



**Mentoring  
and Supervising  
Teenagers**

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## The Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Toolkit

This is the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Toolkit. The Toolkit provides information to present to trainees — employers, educators, students and parents — on how to ensure an effective and productive work-based learning experience for the student and for the employer. The Toolkit also offers trainers information on how to produce a solid training program.

### The Toolkit contains:

- ★ Five separate, self-contained modules
- ★ A video capturing quality work-based learning experiences
- ★ A CD-ROM which contains reproducible content from the Toolkit
- ★ Various brochures which can be ordered (see order form)
- ★ Hardcopy of overheads for copying onto transparencies and as handouts for use during a training session.

Trainers can customize each presentation by presenting only those modules of interest to the audience and by adding their own material.

### The five modules are:

- ★ Training Essentials
- ★ Implementing the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan
- ★ Mentoring and Supervising Teenagers
- ★ Workplace Safety
- ★ Connecting Workplace Competencies with the Learning Standards

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## Mentoring and Supervising Teenagers

This module provides guidance for employees who supervise and mentor teenagers at the workplace. As a supervisor/mentor, employees typically need help negotiating the often rigorous — but often rewarding — relationship between a mentor and mentee.

This module provides guidance for a workplace mentor. As the module demonstrates, a workplace mentor plays a different role for the young person than the “Big Brother/Big Sister” type of model.

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### On the CD

- 1 Mentoring Overheads (mentoroverheads.pdf) — Print these overheads onto transparencies for use during a training and/or copy them for use as handouts.
- 2 Mentor Handouts (mentorhandouts.pdf) — Print these handouts to give to mentors and trainees.
- 3 Order Form (orderform.pdf) — Print this form and complete it to order any of the brochures in this Toolkit.

### Using the CD

On the CD, enclosed in the Toolkit, are .PDF files which can be printed using Adobe Acrobat Reader. Since you may already have this program on your computer, try double clicking on the file you want to open. If it opens, you’re all set. If it doesn’t open, you can load Adobe Acrobat Reader software in one of two ways:

- 1 Adobe Acrobat Reader is on the CD.

- 2 Download this software from the internet at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com). Double click on the words “Free Plug-ins and Updates” and then download Adobe Reader.

### In the Pocket

In the pocket of this module are several items to help you train participants in Work-Based Learning.

- 1 Mentoring Overheads — Copy these overheads onto transparencies for use during a training and/or copy them for use as handouts.
- 2 Mentoring Handouts — Copy these handouts to give to mentors and trainees.
- 3 Order Form — Copy this form and complete it to order any of the brochures in this toolkit.



## Teenagers at Work

The teenagers you are about to supervise are a very interesting group of people. They bring to the workplace youthful energy and enthusiasm. They are ready to master new skills and apply what they have learned in school. They have great expectations.

They do not all lead easy lives. Many live lives very different than your own. They juggle school, work, and family responsibilities. Some have already lived through experiences many adults have never had to face. But these youngsters are resilient, ambitious, determined, and curious. And they are smart — they know that workplace experience is the crucial survival skill they need if they are to have stable, fulfilling, and productive lives.

As teenagers set off for the world of work, they are full of excitement and anxiety. For many, it is the very first time they are leaving their neighborhoods and everything familiar. Undoubtedly, there will be people at work whose values and personal styles are quite different from those they have grown up with. They are also coming from high school where young people are in the majority, to a workplace where they are in the minority.

No matter how well they prepare, they cannot know what will happen as they change roles from student to trainee. While this transition is very exciting, it is also intimidating. Naturally, teenagers will look to their supervisors for help in making a smooth adjustment and will consider themselves very lucky to find a supervisor willing to help them.

*“I worried about being the youngest person there.”*

Encourage teenagers to stretch and achieve. Ask them what they would like to accomplish, in relation to the Work-Based Learning Plan, and then tell them what you think would be a reasonable and measurable set of goals for them to work toward.

## Getting Acquainted

As soon as you are assigned to a student trainee, you should set up your own one-on-one orientation, even if your company offers its own. At this meeting, you can begin to build an alliance which will help both of you resolve difficult situations if and when they arise.

Use this meeting to paint a realistic picture of your workplace and where the student will fit in. Have them talk about themselves and their own expectations. As you go along, ask them if they understand, and if they have any questions. Their responses will give you a better sense of where their strengths and skills lie.

Tell a student about your own work history, where and when you started and where you want to go. Talk about what you like about your current job. It will help him/her to know that there are also aspects of your job you do not like, that you, too, have a supervisor, and that you are not in control of all decisions that will affect you or the student.

### Ask the Right Questions

Is this your first job?

What kind of work have you done and what did you like about it?

What do you look forward to in this job?

