

Session 2

understanding adolescence and local authority care

the fostering network
helping children to thrive



Session 2:

understanding adolescence and local authority care

Introduction

This is a thought provoking session and an opportunity for you to share your knowledge of adolescence and local authority care with the group. Before engaging in the mentoring relationship it is vital for mentors to understand the difficulties and issues faced by young people who have been in care in order to avoid unrealistic expectations.

Purpose

To give people a realistic insight into the experience of young people who have been looked after by the local authority.

Application

This provides a broad background picture for mentors of adolescence and the local authority care system.

Taking part in the experiential exercises will allow mentors to reflect on the realities of adolescence and increase their understanding of the experiences of young people in care and to bear in mind how these might impact the mentoring relationship.

Overview

time

Total session running time: **3 hrs**

objectives

By the end of this session you will:

- Have raised concerns you might have about mentoring young care leavers
- Have listed and discussed key features of adolescence
- Know the reasons young people enter local authority care
- Have discussed issues which affect young people leaving local authority care
- Have listed and discussed the similarities and differences between young people in care and young people generally
- Have a basic understanding of the legislative framework underpinning the Scottish local authority care system

key issues

Ensure that the material you present in this session is accurate and realistic so that people gain real insight into what mentees might have been through while in the care of the local authority. It can also be useful to invite a speaker from Who Cares Scotland to attend the session to give an overview of the situation for young people in care in Scotland (from the young peoples perspective) and to answer any questions mentors might have.

materials

Flipchart stand, pad and marker pens, Blu-Tack

Paper and pens for note taking

1 pack of Post-it's

OHP slides:

1. Session objectives
2. Socrates Quote
3. Peter the Hermit Quote
4. Adolescent Characteristics

handouts:

1. Session objectives
2. Group agreement (not included)
3. Adolescent Characteristics
4. Adolescence
5. Childrens Hearing System (not included)
6. Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (not included)
7. Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulation 2003 (not included)
8. Hometask: Leaving Home
9. Evaluation sheet

Training session

1. Session objectives

5 minutes

Welcome and session objectives: This exercise is designed to let everyone know what is going to be covered in this session.

What to do

- Show slide ①.
- Reveal and talk about each objective, one at a time.
- Ask if anyone has any questions or is unclear about anything.

2. Ice breaker (character identification game)

10 minutes

This exercise is designed to get people loosened up and relaxed and having fun

What to do

- Place pictures of a range of linked characters, (for example, Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore, Kanga, Roo, Owl, Tigger, Rabbit and Christopher Robin) in different parts of the room.
- Ask people to go and stand by the picture that best represents an aspect of themselves
- Then ask each person to say a few words about why they have chosen that particular character.
- Explain that this game illustrates a more creative approach to getting to know someone. This type of creative approach can be useful in the early stages of the mentoring relationship when getting to know your mentee e.g. if your mentee likes a particular film you could ask them which character they are most drawn to and why.

The exercise also highlights that peoples explanations of why they have made their decisions may well differ from your own perceptions of why they made their choice.

3. Review of Group Agreement

5 minutes

This exercise reminds everyone of the group agreement made in session 1

What to do

- Put up the flipsheet of the group agreement on the wall and ask everyone to read it through again
- Tell people that it has been typed up and will be given out as a handout at the end of the session

4. Concerns about mentoring young care leavers

15 minutes

This exercise gives people the chance to identify things that concern them about mentoring young people who have been in the care of the local authority.

What to do

- Give everybody a few Post-it's and ask them to take a few minutes to think of any worries they have about mentoring young care leavers, e.g. what if the young person does not turn up for meetings.
- Ask people to write each concern on a Post-it and to hand in their Post-it's to the trainer once they have finished.
- Emphasise that the concerns will stay anonymous.
- Once all the completed Post-it's have been handed in, sort them into themes, read them out to the group and deal with the concerns raised. Reinforce that anxieties/concerns/worries are a normal response to new situations, are to be expected and are better aired. Where possible, link each concern into the relevant section of training in which it will be explored further. This gives confidence/reduces anxieties.

5. Key features of adolescence

30 minutes

This exercise gets people to identify key features of adolescence by thinking back to their own experience of adolescence.

Explain that a young person leaving care is also going through adolescence and, therefore, it is important that mentors are aware of what adolescence means. A greater understanding of adolescence can give the mentor a stronger framework within which to undertake the mentoring relationship.

