Working One to One with young people

Given the nature of doing youth work in a community or church setting, there is an inevitability that young people will want to engage with supportive youth workers on a one to one basis, whether through formal mentoring, or in a quiet space at the end of a service, in the school, or out in the community. It is important that as a youthwork project both staff and volunteers:

- Consider the dynamics of these situations,
- Respect the journey that the young person has already started before approaching you
- Protect them and yourself.

There may be times when a young person wants to speak to you in that moment, or at a future time when a venue is more suitable.

The important thing is to realise that Youthwork is about supportive relationships, and so if the young person has identified that it is you that they are wanting to trust with that information and you are able to facilitate this disclosure, it would be somewhat disrespectful and counterproductive to refer them to someone else.

If you feel uncomfortable in meeting that young person, then the following guidelines should help to give you a framework for reciprocating that trust, and the resources to reassure you. However, for whatever reason, if you are unable to fulfil this role, please contact Graham to arrange for an alternative person do this.

Irregular One-One Work (not mentoring)

If you are travelling one to one with a young person in a car, then the same guidelines of public/private space should be adhered to, for example do not park your car in a secluded spot and have a personal chat with a young person of the opposite sex, You may additionally want to call in/out with someone to let them know that your travel time has ended and that the passengers have arrived safely etc. A specific policy on young people and car journeys is available.

The following are guidelines that will enable you to consider the dynamics of working one to one with young people, specifically for TheO6 Project in Ottery St Mary.

The Environment.

Consider the setting for the meeting with a young person:

- Will you be able to have a conversation without being overheard?
- Is it public enough that your meeting a young person is not misinterpreted?
- Is it suitably informal and relaxed?
- Is it a safe space for the young person to meet you? – how confidential is the public place?

- Think about the best time to meet.

Usually public spaces like coffee shops, parks, cafés, might be good spaces to meet a young person, though it is important to think about the environment and how conducive it is for the conversation to take place. The café might be a good idea, but what if the young person's mum's friend works there? You may need to think of an alternative in this case.

If the young person requests to speak to you in the 'heat of the moment' i.e. during or at the end of an activity, (and in reality if the work that we do has given young people space to think and reflect then this may be likely) then be assured that you have created the right kind of atmosphere that young people can trust you. But have you considered whether you have the facilities to be able to have a further conversation with any individuals should the need arise? For example: do all the leaders leave as the young people do, and are you left on your own in the building? Could someone else 'be in the kitchen' whilst you chat with a young person in the main hall?

The moment, that a young person has indicated a wish to speak to you, may not be the most suitable time for you. It might be as you are packing away equipment, yet to put off that moment, may mean that the young person chooses not then to speak to you, or anyone else about the issue for a while. So, you need to follow this through with some suggestions.

The Environment plays a very important role in creating the right atmosphere for a conversation to take place, each young person may feel differently about certain settings, such as the park, or a café, and so do not assume that they feel as comfortable about a place as you do. Ask them

The Conversation

As well as the environment, think about the conversation, it may feel quite intense to talk just about the particular issue, often it is in the last few minutes that the young person will discuss the 'real' issue, so be aware of timing. Have other topics to talk about that aren't directly about the young person; "what did you think about _____(news/sports/music/etc)?"
This would be specifically important in a 'meeting over a coffee' type scenario as it could be quite intense.

It is important to realise that unless you are a trained counsellor, asking further investigatory questions may cause you or the young person to expose themselves emotionally to a place that they are not comfortable with. Saying this, let the young person decide what to tell you and the extent they feel they can trust you *at this moment.*

TheO6 Project has a 'one to one recording' form which you should fill in after the meeting, this will enable you to reflect on the situation, the conversation and by passing this on allow you to have some accountability for this supportive relationship. There may be occasions when you would want to talk through the meeting with someone else, either a member of TheO6 project, or an allocated external support/supervisor who will be able to fulfil this role for you.

There may be scenarios when you may feel the need to have a third party either in the vicinity or aware of the timings of the meeting that you are having. This may be because you are unsure of your personal safety, as it may be a young person that you do not know too well, gender issues In the same way that you might do for a car journey, you could 'sign in' and 'sign out' with someone from the Project, or external to confirm that the meeting is now over.

Some quick do's and don'ts

Do:

- Fill in the review form as thoroughly as possible, but retain the confidentiality of the young person, and email a copy to Graham or chair of trustees
- Seek external support, either from Graham or Chair of Trustees
- Try and enable/empower the young person to think about the options for them in terms of support, future behaviour, dealing with the situation legally/professionally.
- Realise that you don't need to uncover all aspects of the situation to help the young person deal with things in the future.
- Consider the appropriate environment to have the conversation, making safety and security (of the information) a priority
- Take the situation seriously as this is clearly important in the life of the young person.
- Ask permission to ask "would you be ok to talk further about _____." and if they say no, that's fine, they may do so at a later point, but respect the fact that they have already said what they want to say.
- Be aware of personal boundaries – i.e. your home phone number/ address, and also the young persons. This is especially pertinent in small towns/villages in this area.
- Realise that the conversation and dynamics of trust in this relationship are only for this space and time. If you were to meet the young person in a different context (schools, streets etc) they will need you to act as though none of that meeting has occurred. You may want to advise the young person of this during the one to one conversation you have with them. To create the best possible scenario for that moment, it is better to treat the time and space of the school or street as something new and distinct.
- Act within the law in any situation.