How do you get along with people?

Are there any problems at home or school that may affect you at work?

What kind of job would be ideal for you and why?

Do you have any questions about working here?



## What Kind of Supervisor Are You?

Working with teenagers gives you a chance to examine your beliefs about “good” supervision. If you are an experienced supervisor, you may no longer think about how you do what you do. Supervising the work of others comes naturally to you by now, and the people who work for you know what to expect. However, students need an outline of what they can reasonably expect from a supervisor and which aspects of the job you believe to be most important.

Make clear what you will and will not do for them, how you interpret the rules and apply the consequences when the rules are broken, and when and how you want to be approached for help or advice.

Students should be told that supervisors routinely defend subordinates if they are unfairly criticized and that you will stand up for him/her if harassed, bullied or discriminated against because of race, sex, age, disability, or ethnic origin. Encourage students to report to you anything they think is discriminatory. Young women are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and should know who they can turn to if this situation occurs — perhaps it is you, or perhaps it is a human resources manager.

## Making Your Job Easier

Supervising trainees can be very satisfying and enjoyable, even when challenging. Young people enliven the workplace and have the energy and enthusiasm to learn, to master, and to produce. They look up to their supervisors and appreciate the attention they receive.

Supervising trainees is also a taxing job; it is hard to be the coach and the cheerleader at all times. It helps to have a back-up among your colleagues who wants to work as an alternative supervisor or mentor with your trainee. Or you may want to select an employee who is slightly older than the trainee to act as a “buddy.” Also, if you assign teenagers to work in teams with other employees, they will be less dependent on you and will learn about the cooperative, as well as the competitive, aspects of work.

## The Rules of the Workplace

Teenagers often need to be told things about the workplace that you might assume “everyone knows.”

Answer these questions for students. Do not wait for them to ask.

What are they being paid an hour?

Is overtime allowed?

What will they make if they work overtime?

When will they get their paycheck?

What is the protocol if they have a schedule conflict?

What does it mean to endorse a check?

Where can they open a bank account?

What do they have to do to get a raise?

How much time can they spend on their break?

What is company time? Personal time?

Do they need to sign in?

What should they do if they cannot make it to work?

What happens if they are late? Absent?

Who depends on the work they do? What happens if they do not produce?

How will their work be evaluated?

Does this company have a rating system?

Can they count on you to protect them? From racial discrimination? Sexual harassment?

What happens if they have more than one supervisor? If their supervisor changes?

What is the value of working quickly?



## Teenagers Are Not Adults

Teens, usually self-conscious because of their age, inexperience, and outsider status, try hard to fit into the adult work environment. When they are successful, we forget that they are not adults. However, when they are under stress, the mask of adulthood may slip, revealing their youth.

No matter how sophisticated a young student sounds or acts, he/she will be sensitive to criticism and may be hurt if he/she feels unjustly reprimanded or misunderstood. He/she may sulk, get teary, walk out, or not show up for a few days. He/she may want to talk, apologize, or ask for an explanation but does not feel confident enough to initiate the conversation. Therefore, when you point out mistakes to a young person it is best to be direct and, if possible, neutral. Avoid condescension and sarcasm. Young people are easily intimidated — especially when adults use a tone of voice that implies they are too young to do a good job. Whatever increases fear discourages honesty and will be counter-productive for you and the student. As a supervisor, your goal is to get work done while teaching the ropes.

Because the teen years are typically filled with insecurity and stress, there will be times when you need to recognize that a student's personal problems are interfering with work, and not interpret such behavior as a lack of commitment or respect for you or the work. A sympathetic inquiry will help clarify the cause of problematic behavior: "Are you OK? Do you want to talk about anything?"

While it is important the student understand that you are available to help with personal problems, you must explain that personal problems should not interfere with performance at work.

## How to Help Students Succeed at Work

### Set Goals

Decide goals with students and ask them to pay attention to their own progress. Encourage them to stretch and achieve. Ask them what they would like to accomplish in relation to the work-based learning plan, and then tell them what you think would be a reasonable and measurable set of goals for them to work toward. For example, if a student wants to achieve an "Advanced" skill level in a certain competency, develop a project with him/her to realize that goal.

For work experience to be a learning experience, students need to be given tasks that make demands on their intelligence and their skills. Whenever possible, shape the job requirements to take advantage of the particular talents of each student.

### Encourage Involvement

Teenagers have a lot of energy. They need to be active participants, not passive observers. Encourage their involvement and give them enough work to test their capacity. When the pace of work changes and there is little for them to do, help them learn another skill.

