoring children’s development of math concepts.
4. **Teaching Scenarios: Analysis and Planning**—examples that mentors can use as models to discuss ways to analyze children’s conceptual understanding, including errors, as a way to determine next learning opportunities

SUPPORTING ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Toddlers and Prekindergarten

1. **Setting Up the Environment**—the Creative Environment Inventory provides guidance for setting up an environment that encourages creativity and self-expression.
2. **Integrating Arts into Daily Activities**—a planning tool mentors can use with protégés to integrate the arts into daily activities.
3. **Preparing a Child Portfolio**—guidelines for preparing a portfolio to capture a child’s work that includes items representing skill development and progress over time.
4. **Learning from the Portfolio**—strategies for how mentors can help protégés examine the portfolio and use the information to plan instruction and communicate about progress.

INCREASING SELF-REGULATION SKILLS

Infants, Toddlers, and Prekindergarten

1. **Overview and Discussion Sheet**—summary information for the mentor and protégé about the relationship between developing self-regulation and school readiness.
2. **Prekindergarten Self-Regulation Planning Worksheet**—ideas about concepts and practices that support the development of self-regulation skills in prekindergarten settings.
3. **Reflections on Infant and Toddler Environments**—illustrations designed to elicit discussion between the mentor and protégé about how to develop self-regulation skills with infants and toddlers.

SUPPORTING PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Infant and Toddler

1. **Background**—background information for the mentor and protégé. The points could be a read-ahead and become the basis for a discussion between mentor and protégé.
2. **Health and Safety Reflection Illustrations**—illustrations designed to prompt discussion and reflection about health and safety for infants and toddlers.
3. **Creating Experiences that Support Physical Development**—chart of actions that support children’s physical health and development of well-being.

PROGRESS MONITORING TO INFORM INSTRUCTION

Prekindergarten

1. **Progress Monitoring Guide**—a step-by-step process that mentors can use to help protégés understand the steps in collecting, analyzing, and using information about children’s learning for planning instruction.
2. **Assessment Planning Chart**—a tool mentors can use with protégés to map out a plan for assessing a child’s progress toward a goal.
3. **Child Assessment Examples**—assessment examples that can be adapted to fit various settings, age groups, and priority developmental skill areas.



T E X A S

EARLY LEARNING

C O U N C I L