

# Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly



NCETA  
Australia's National Research Centre  
on AOD Workforce Development



## W2. Yarning About Work (Mentoring): A Guide For Workers

*Theory Into Practice (TIP) sheet for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander AOD workers*

This TIP sheet is for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander<sup>1</sup> alcohol and other drug (AOD) workers. It is part of a series of resources produced by the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction at Flinders University. These TIP sheets aim to enhance Indigenous worker wellbeing and reduce work-related stress.

A TIP sheet on mentoring has also been developed for managers/supervisors (Managers/supervisors TIP Sheet No.S4) and forms part of this resource Kit.

- Problems using mainstream AOD treatments to meet the needs of Indigenous clients
- A lack of cultural understanding and support from non-Indigenous health workers
- Problems of isolation when working in remote areas.

Mentoring is a good way to get the support you need for the work you do and to prevent stress and burnout.

### What is mentoring?

- Mentoring is like yarning. It is when a more experienced worker (the mentor) helps support and advise a less experienced worker (the protégé)
- It can provide a safe and supportive place where the protégé can learn to manage stressful and difficult situations and develop problem solving skills to address issues related to working in the AOD field
- Mentoring can happen between a mentor and a protégé or a small group of protégés or it may involve co-workers who act as mentors for each other
- Mentoring can make sure that workers know how to do their jobs well and make sure that knowledge is passed down to present and future Indigenous AOD workers.

### Introduction

Indigenous AOD workers may face stress from:

- Heavy workloads and clients with complex health and social problems
- People having negative attitudes towards AOD work and from racism towards them and their client group

<sup>1</sup> The terms Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this document. We understand that some people have a preference for using one term over the other and we have used the terms interchangeably to be sensitive to these differing perspectives.

## Why is mentoring important?

Mentoring can be very helpful because it:

- Allows experienced workers, as the mentors, to build their protégé's skills, as well as their own
- Provides support for workers by:
  - » allowing workers to discuss stressful work events
  - » helping workers develop good work strategies
  - » helping workers to be clear about their job roles and responsibilities
- Can help stop experienced workers from leaving organisations.

## What mentoring is not

- Mentoring is not about helping workers with their personal issues. This is the job of qualified counsellors working for culturally appropriate Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).
- Mentoring is also different to supervision and performance reviews. These are separate processes and should not be confused with mentoring.
- Mentoring is not just having a friendly chat from time to time. Mentoring involves setting goals and objectives and is about developing the skills of the protégé.

## What's needed to have a successful mentoring relationship and program?

A successful mentoring relationship needs mutual respect, trust and confidentiality between the mentor and protégé. Both need to:

- Be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and be willing to learn from the other person
- Listen to positive and negative feedback, welcome ideas to improve work practice and learn from mistakes
- Allocate time to attend regular meetings
- Keep discussions confidential.

## Who should be involved in mentoring programs?

Each new or junior Indigenous AOD worker should be offered the option of participating in a mentoring program. The protégé always has the final say in who they would like to accept as a mentor. In most instances, an Indigenous worker will best be mentored by a more experienced Indigenous worker either from their own organisation or a similar one. Often male:male and female:female matches are preferred.

A range of employees, including managers, can also benefit from involvement in a mentoring program so participation should not be limited to new and junior employees.

## How to set mentoring goals and objectives

To get the most out of a mentoring relationship, it is helpful for the person being mentored to identify what they would like to get from the relationship and the time and effort it involves. Also have specific goals and objectives.

- *Goals*: are the long term outcomes that the protégé wants to achieve
- *Objectives*: are the more specific shorter term actions, behaviours and work practices that will be needed to reach the goal.



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Copies of resources developed as part of the 'Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly' Resource Kit are available for download from the NCETA website: [www.nceta.flinders.edu.au](http://www.nceta.flinders.edu.au)