WHAT IS MENTORING?
By Peta Joyce

Some definitions:

Mentoring - traditionally, a mentor was a senior professional in your field who was available to pass on their technical knowledge or experience, but is now increasingly used to describe an experienced and trustworthy advisor, guide, or tutor who offers confidential personalised support and professional guidance.

Supervision - a term from the helping professions like social work, nursing, medicine or psychotherapy which means taking work issues to a senior in your profession or a qualified supervisor to be guided in your practice.

Clinical Supervision – supervision on the technical, specialised aspects of your work.

Coaching - a similar process to mentoring, but more focussed on performance, achieving goals and reaching your full potential, either professionally or personally.

Counselling - personal in depth work of a therapeutic nature from someone trained in the appropriate theory and skills of counselling.

WHAT DOES A MENTOR DO?

A mentor offers oversight, expertise, progress monitoring and ongoing support to enhance your professional skills, effectiveness and satisfaction. It is the responsibility of the mentor to:

- Work with you to create a safe and productive working alliance in your best interests, and hold the focus of that alliance

- Hear, understand and encourage clear expression of your needs, concerns, aspirations and opportunities for improvement

- Be an enabler who knows when to listen, advise, challenge, celebrate, support, educate and guide

- Ask searching questions and provide reflective feedback

- Enhance your learning from everyday experiences

- Enable you to see a bigger picture

- Model effective strategies for problem solving, planning, and professional development

- Encourage you to be self-responsible, autonomous, and act out of the power of choice

- Help you recognise your own values and development path, act within them, and get back on track if you have diverted

- Encourage self-evaluation and celebration of progress

- Respect confidences

•

WHAT TYPES OF MENTORING ARE THERE?

- **Co-mentoring**, where you set up a reciprocal voluntary contract with a peer (a colleague at a similar level of expertise/training) to give each other equal mentoring time (as in co-counselling)
- **Peer mentoring**, where you set up a contract with a peer to either be the giver or receiver of mentoring (usually voluntary)
- **Peer group mentoring**, where a group of peers meet to mentor each other as a small group, using structured processes (voluntary)
- **Professional mentoring**, where you pay a trained and experienced mentor for their services, or go to a senior staff member in your profession or organisation

WHAT DOES THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP INVOLVE?

Establishing and maintaining mentoring relationships involves attending to the following:

Context - being clear about the type of mentoring

Purpose or focus - what are we doing?

An agreement or contract is useful - it may cover:

- **Practicalities**, such as frequency of meeting, time and place, session format, commitment to attendance, any payment involved
- **Boundaries**, such as what does the mentoring cover, work and/or personal issues, the organisational and professional context
- **The working alliance** – mutual expectations, who will do what, mentoring style, evaluation and review, accountability, code of ethics
- **Ground-rules** such as confidentiality, honesty, processes for communication and feedback

Maintenance

Building in agreements for evaluating, auditing and reviewing the process periodically can keep the mentoring on track, 'clear the air' and help the ongoing relationship to be dynamic and useful. It is easier to establish the culture of mutual feedback and review at the beginning, than try to introduce it later when and if difficulties arise.

Completion
Acknowledging when the relationship has come to an end, and having a process for terminating or completing is important: a no fault divorce clause! Again, this is easier to establish at the beginning.