

HOW TO MANAGE THE SCHOOL LEAVING PROCESS WITH YOUR MENTEE



So, your mentee has decided to leave school early. What support can you provide?

As with all difficult subjects and situations as a mentor, the quality of your relationship will determine how much your mentee listens to what you say (see Fact Sheet 1 – Building Relationships). Your approach of course is of vital importance. It will either open up or shut down the opportunity to engage in conversation and discuss issues with your mentee, consider options, look at scenarios and allow the telling of stories about your own experiences. Sometimes leaving school may be the best option for your mentee.

For those mentors who left school early and regretted it, try not to assume that it will be the same for your mentee. Having the support of a mentor can make all the difference.

Making a good start upon leaving school, whether it be further study, full time work or an apprenticeship, increases the likelihood of successful outcomes in subsequent years. Your best outcome is that your mentee has considered all the options and makes a well informed decision.

WHERE TO START?

A good place to start is to write down the pros and cons together. You can look at finances, friends, money, clothes, transport, access to resources, and family to begin with. As you work through these issues you can look at each separately and see how they might change if your mentee follows through with the decision to leave. Aim to develop a one to five year plan should they follow that path. Perhaps develop a collage with a picture of them in the middle. Try and make it as real as possible so that your mentee can imagine themselves in that situation.

Many of the issues that arise during this process may give you clues as to why your mentee wants to leave school, such as:

- Their friends might be leaving school.
- They would like to get work, earn some cash and achieve goals like moving out of home.
- The subjects at school are not what they are interested in (e.g. they may be interested in arts and drama and these are not offered at their school). Alternative education is often an option – have they talked to a careers teacher?

- They are bored with what they have been doing for so many years and would like to do something else with their time.
- They are feeling unsure about the chance of getting a job even if they do finish school.
- They have an interest in learning while working (e.g. a hair dressing apprenticeship) without having to finish high school.
- They may have difficulty coping with the expectations of study. Maybe they have health or social issues that take up a lot of time and energy.
- They may feel that there is too much pressure to achieve at school from their parents or caregivers.
- They might be having problems with students or teachers at their school and don't think they can be resolved.
- They might have learning difficulties. If your mentee is struggling with literacy or numeracy at school they may also struggle in the world of work.

In your interactions with your mentee you would have an idea if literacy or numeracy issues are a factor. It is vitally important that these issues be addressed – in our electronic world, low literacy often means being isolated and unable to participate in society. From filling in online forms, accessing information and talking to friends, options are severely limited. Contact a teacher at the school who can assist you to provide resources or contacts for continued literacy/numeracy support.

WHAT IF YOUR MENTEE HAS NOT REACHED THE REQUIRED AGE TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

The legal school leaving age in NZ is 16 and students must seek an exemption if they wish to leave before then.

If your mentee is waiting to turn the required age to leave school, there may be some things they need to consider. For example, if they intend applying for an apprenticeship, they need to know that some require satisfactory completion of Year 11. Make sure your mentee knows what they need to do before they leave school.

If their school does not offer the classes that they want, check out their options of going to a senior college. If there is an evening class, they may be able to blend this with the curriculum at their current school.

If your mentee is 16 years old and considering further education, they may be eligible for student allowances through Study Link.

If your mentee has not told anyone else about their plan to leave school, but they are thinking about it, you are in a good position to prepare them to tell others or address any reasons for leaving school that may have emerged. You can discuss the possible reactions of others to their decision as it may cause conflict. It is possible to guide them as to how they might approach their family and friends. If they have good reasons behind continuing with their decision and a plan in place, they can be more confident about progressing.

You cannot force your mentee to make the decision you think is right for them. If they ask you what you would do, you can be honest, but they need to be responsible for the consequences of their decisions both good and bad. Your role is to provide them with the access to resources that they need and a good process for decision making that can be used in the future.

It is also possible that once they have considered all the options that you have worked through together, they may choose another option or change their mind.



REFERENCES & FURTHER INFORMATION

- Ministry of Education
www.minedu.govt.nz
- Careers New Zealand provides a checklist, advice and support for school leavers.
www.careers.govt.nz/plan-your-career/im-at-school-and-need-ideas/thinking-about-leaving-school/leaving-school-checklist/
- Careers New Zealand provides independent career information and advice.
www.careers.govt.nz/
- Careers New Zealand also offers an online chat facility with staff to get help with career planning, along with a tool to help create a curriculum vitae.
<http://www2.careers.govt.nz/about-career-services/contact-us/chat-online-about-your-career-options/>
- Study Link – helps students decide on further study and provides student allowances.
www.studylink.govt.nz/financing-study/
- Te Kete Ipurangi offers advice on curriculum choices and guidance through the NZ education curriculum with a view to career development. It can be navigated in both Maori and English.
<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/Learning-and-teaching-resources/Career-education>
- Several New Zealand universities offer online career information and self-assessment tools for students or recent graduates of the universities.
<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/ua/careers-library>
http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/student-life/services-students/careers/career_services_massey_home.cfm
www.otago.ac.nz/careers/students/links/