Formal Mentoring
A Guide for Nurses at The RCH

This guide has been drafted for trial purposes during the process of introducing a formal mentoring model for nurses at The Royal Children’s Hospital. A number of sections within the document, including all the appendices, have been adapted from or directly copied from Ehrich (2013).

If you have any questions or comments regarding this guide, please contact

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Background
The Royal Children’s Hospital (RCH) vision is to be a GREAT Children’s Hospital, leading the way. The RCH core business is the delivery of GREAT CARE: achieved through a commitment to “continuous improvement, and working innovatively and collaboratively to achieve an exciting and sustainable future” (RCH Strategic Plan 2013-18, p. 10). In the busy ness of everyday work, it can be difficult to take a step back and question professional practice: who are we and what are we doing to enable the provision of great care? Many approaches exist to support professional development, yet overlap and lack of clarity between approaches can lead to confusion, frustration and lack of engagement.

There are over 1700 nurses working at the RCH, in clinical, management, education and research roles. Over time, a number of professional support models such as preceptorship, clinical supervision, mentoring, and debriefing have been introduced for nurses at the RCH. Preceptorship for nurses transitioning to a new areas of practice, facilitated debriefing for undergraduate and graduate nurses, and the clinical supervision pilot for advanced practice nurses have clearly articulated processes. In order to facilitate professional support for nurses from novice to advanced practice across all areas of practice, working with existing RCH infrastructure a Professional Support Framework for Nurses at the RCH (Framework) is being developed.

The Framework
This document provides an overview of the proposed Framework (figure 1). Within the figure, the lightened boxes indicate support models that are in development. Following a brief description of the support models included in the Framework, an overview of mentoring for nurses at The RCH is provided.
Description of support models included in the Framework

The table below provides very brief, high level definitions of the professional support models included in the Framework, how they are currently enacted at the RCH, and areas under development.

Table 1: Brief description of professional support models for nurses at the RCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional support model</th>
<th>Definition applied and model enacted at RCH</th>
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<tr>
<td>Preceptorship</td>
<td>The formal assignment of an experienced practitioner for a fixed period of time, to provide transitional support to an undergraduate or clinician, into a new practice setting, through role modelling, teaching, and socialising (based on literature review by RCH Preceptorship working group, 2010). There is a formal one day preceptorship program that all nurses who act as preceptors are encouraged to attend. Preceptors are allocated to preceptees by the NUM.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitated group debriefing</td>
<td>A facilitated discussion of events that includes reflection, to support improved performance (Cant &amp; Cooper, 2011). Facilitated debriefing is mandated by the programs the nurses are participating in (undergraduate placement or graduate nurse program) and continues for the duration of the program, facilitated by the relevant program coordinators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinical supervision</td>
<td>A formal process of professional support and learning between two or more practitioners within a safe and supportive environment, that enables a continuum of reflective critical analysis of care, to ensure quality patient services and the well-being of the practitioner (based on literature review by RCH APN clinical supervision working group, 2014). A pilot clinical supervision program for APN has just finished. Following evaluation in May 2015, the program will be expanded. All supervisors and supervisees attend training and enter into a clinical supervision contract for a defined period of time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>“A fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy and personal know-how in assisting the growth and ability of another person” (Shea, 1997).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal mentoring</td>
<td>The process of two people engaging in a voluntary relationship without any organisational intervention or support. The mentor is usually more experienced and identification of mentors/mentees is through self-selection (Ehrich, 2013). As this happens informally there is no way of capturing the extent to which informal mentoring takes place for nurses at the RCH or its effectiveness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal mentoring</td>
<td>The process of two people engaging in mandated relationship with organisational support structures to ensure clarity of purpose and success (Ehrich, 2013). At present there are no formal mentoring programs are in place for nurses at the RCH. All NUM are allocated a mentor, however there is no mentor training and no clarity regarding structure, process, or duration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer mentoring</td>
<td>Involves two or more people at the same level of experience who learn from and support each other’s professional development (Ehrich, 2013). While formal mentoring enables a more experienced nurse to enable the professional development of someone less experienced (for example an experienced nurse mentoring a nurse new to the role), peer mentoring enables long term support and development for an experienced group (for example nurses who have been in their roles for a period of time). In addition peer mentoring is less resource and time intensive so is therefore potentially more sustainable over the long term. At present there is no formal peer mentoring model in place for nurses at the RCH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formal mentoring at The RCH
As part of the formalisation of the Framework, the focus for 2015 will be placed on development, implementation and evaluation of formal mentoring and peer mentoring. As already stated on Page 2, formal mentoring is defined as the process of two people engaging in a mandated relationship, with organisational support structures to ensure clarity of purpose and success.