What to do

- Show slides ② and ③. Ask people to date the quotes. Point out that the quotes show how the issue of youth being seen as a threat to adult authority is therefore not new although the concept of adolescence is relatively recent.
- Divide the group into pairs. Ask each pair to draw on their own memories of adolescence and to pull out from this discussion a list of the key features of adolescence, which they will write on a flipsheet. Allow 10 minutes for this.
- After 10 minutes, bring people back to the large group and hang up the flipsheets so that everyone can see them
Review what has been listed and add any important features of adolescence which have been missed out
- Show slide ④ and talk through the points.
- Ask people how it felt remembering their own adolescence? Has the experience of being an adolescent changed over the years? Ask if people feel

that doing this exercise has helped prepare them for their mentoring role with a young person?

- Give out Handouts: Adolescent Characteristics and Adolescence
- Emphasise the importance of recognising that although common themes exist everyone's experience of adolescence is unique.

Coffee break **15 minutes**

6. Young People in Care **20 minutes**

Group exercise and discussion of similarities and differences between young people in care and those not in care, reasons why young people enter the care of the local authority and issues for young people leaving care.

What to do

Give a brief explanation of what being 'in care' means. Remember that it includes young people looked after at home. Divide the group into 3 smaller groups

- Give each group a pre-prepared flipsheet with the group task written on it
- Ask group 1 to make a list of the stereotypical characteristics of young people in care
- Ask group 2 to make a list of reasons why young people enter the care of the local authority
- Ask group 3 to make a list of issues affecting young people leaving local authority care
- Explain that group has 10 minutes to do this
- After 10 minutes bring people back into the large group
- Fix flipsheets to the wall and go through point raised. Pay particular attention to any stereotypes or myths that may need to be dispelled, or important points that have been missed out.
- * Keep discussions brief as the speakers to follow will be able to provide factual information and answer questions

Note: The flipsheet information also provides a useful guide to the speakers on the views and level of knowledge within the group.

7. Presentation on the care system and the experience for those involved **60 minutes**

This input introduces mentors to the work of the throughcare/aftercare service and gives them an insight into the experience of local authority care from a young person's perspective. It also reinforces that they are part of a network of services/supports on offer to young people.

What to do

- Invite someone from the local authority throughcare and aftercare service team to give a 20-30 minute talk/presentation on the work of the service and the relevant legislation.
- Invite the local worker from Who Cares Scotland to give a 20-30 minute talk/presentation on the reality of life in care and of the role of Who Cares Scotland. (a video produced by Who Cares Scotland on the rights of the child may also be shown here)
- Introduce the speakers and explain that there is time built in for questions/discussion with the speakers both during their presentations and afterwards.
- After the speakers and questions round up the discussion and thank the speakers for their contributions
- Explain that the handouts for this session include background information on the Children's Hearing System, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Support and Assistance of Young people Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003

8. Recap of session **5 minutes**

This helps people reflect on what they have learned and recaps on the session objectives.

What to do

- Show slide ① again.
- Check that everyone is happy that each objective has been met.

9. Hometask **5 minutes**

Explain that this session's hometask will ask mentors to reflect on their own leaving home/care experience and to relate that to the experience of mentees leaving local authority care. Ask people to take 10-15 minutes at home to complete the task on the Sheet provided.

10. looking ahead **5 minutes**

Link forward to next session.

What to do

- Tell everyone what the next training session will be about.

11. Evaluation of session **10 minutes**

What to do

- Give out evaluation sheets and allow 10 minutes for everyone to fill them in. Make sure you get them all back before everyone leaves!

12. Handouts

Give out session handouts.

By the end of this session you will:

- Have raised concerns you might have about mentoring young care leavers
- Have listed and discussed key features of adolescence
- Know the reasons young people enter local authority care
- Have listed and discussed issues which affect young people leaving local authority care
- Have discussed the similarities and differences between young people in care and young people generally
- Have a basic understanding of the legislative framework underpinning the Scottish local authority care system

Food for thought

"The young people of today love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority and disrespect for their elders. They no longer get up when old people enter the room, they contradict their parents and tyrannise their teachers."

Socrates 899 BC

The young people today think of nothing but themselves.. they have no reverence for their parents or old age."

