

MORAL SUPPORT

'EVERY EXPLORER SCOUT SHOULD HAVE A MENTOR' – UNIT ESSENTIALS

When you have 40 other things to do, mentoring is the last thing on your mind. But, **Gordon Weston** and **Chris Brammer** explain, offering support is one of our most important qualities



As Explorer Scouting grows from its infancy and gains its own identity, those of us involved on a day-to-day basis have a number of challenges to face which are new to most of us in Scouting. One of these is the introduction of the mentor as an integral part of Explorer Scouting.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a mentor is 'an experienced and trusted adviser'. Like all dictionary definitions, this provides only the most basic of explanations. Mentor was a character from Greek myth. In *The Iliad* by Homer, written some 2700 years ago, Ulysses entrusted the care and upbringing of his young son to a close friend, while he went away to fight in the Trojan Wars. The name of this friend was Mentor. Perhaps this story provides a better explanation of the essence of mentoring – a mentor is anyone who provides support and encouragement, usually from a position of experience, and is clearly in a position of great trust.

We can all think of examples from our own lives. Often the first mentor we have is a parent or sibling, we may have a best friend who acts as trusted soul mate, or somebody else who provides advice and encouragement whether we

need it or not. Most of will achieve more because we have been supported by one of these informal mentors.

EVERY EXPLORER SCOUT SHOULD HAVE A MENTOR

It might be said that Explorer Scouting is all about helping young people fulfil their potential. We all know that there is a broad spread of achievement in Scouting. Some young people need encouragement and guidance to embrace the opportunities available to them through Explorer Scouting, some only need a push in the right direction. The role of the mentor is to ensure that each Explorer Scout gets the most out of the Section. Every Explorer Scout must have a named mentor who will meet with the Explorer Scout and agree personal goals, review progress and generally make sure that they get the most out of the Section.

WHO CAN BE A MENTOR?

The mentor is usually a member of the Unit leadership team in the Explorer Scout Unit. There is no particular qualification required, but there are a number of key elements to a successful mentoring relationship.

- The relationship should be between

individuals, not groups. It may be appropriate at times for a mentor to meet with a number of Explorer Scouts at the same time, but individual needs are paramount. Some issues may be difficult to air in front of a group of peers.

- The mentor holds a position of great trust. Issues aired during the mentoring process should only be discussed with others with the express permission of the Explorer Scout concerned.
- The Explorer Scout and mentor should get on well together. If either party feels uncomfortable the process will lose some of its value.
- The Explorer Scout and mentor should understand the purpose of the mentoring process and agree a structure, including how often and for how long they meet, and when and where they will meet. It is important to review the mentoring process itself to make sure it is working.

Clearly most Explorer Scout Leaders will be a mentor to more than one Explorer Scout, but each mentor must be able to give sufficient time and support to all those they should be mentoring. Occasionally it may be appropriate to find a mentor outside of the Unit. For example, a Young Leader may find that the most appropriate mentor is the

Leader of the Section in which they work. Remember, though, if the Explorer Scout does not know and trust the mentor, the process will fail. It is also important that the mentor is able to empathise with the Explorer Scout. If a Leader from another Section is chosen, it is important that they clearly understand the needs of the age group.

WHAT MENTORING SHOULD ACHIEVE?

Mentoring in a structured sense is new to Scouting, though in many ways it has always existed, and good Leaders have always applied the basic principles of mentoring, probably without realising they are doing it.

For the Explorer Scout, a good mentor will:

- Ensure that the Explorer Scout understands the balanced programme and how it supports their own aims.
 - Ensure that the Explorer Scout has a say in how the programme is developed, so that they can set and achieve their personal goals.
 - Help focus on personal strengths and achievements, making sure these are recognised.
 - Make sure that the Explorer Scout gets full value out of the award scheme.
 - Help with the development of self-confidence and esteem.
- For the mentor, the benefits include:
- A better understanding of young people in general.
 - Greater insight into the needs of the young people in the Unit, therefore making for better and more appropriate programme planning.
 - A definite increase in personal worth as a Leader.

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK.

The benefits of mentoring should now be clear. However, good intentions do not always translate into good practice, and without a clear structure mentoring could easily fall by the wayside. It is easy to see how other priorities could push mentoring to one side.

It is also easy to imagine the mentor and Explorer Scout meeting for a chat, full of good intentions, but both coming

away with no clear idea of the purpose and outcome of the meeting.

So how do we find time, and how do we make sure there is a definite and positive outcome?

- Make time for the mentor to meet with the Explorer Scout. A few simple rules will help. Include mentoring in the day-to-day structure of the Unit. Perhaps you could set aside time on a Unit meeting evening for this. Most important of all, plan ahead and make sure both the mentor and the Explorer Scout know that it is going to happen.
- Prepare! The mentor must have a good working knowledge of *Unit Essentials* and the Programme Zones, should know which awards the Explorer Scout is working on and has



Explorer Scouts will benefit from having a mentor to 'lean on' and talk to

gained, and should look back at what was discussed at the last meeting.

- Use the Certificate of Achievement to record the Explorer Scout's achievements and plan ahead. This should happen at least once a year, but why not fill one in each time the mentor and Explorer Scout meet?

- Ensure that appropriate awards are included in the Explorer Scout's aspirations, whether they are Scout Awards or Duke of Edinburgh Awards.
- Ensure that you remember to cover Scouting achievements outside of the Unit. For example, if they are

members of the Young Leaders' Unit, find out from their Section Leader how he/she feels that they are doing. This will make the process more meaningful to everyone.

- Remember to follow The Scout Association's *Young People First (Yellow Card)* guidance at all times. This in itself will take some thought – when and how will the mentor and Explorer Scout meet?

How often they meet must depend on individual needs, but always set a date for the next meeting when you are finishing one meeting. Set goals for both the mentor and Explorer Scout to achieve by the next meeting, and make sure you keep your side of the bargain. However, don't let goals get in the way of real achievement. Never let the Explorer Scout feel they have failed if they do not achieve one of their goals. It may be appropriate to have an extra meeting when a major project has been completed so that a review can take place.

Whenever possible, let the Explorer Scout choose his or her mentor and make it easy for them to change if the mentoring relationship does not work out. Keeping a record of who is mentoring who and when they meet will help ensure no one misses out.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTOR?

There is no simple answer to this. Individual needs are variable, and a good mentor for one Explorer Scout will not be suitable for others.

- In general a good mentor must be:
- Understanding of the age group and able to empathise with Explorer Scouts
 - A good listener
 - Supportive and non-judgmental
 - Available and reliable
 - Discrete
 - Aware of their own limitations, and prepared to ask for help if necessary

AND FINALLY

An Explorer Scout can only have one named mentor so it is important that it is the right person for them. Don't forget our watchword of 'flexibility' and allow the Explorer Scout to change mentors if they wish. The best judge will always be the Explorer Scout! ■