Benefits of a formal mentoring program
The benefits of a formal mentoring program include¹:

For the mentee
- improved knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes
- increased potential for career mobility and promotion
- improved understanding of roles in the organisation
- insights into the culture and unwritten rules of the organisation
- a supportive environment in which successes and failures can be evaluated in a non-confrontational manner
- a powerful learning tool to acquire competencies and professional experience
- networking opportunities
- recognition and satisfaction
- empowerment
- encourages different perspectives and attitudes, and
- develops greater appreciation of the complexities of decision-making within the organisational framework.

For the mentor
- opportunities to test new ideas
- enhanced knowledge of other areas of the agency
- renewed enthusiasm for their role as an experienced employee
- higher level recognition of their worth and skills through encouragement to take on a mentoring role
- challenging discussions with people who have fresh perspectives and who are not already part of the organisational thinking
- satisfaction from contributing to the mentee’s development
- opportunities to reflect upon and articulate their role
- develop deeper awareness of their own behaviour
- improved inter-personal skills in counselling, listening, modelling and leading, and
- improved ability to share experience and knowledge.

For the organisation
- improved delivery of services through more informed and competent staff
- application of knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes gained from mentoring
- reduced recruitment and selection costs as a result of higher employee retention
- improved communication between separate areas of the agency
- support networks for employees in times of organisational change
- successful mentees often become mentors
- promotes the concept of a learning environment where employees are encouraged to be developed
- more committed and productive staff can contribute to succession planning, and
- transmitting of cultural values and norms that can contribute to a change in workplace culture.

¹ The benefits for mentors, mentees and the organisations are adapted from Employment Equity and Diversity Public Employment Office (2004).
Mentoring model

Many models and theories for mentoring exist, some simple, some complicated. The key principle underpinning formal mentoring at The RCH is that the mentee will receive support and challenge from the mentor in equal measures. The importance of support and challenge to enable individual development is well described in the coaching and workforce development literature. Blakey and Day (2012) state that support affirms the value of the individual (builds respect, trust, and rapport) and reduces anxiety and uncertainty (encouragement, empathy, builds on strengths). Challenge compels the individual to face reality (accountability, limiting beliefs, feedback) and meet expectations of self and others (goal setting, visioning, alignment of values). The key is to ensure a balance. Where an individual receives high support/low challenge, there is a risk of complacency. Where there is low support/low challenge, the individual may become bored or disengaged. The risk associated with low support/high challenge is defensiveness and stress. Finally, when an individual receives high support/high challenge, the best opportunity for growth and development is provided. The support/challenge matrix is presented in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Support Challenge Matrix](image)

Role of the mentor

Building on the notion of support and challenge as central to the mentoring relationship, Cohen (1999) identifies six core interpersonal functions of the mentor.²

1. **Relationship emphasis** involves psycho-social functions such as:
   - encouragement
   - active and empathetic listening
   - understanding and acceptance
   - creating a climate of trust.

2. **Facilitative focus** refers to behaviours whereby the mentor guides the mentee to identify and explore their views, interests and beliefs, assisting the mentee to consider alternatives. For example, mentors ask mentees what if questions, and questions that help them identify their assumptions.