### Give Feedback

Teenagers need to hear you say how they are doing. Like other workers, they thrive when they know their efforts are valued, even if they do not succeed at everything they do. That is why it is important to give them feedback, to identify their strengths and talents, to help them accept mistakes as part of the learning process, and to encourage them to persist and master new skills. Schedule frequent, short sessions to evaluate the student; this fosters open communication between the mentor and mentee.



## Things Only You Can Provide

Even the most motivated student needs help from you to do their personal best on the job.

Things only you can provide include:

- ★ Specific and realizable goals to work toward
- ★ Tasks which promote new skills
- ★ Long-term projects
- ★ Tasks that keep them involved
- ★ Feedback on their progress, strengths, and weaknesses
- ★ Clear boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behavior
- ★ Effective ways to cope with inevitable frustrations and problems
- ★ A “buddy” or mentor who is more experienced but closer in age to the student
- ★ Open channels of communication with you
- ★ A comfortable and safe environment

## Feedback

Feedback is most useful when it is frequent, honest, and constructive. Here are some things you can do:

- ★ Meet with each student on a regular basis.
- ★ Review what each of you considers progress.
- ★ Define areas that still need improvement.
- ★ Make concrete suggestions for improvement.
- ★ Focus on what the student is doing right rather than what he/she is doing wrong.
- ★ Write a list of things to work on in the next month.



## Enforcing the Rules

As a supervisor you may encounter some problematic students—they may come in late, not listen when you are talking, “forget” what you asked them to do, refuse an assignment, use “unprofessional” language, or ignore a repeated request to change their behavior.

Sometimes, it is merely their teenage need for self-expression that interferes with being effective members of a work team. Other times, they want to create situations to get attention or power, or to avoid being tested on their performance. Whatever the underlying reason, expect times when your buttons will be pushed and your limits tested.

As soon as you feel that you are being tested or drawn into a power struggle, let that student know that you can and will hold the line, enforce the rules, and mete out the consequences. Although they may not say so, adolescents want someone who can see through brashness and manipulation. They usually feel relieved when you set the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and make them take responsibility for their actions.

### Techniques for Setting Limits

- ★ Be firm but friendly.
- ★ Resist the temptation to lecture.
- ★ When a student acts inappropriately, describe responsible behavior for the situation in question.
- ★ Ask the student to take responsibility for a solution when faced with a problem.
- ★ Keep anger and hostility out of the discussion, but it is appropriate to express disappointment.
- ★ Draft an action plan for improvement with the student.
- ★ Engage an educator and/or parent as necessary.
- ★ Threaten to fire a student only as a last resort, and only if you are prepared to act on the threat.

## Personal Feelings and Workplace Relations

Students need to know that the workplace is structured hierarchically. They may not like orders that come down from on high, but they will have to respect them. Even if they feel angry or disappointed, there are acceptable and unacceptable ways of expressing feelings and solving problems at work.





### Strategies for Solving Problems

One of the goals of Work-Based Learning is to teach teenagers how problems are handled in the workplace. As a problem develops, ask the student to name the problem and identify its source. Then work with the student to solve it. Encourage the student to take responsibility for solving the problem. Creative problem-solving is a skill that can be learned.

When students are not fulfilling their responsibilities, it is very important to let them know that problems of attitude or behavior will not be ignored. Develop a strategy that you think will be an appropriate and effective remedy to these problems.

Here are some techniques for addressing problems that arise around appropriate business skills, demeanor, dress, and language.

#### Poor Phone Skills

- ★ Write a script. Start with “Hello, the XYZ company, may I help you?” Include a number of possible responses to different types of demands. Role-play with the student.
- ★ Show the trainee how to write down the name of the caller – “Could you spell that for me please?” – the telephone number, the action taken on the call, etc.
- ★ Stress that in answering the phone, he/she represents the company and should sound polite, friendly, and willing to listen and help.

#### Missed Deadlines

Learning works best when people have a chance to go over their mistakes and correct them. This is especially true on the job. Here are some things you can do:

- ★ Find out where the problem lies; is the task unclear or too difficult?
- ★ Review instructions to determine if they were misunderstood.
- ★ Change the task.
- ★ If a student cannot meet your schedule, assign work less crucial to your deadline.

#### Tardiness and Personal Calls

Occasionally, students have difficulty differentiating between school and workplace behavior. They may take long lunches and talk on the phone with friends. Again, there are steps you can take to resolve these types of problems.

- ★ State that break time, lunch time, starting time and ending time are not flexible.
- ★ Explain that personal calls should be kept to a minimum and are always interruptible by work demands.
- ★ Make sure the student has enough work to do.

#### Business Dress

- ★ Be clear about the dress code. Note that many dress codes are established in accordance with health codes.
- ★ Point out someone young who you think understands appropriate dress as an example to follow.
- ★ Compliment students when they dress appropriately. Inform them when they dress inappropriately.
- ★ Give students recognition for their attempts to change.
- ★ Remember that many kids have limited money to spend on clothes.



