

# HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFIDENTIALITY IN YOUR MENTORING RELATIONSHIP



Confidentiality is an incredibly important part of your mentoring relationship – your ability to listen and to keep that information private will be the platform for a trusting relationship where your mentee feels secure enough to talk openly and honestly.

Before you enter into a mentoring relationship though, both you and your mentee should know that there is some information you are required to share if it comes to your attention – generally this information is anything related to criminal activity or anything that reveals a serious threat to your mentee's health and safety or to another individual's safety and wellbeing. At a minimum you should at least discuss and issue a young person friendly version of the organisations confidentiality policy by your 2nd or 3rd mentoring meeting.

## BE UPFRONT

*To maintain a trusting relationship, mentors need to set realistic expectations for confidentiality at the outset.*

So when you are talking to your mentee:

- Discuss the mentoring organisations confidentiality policy, and if possible leave a young person friendly version with them.
- Under no circumstances promise to keep secrets.
- Do assure them that if they share difficult information about things they have done, or things that have been done to them, that you will do what you can to help them.
- Do explain your commitment to their privacy and safety – let them know you will not be gossiping about them or sharing the information they tell you with other people unless it threatens their health and wellbeing or somebody else's safety and wellbeing.
- Do give them details about the sort of information you are required to pass on if it comes to your attention.
- If you do have to break the young person's confidence make every attempt to inform them of what and who you will be telling.

## WHEN DO I NEED TO TELL SOMEONE ELSE ABOUT ISSUES INVOLVING MY MENTEE?

You will need to share information about your mentee if you learn they are:

- being hurt by someone – being sexually, emotionally or physically abused by someone.
- being threatened with violence.
- in desperate need of help for something that you cannot provide e.g. a safe place to stay, sexual abuse counselling, help to deal with suicidal thoughts or treatment for a drink/drug problem.

You will need to talk to appropriate authorities about your mentee if you learn:

- they are sexually, emotionally or physically abusing someone.
- they are involved in criminal activities.

You will also need to talk to someone if you feel your own personal safety is at risk from your mentee, either due to their behaviour or threats they have made.

*In situations where your mentee confides in you about being abused or threatened you should let them know you what to help them help themselves. Let them know if you are going to talk to someone else, such as a Social Worker or Police Officer – if you don't tell them, your decision to tell someone else may feel like another violation,*

and the young person may reject any help offered. Explain why it is important that they get help, that you care about their happiness and wellbeing and that you will support them through the process.

## TIP

Some of the information your mentee shares with you may concern you because it reveals behaviour or activities that you believe are inappropriate for someone of their age. Perhaps they are smoking, drinking, sexually active or staying out very late at night – if these are not illegal activities for someone of their age and they do not present an immediate threat to their safety or wellbeing you need to think very carefully before sharing this information with anyone else. If your mentee has chosen to confide in you, you may be in a better position to help them if you keep their confidence and get them to think about some of the possible consequences of their choices.

## WHO SHOULD YOU NOT BE SHARING INFORMATION WITH?

### • Parents

Remember that your relationship is with the mentee, you are not an ally for their parents. If your mentee feels like you are going to pass on information to their parents it is unlikely they will open up to you and if you go behind their back it will undermine the trust you are working hard to build.

## TIP

If parents approach you as a source of “inside information” on their child, explain that any information that revealed a threat to their child’s health or safety would be passed on but otherwise you have to respect the young person’s confidence.

### • School

Schooling may be an area where you would like to help your mentee make improvements but in the first instance this needs to be done in partnership with the mentee. If your mentee reveals they are missing classes, not doing homework or cheating on assignments you need to talk to them – ask them why they are doing it and what they think it might take to get them to change that behaviour, get them to think about the longer term consequences.

If you go behind their back and talk to their school they are likely to feel betrayed and unlikely to talk openly and honestly with you in the future.

### • Peers

Friendships are very important but it is not your job to build these relationships for your mentee or to get in the middle of them. The dynamics of young people’s friendships can change quickly and if you choose to share information with one of their peers you will have no control over how it is used.



## WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [www.cyf.govt.nz](http://www.cyf.govt.nz)