3. **Mentor model focus** involves the process of self-disclosing work and relevant life experiences to the mentee to personalise the relationship.

² Role of the mentor adapted from Ehrich (2013)
4. **Confrontive focus** involves skills required to challenge the mentee’s explanations and ideas by offering insights regarding their need to re-evaluate their beliefs, assumptions and practices, and take a different approach. Confrontive focus is akin to the function of ‘challenge’.

5. **Information emphasis** involves seeking detailed information from, or providing detailed information to, the mentee. Being aware of some basic facts about the mentee’s purpose should help the mentor gain a better understanding of the mentee, and be in a better position to meet his/her needs.

6. **Mentee vision function** concerns stimulating mentees to think critically about their goals and to envision a future where these goals can be achieved.

**Questioning: A key mentoring technique**

Like coaches, mentors use questions to help mentees:

- identify and describe problems, situations, events
- reflect on their feelings, assumptions and beliefs
- identify alternatives and options they may not have considered
- come to new understandings about themselves and the issues at hand.

Writers in the field of mentoring maintain that:
- conversations between mentors and mentees should be planned
- a large part of the planning is to prepare well-constructed questions to ask mentees.

According to Standfield (2000), there are four levels of questions:

1. **Objective level**: questions based on facts and data and viewed as ‘external’ to the mind. These are seen as ‘what’ questions.
   - Where are you up to?
   - What work have you done since I saw you last?
   - With whom have you been working?
   - What have you achieved since we talked last?
   - What are your observations?
   - What words or phrases stood out for you?

2. **Reflective level**: questions that invite personal reaction to the data/facts presented. Sometimes the responses can be based on feelings. Questions viewed here are considered ‘internal’ - questions that relate to ‘gut feelings’.
   - What has been the response of others to the work you have done?
   - What have you enjoyed doing the most?
   - What have you enjoyed doing the least?
   - How are you feeling about things now?
   - What surprised you?
   - What’s missing for you?
   - What were you reminded of?

3. **Interpretive level**: questions that draw out meanings, values, beliefs and the significance of the issue. Questions here are concerned with: ‘what does this mean?’; ‘why’? Sometimes these questions are referred to as ‘so what’ questions.
   - What have you learned about yourself, others, so far?
   - What are some issues you continue to worry about? Why?
   - What alternatives are you thinking about for dealing with some of the ongoing challenges?
   - What makes x important?
   - What implications are there for you?
   - What might be the impact of ...?

4. **Decisional level**: questions that elicit resolution, new directions and actions. This is where the conversation is brought to a close and decisions are made - sometimes referred to as ‘now what’ questions.
   - What are you going to do next?
   - What is your plan and how are you going to achieve it?
Can I help and if so how?
Are things moving in the right direction for you?
What recommendations do you have?
What can you do differently in the future?
What have you learned from this?

Effective mentors are those people who ask questions that require their mentee to:
- provide objective/factual data
- reflect on their feelings and ideas
- interpret issues and therefore identify meanings and significance
- make informed decisions based on a range of factors.

Role of mentee
Much of the writing in the field refers primarily to the role played by the mentor; yet the mentee must also play his or her part and be a willing and active. Some key roles of the mentee include:
- developing the relationship with respect, openness and trust
- setting personal goals
- communicating directly and honestly
- having clear expectations of the mentoring relationship and process
- being willing to share interests, views and beliefs with the mentor and bring issues forward for discussion
- being prepared to have one’s beliefs and values challenged and to challenge the mentor
- being ready to accept increasing responsibility for managing the mentoring relationship.