## Supervising Students with Disabilities

### Look Beyond Stereotypes

When we hear the word “disability,” it evokes images of people we feel are not like us. With a limited frame of reference we resort to stereotypes. Stereotypes are based on lack of contact, lack of information, and fear of other people’s differences or limitations. Our ignorance about people with disabilities affects how these students are viewed and treated. The way we treat those with disabilities often imposes greater limits than the actual disability.

When we focus exclusively on the disability, we lose sight of the individual. This leads to a difficult situation and blocks the communication that is needed at work.

Many adults stereotype teenagers as immature, unreliable and self-absorbed. Teenagers with disabilities come with another set of stereotypes. In all cases, look beyond the stereotypes.

### Working with Students with Disabilities

- ★ Acknowledge your concerns about working with students with disabilities.
- ★ Learn more about specific disabilities.
- ★ Use the student as the expert on working with the disability.
- ★ Serve as role model and resource for your colleagues and other personnel working with a student with disabilities.
- ★ Negotiate realistic expectations for productivity and performance.
- ★ Contact the student’s counselor for information and advice, if necessary.
- ★ Research ways to be a more effective supervisor/mentor.

### Positive Communication

It should not be assumed that because one part of a person is disabled, the whole individual is handicapped. It is not necessary to shout at someone who is sight-impaired, or speak very slowly to a person who has difficulty coordinating limbs or facial muscles.

Speak with the same directness you would with any other worker. Inquiring about a person’s ability to perform on the job is not the same as invasive questioning about the nature of their disability.

When reviewing the job description, ask the student — as you would ask all students — if there are any responsibilities that he/she may not be able to fulfill. Do they have skills, strengths or talents that haven’t been mentioned?

### Match Students with Role Models

If the student would benefit from it and is interested, match a student with special needs with an adult with special needs. Often, a professional adult with special needs can serve as a strong role model.

### Managing Co-worker Reactions

As a supervisor and mentor, you need to deal with your colleagues’ reactions to working with disabled students. They will look to you as a role model and resource for how they should treat these students. If you set a tone of fairness and treat the students as you do others, your colleagues will do the same. As time passes, the student’s disabilities will become less and less a part of his/her presence and everyone will become less self-conscious.



**If you set a tone of fairness and treat the students as you do others, your colleagues will do the same.**

### **Keep High Standards for Students with Disabilities**

For many young people with disabilities, the workplace offers a chance to have an equal role among non-disabled peers. They should be encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, but also to realize that asking for help is not a sign of weakness.

There is a tendency to overprotect people with disabilities. Naturally, a supervisor should offer assistance when it is necessary, but should not assume it is required, especially if a student does not ask for help.

Overprotection goes hand in hand with lack of expectations, keeping people from trying anything new or mastering difficult tasks.

Sometimes people think that if students with disabilities cannot do everything, they cannot do anything. Because a person may need some additional accommodation does not mean that he or she cannot get the job done.

Remember, teenagers with disabilities have been challenged more than most of us. They are used to going beyond what people expect of them.

**Replace assumptions with facts. The more you know about his/her disability, the better your working relationship will be with the student.**

### **Use Students as Experts on Their Own Disabilities**

Students are experts on their own disabilities and have figured out ways of coping that are not found in the books. Have a forthright discussion on what they feel are their capabilities and limits. You will not hurt their feelings.

Once you have this information, negotiate with students about what they can and cannot do in the workplace.

Many teenagers with disabilities use their creativity to come up with novel ways to work around their disabilities. For example, a learning-disabled student may find it easier to add a column of numbers if the numbers are written on graph paper. The graph lines help to keep the numbers in neat columns. Ask students if they have any special tricks that will make it easier for them to do their job well.

### **Managing Co-worker Reactions**

- ★ Get clear on your own attitudes about the student's disability.
- ★ Get clear on the attitudes of your staff/colleagues. Do they falsely anticipate preferential treatment for the student with disabilities?
- ★ Note that we all have disabilities and we work around them.



## Evaluating the Learning Experience at Work

When a student is about to leave your workplace, a formal exit interview using the Work-Based Learning Plan can help put the experience in perspective.

Give students an opportunity to evaluate their own performance as well, orally or in writing.

### Evaluation Questions for Your Student

- ★ What have you learned?
- ★ How would you rate yourself?
- ★ What did you enjoy about this job?
- ★ How would you evaluate your own work performance?
- ★ Where do you need to improve?
- ★ What would you change about this job?
- ★ Would you like this job a year from now? Why?
- ★ What was the hardest thing for you on this job?