Don't:

- Do anything that could be misinterpreted by people i.e. physical contact, giving of gifts/money
- Make promises about longevity of contact (I will always be here for you etc)
- Make promises you can't keep
- State that the conversation is completely confidential, young people need to be aware that you may have to forward the information on, however, be very sensitive in advising this, as the young person may have identified you to discuss things *because* you are independent from state services.

Regular one – one work (Mentoring)

Best Practice

- Meet in an open environment. If you meet a young person in their home, only do so if there are other people present and always keep the door open of the room you are in. Do not isolate yourself with your mentee.

- Activities with your mentee should take place in the open, and public transport should be used wherever possible. If you do need to travel together in a car, get written consent from the parent/guardian (this can include a text message or email if convenient).
- Pre-arrange home visits with parents/guardians.
- Keep your mobile phone on when meeting your mentee.

Avoid

- Spending long periods alone with your mentee
- Taking your mentee to your home or taking them somewhere specifically to be alone with them.

Dealing with negative behaviour

Mentors should challenge the behaviour in way that is proportionate to the strength of your relationship and provide non-critical feedback that

- Helps to identify the possible consequences of their actions
- Seeks to understand and to challenge the reasons behind their actions in a positive way.

Dealing with aggressive behaviour

- Don't react without thinking
- Don't get in their face, but don't immediately walk away
- Stay calm
- Talk normally and clearly
- Do not use sarcasm or threats
- Do not show your frustration
- Ask open questions and listen
- Don't fight
- Don't put yourself at physical risk

Boundaries in a Mentoring Relationship

- Don't disclose personal details to your mentee e.g. where you live.
- Don't accept them as friends on your social networking sites.
- Don't feel that you have to break pre-made plans to see your mentee.
- Decide on an appropriate time of night to cut off responding to texts.
- If your mentee or their family asks for help you are not comfortable with, contact your Coordinator.
- If the mentee's family has multiple, complex issues, don't get drawn into them, your focus is with your mentee.
- Don't give or lend money or belongings to your mentee
- Don't feel you have to answer inappropriate questions.

Tips to encourage Healthy Mentoring

- Take time out for yourself.

- You are their mentor, not parent, social worker, teacher or best friend.
- Honour your confidentiality agreement.
- Share your experiences and concerns in the group support sessions.
- Do not transfer your mentee's problems onto yourself.
- Use the mentoring Coordinator when you need to.

Handling Disclosure

- Mentors are obliged to report anything mentees tell them involving serious abuse, criminality or any situation that puts them or another person at risk of harm.
- At the beginning of the relationship this should be CLEARLY explained.
- Mentors should never keep a secret. If a mentee wishes to make a disclosure, mentors must remind them that they might have to share that information but that they are willing to listen.

If a young person discloses serious sexual abuse or criminal information, the appropriate response to that disclosure is as follows:

- Do not ask leading questions. If you need to clarify something restate what the mentee has communicated using their words and terminology.
- Avoid looking shocked or using phrases such as 'are you sure?' or 'that's horrible!' Tell the person that you believe what they are telling you and thank them for sharing the information with you.
- Compile a written report of everything your mentee said while it is still fresh in your memory and sign the report recording the time and date. This may be used as evidence later.
- Contact the co-Ordinator to report the disclosure
- Remember not to discuss the disclosure with anyone else.
- If the young person or another is deemed to be in immediate, significant danger or harm and the coordinator cannot be contacted then you call emergency services or social services!

Recording Incident Information

In the event of an incident or disclosure a report should be completed. This should be done at the time of disclosure/concern and contain **FACTS** only. Mentors should not include their opinions.

The form will capture the following information:

- Name, age, dob, home address and telephone number of the young person
- Whether the incident concerns them or another
- The nature of the incident or allegation: including dates, times and any other relevant information
- A description of any visible bruising or injury
- Details of witnesses to the incident.
- The young person's account
- Whether the parents have been contacted
- Whether anybody else has been consulted together with details
- Whether anybody else has been alleged to be the abuser together with details

This document may not be exhaustive, it is intended as a guide only, as with the best intentions activities with young people can be unpredictable. However, it is important to realise that if young people have identified you as someone that they can trust and talk to, that you honour that trust, and make every consideration necessary to develop a supportive relationship in a fitting and appropriate manner.

Signed ……(Chair) Date ……

To be reviewed September 2025