Phases of the mentoring relationship³
There can be great diversity in the way in which mentoring is experienced within formal programs and informal mentoring relationships. For instance, formal mentoring programs have a start and finish date, and are designed to take place over a set period of time, such as a year or 18 months, whereas informal mentoring relationships are not constructed in this way; they evolve and can take place over several years depending on the needs of the party. Regardless of the type of mentoring relationship employed, researchers and writers in the field maintain that mentoring relationships tend to be characterised by a number of important milestones or phases.
- Initial phase — the parties get to know one another and build the relationship that both deem very important.
- Cultivation or development phase — both parties benefit from the relationship, with learning and growth strongly present.
- Termination or separation phase — the relationship ends and contact decreases. Sometimes the separation is not amicable, and can end in resentment, bitterness, pain and anger.

Another important phase is called ‘redefinition’. This sometimes occurs at the end of the relationship, when both parties choose to work together, but with different expectations. For example, both parties might decide to work as ‘peers’ rather than as mentor and mentee because the mentee may have developed the requisite skills. Redefinition, then, signals a new type of relationship.

The period of time that each mentoring dyad takes to undergo any of these phases is likely to depend on a variety of factors such as the type of mentoring that is used (i.e. formal or informal), as well as the readiness of the mentee and the motivation, goals and personality of both parties. Due to the developmental nature of mentoring relationships, they are unlikely to stay the same; they will evolve and change and, in most cases, they will end. An effective mentoring relationship is one where both parties feel satisfied that the journey has been rewarding and worthwhile.

³ Phases of the mentoring relationship taken from Ehrich (2013)
References


Appendix 1: Mentor pre-meeting 1 checklist

**Purpose**
Help you plan and prepare requirements to facilitate a conversation with a mentee.

**I have**
- [ ] invited my mentee to the meeting
- [ ] arranged a time and place
- [ ] decided how formal the relationship will be – prepared the mentor agreement
- [ ] considered carefully my roles and responsibilities
- [ ] clarified my expectations and what I expect

My goals for this mentoring relationship

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Expectations I have of the mentee for this mentoring relationship

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Some getting to know you questions I have prepared

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Some questions I have planned based on the four levels of questions outlined in questioning: a key mentoring technique (page 5)

Objective questions
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Reflective questions
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Interpretive questions
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Decisional questions
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Appendix 2: Mentor meeting 1 checklist

Purpose:
• Get to know your mentee
• Share ideas about roles, responsibilities and expectations, and come to agreement about these aspects of the mentoring relationship
• Use Stanfield’s four levels of questioning (objective, reflective, interpretive, decisional) in posing questions to your mentee

During the meeting I have:
☐ welcomed and thanked my mentee for attending the meeting
☐ reinforced the discussion will be kept confidential
☐ introduced ourselves and got to know each other (e.g. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? — objective question)
☐ clarified the purpose of the meeting:
  • to establish a mentoring relationship
  • to discuss what we see as our roles, responsibilities and expectations
  • to determine whether we use a mentoring agreement to formalise the relationship
☐ included some key questions based on all four levels such as:
  • Based on what I have said about my roles and responsibilities, what is your response to that? (reflective question)
  • Can you tell me what you see as your roles and responsibilities? (reflective question)
  • What do you hope to get out of the mentoring relationship? (interpretive question)
  • How can I best support you and your learning? (objective, reflective question)
☐ closed the meeting
☐ reflected on the meeting and asked my mentee to provide some feedback on the session:
  • What worked well in this session?
  • Can you comment on my questioning and listening skills?
  • What do you think I could have done differently that would have made the conversation more beneficial to you?
  • Any other comments?
☐ set a time and date for the next session and asked my mentee to identify a topic/focus for the next conversation
Appendix 3: Mentor post-meeting 1 reflection template

Now that you have conducted your first conversation with your mentee, reflect on that conversation and answer the following questions. To help you respond to these questions, consider the following points when formulating your ideas:

• your communication skills
• the dynamics of the relationship
• the role you played
• your mentee’s interest and comments
• any other impressions.

What worked well?

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What needed improvement?

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What comments did your mentee provide regarding your performance? How can you use this feedback to improve next time?

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What do you need to work on to enhance your mentoring skills?