Peter The Hermit 1274 AD

Adolescent Characteristics

Slide 4

- A** stands for **AMBIVALENCE**
Moody....unpredictable....inconsistent
- D** stands for **DISTANCE**
Aloof....will talk back....stress their independence
- O** stands for **OTHERS**
Movement towards peer group
- L** stands for **LOVE & LONELINESS**
Develop relationships outside family....boy/girl friends
Underdeveloped social skills
- E** stands for **EGO-IDENTITY**
Shopping time for roles (clown...professor...etc)
- S** stands for **SEXUALITY**
Changing bodies....not just biological change – strong attraction to physical relationships
- C** stands for **CONCEPTUALISATION**
Ability to think abstractly....idealise.... will argue their point
- E** stands for **EXPERIMENTING**
Risk taking....alcohol....drugs....fashion
- N** stands for **NARCISSISM**
Pre-occupied with themselves/bodies-they feel themselves to be on stage
- C** stands for **COMMUNICATION**
Problems with parents and adults here, will communicate with significant other and peers
- E** stands for **EVERYONE**
All experience these issues either in adolescence or later on

Adapted by Barnardo's Glasgow 16+ Project from the work of Erikson

Adolescence

Adolescence can be defined as a transitional period from childhood to adulthood. The transition may take place at any point between 10 and 21 years of age. Adolescents feel more akin to each other than they do to their families at this time of transition as they are experiencing many of the same feelings and thoughts. Each adolescent is unique, however, because the degree to which they experience this transition phase is individually determined.

Going through adolescence can be one of the most stressful periods of life as it is a time of great confusion – chaotic and scary one minute and exciting and stimulating the next.

Adolescence is a stage of development characterised by enormous physical, psychological and emotional changes.

Phases of adolescence

Phase 1: approximately 10-14 years

During this age range young people's long bones are growing and there is a rapid growth spurt. Muscular development also takes place. These changes result in jerky spasmodic activity and clumsiness as young people are not in tune with their own bodies. Hormonal activity causes this growth and young people will experience surges of hormonal output resulting in them feeling high, followed by periods of total apathy. The development of sexual characteristics also takes place at this time; boys may have periods of acute tiredness, whilst girls will have spells of being very emotional.

For both sexes the senses will be heightened; colour and music will take on new dimensions. The young person will also have wildly swinging expectations, wanting to be treated as grown-up one day and then punishing their parents for not wanting them to stay as helpless children the next.

Phase 2 : approximately 14 –17 years

During this age range young people may seem more or less an adult in appearance. They are often anxious, as their inner need to separate from the family is in conflict with their need to be cared for. Girls tend to have one special friend, whilst boys tend to get their support from peer groups. Glandular sexual activity will be established in both genders. There is a resurgence of childhood anxieties, which can result in rituals such as not stepping on cracks, washing hands or food fads. This is thought to be a second chance to resolve old problems of childhood.

Young people are seeing their parents and teachers with adult eyes. They sometimes look for a new role-model on whom they can base themselves. This may be the cause of young people having "crushes" on some adults close to them.

Phase 3: approximately 18 – 21 years

During this age young people may experience grieving because of the final letting go of childhood. It is a grief for loss of childhood and its dependent security, and marks the time for facing the responsibility of the unknown.

Parents need to adjust to being on their own, often when they themselves are going through a mid-life crisis. There may be a lot of ambivalence around towards young people. For instance, parents are torn between their belief that that young people should "grow up" but still need them.

Needs of adolescents

When young people are having a bad time, they need positive attention, patience, time, space and a way of negotiating their way through the bad times in a decent, respectful manner. They need tolerance, a minimum of enforceable boundaries, consistency and reliability.

Adapted from : Princes Trust / NCB "Mentoring schemes for Young People"

Hometask for session 2: Leaving Home/Care

This written exercise gives you an opportunity to reflect on your own leaving home/care experience and to connect that to the experience of mentees leaving local authority care.

Think about your own experience of leaving home or local authority care and make notes below of your experience. For example how old were you when you left home? What was your reason for leaving home? What factors helped you make the transition? Did you go back home to live for any period after leaving home the first time? Did you get help to move?

In what ways does your experience of leaving home differ from or resemble the experience of a mentee leaving the care of the local authority?

Evaluation Sheet

1. Rate today's training session by circling one number

Not interesting

Very interesting

1

2

3

4

5

2. How will today's training session help you carry out your role as a mentor?

3. What did you enjoy most about today's training session?

4. Anything you didn't enjoy or didn't feel was useful?

5. Any suggestions to improve this training session when it is next run?

6. Any other comments?

Thank you for completing this form