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Appendix 4: Mentor pre-meeting 2 checklist

Purpose
Use Stanfield’s four levels of questioning (objective, reflective, interpretive, decisional) in posing questions to your mentee.

I have
☐ checked the meeting time and place
☐ prepared questions

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<th>Reflective questions</th>
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Appendix E: Mentor meeting 2 checklist

Purpose:
• Facilitate a learning-rich conversation where your mentee does most of the talking
• Use Stanfield’s four levels of questioning (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional) in posing questions to your mentee.

During the meeting I have:
☐ welcomed and thanked my mentee for attending the meeting
☐ clarified the main purpose of the meeting:
☐ encouraged my mentee to begin the conversation by introducing the focus for the conversation.
   While the mentee is talking about the issue, I devise questions from Stanfield’s four levels. Some examples from each of the four levels are below, and they may provide some guidance

Objective level — questions based on facts and seen as ‘what’ questions:
• Where are you up to?
• With whom have you been working?
• What have you achieved since we talked last?
• What are your observations?
• What words or phrases stood out for you?

Reflective level — questions that invite personal reaction to the data/facts presented:
• What has been the response of others to the work you have done?
• What have you enjoyed doing the most?
• What have you enjoyed doing the least?
• How are you feeling about things now?
• What surprised you?
• What’s missing for you?

Interpretive level — questions that draw out meanings, values, beliefs and the significance of the issue:
• What have you learned about yourself, others, so far?
• What are some issues you continue to worry about? Why?
• What alternatives are you thinking about for dealing with some of the ongoing challenges?
• What makes x important?
• What implications are there for you?
• What might be the impact of ...?

Decisional level — questions that elicit resolution, new directions and actions:
• What are you going to do next?
• What is your plan and how are you going to achieve it?
• Can I help and if so how?
• Are things moving in the right direction for you?
• What can you do differently in the future?
• What have you learned from this?

☐ closed the meeting
☐ reflected on the meeting and asked my mentee to provide some feedback on the session:
   • What worked well in this session?
   • Comment on my questioning and listening skills.
   • What do you think I could have done differently that would have made the conversation more beneficial to you?
   • Any other comments?

☐ set a time and date for the next session and ask your mentee to identify a topic for the next conversation.
Appendix 6: Mentor post-meeting 2 reflection template

Now that you have conducted your second conversation with your mentee, reflect on that conversation and answer the following questions. To help you respond to these questions, consider the following points when formulating your ideas:

• your communication skills
• the role you played
• who did the most talking
• who had the power
• the dynamics of the relationship

What worked well and why?
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What needed improvement and why?
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What comments did your mentee provide regarding your performance? How can you use this feedback to improve next time?
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What do you need to work on to enhance your mentoring skills?
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What strategies are you going to use to enhance your mentoring skills?
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Appendix 7: Mentoring agreement

Mentor name:  
Mentee name: 

Our mentoring agreement

By developing and signing this agreement together, we agree on ground rules which we believe will support the relationship. As we spend time together, we will both try to:

- meet at least once per _____________, for at least _____________ (amount of time each session)
- select meeting places that allow us to talk deeply
- call or email ahead — giving at least 24 hours’ notice if possible — if we have to cancel or reschedule
- come to our meetings prepared. If we’ve agreed to do some assignment between meetings, have it completed
- if we have a problem or something doesn’t feel right to one of us, we’ll talk about it — even if it isn’t easy. We won’t avoid facing a problem. We’ll deal with it together
- keep what is said between us — maintain confidentiality unless required to address outside the mentoring relationship
- work on our shared goals for this mentorship
- recognise that we are two different people, and that is a good thing. We can learn from each other if we respect and value each other and the ways we’re alike and the ways we’re different
- make sure we get things done and remember to laugh.

Commencement date: ______________________

Finish/review the mentoring relationship by: (date) ______________________________

Signature of mentee: ________________________________________ Date: _____________________

Signature of mentor: ________________________________________ Date: _____________________