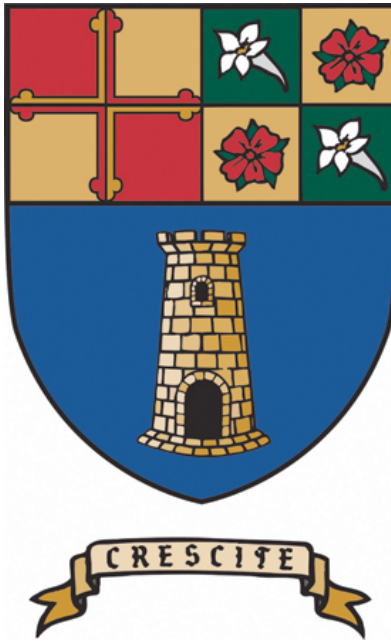


THE HEIGHTS SCHOOL



MENTORING HANDBOOK

MENTORING HANDBOOK
THE HEIGHTS SCHOOL

Table of Contents

1) Introduction

2) General Considerations Regarding Mentoring

- i) Definition of Mentoring*
- ii) A Partnership with Parents*
- iii) The Importance of Mentoring*

3) Practical Considerations

- i) Number and Duration of Meetings*
- ii) The Mentor as Advocate*
- iii) The Mentor/Parent Conference*

4) Content of Mentoring

- i) Nature and Scope of Advice Given*
- ii) The Mentor/Mentee Conversation*

5) Mentor's Responsibilities

6) Characteristics of the Mentor

7) Guidelines for Student Privacy

- i) Not a Closed Circuit*
- ii) Recordkeeping and Written Communication*

1) Introduction

The Heights School is a private, independent, preparatory school for boys, grades three to twelve. Our mission is to assist parents in the intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual education of their sons, with dedicated teachers training boys rigorously in the liberal arts. This formation in virtue fosters respect for every person, a desire to serve God and others, and an optimistic attitude towards life's challenges.

The Heights School, like any other educational institution, has a clear and distinct mission. A mission that sets it apart from other schools and gives it its character. This mission pervades every aspect of the School's life: academic, athletic, and spiritual. The administration, the faculty and staff, and the School's families work together in making this mission a reality for each student.

The mission is accomplished through a rigorous academic program, competitive athletic teams, and a dedicated faculty and staff. What makes it all come together in the life of each boy is the mentoring program. Mentoring seeks *to assist parents in the intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual education of their sons.*

Jacques Maritain, a philosopher and educator, once said in a lecture given at Yale University, "The prime goal of education is the conquest of internal and spiritual freedom by the individual person, or, in other words, his liberation through knowledge and wisdom, good will, and love." (*Education at the Crossroads*, p. 11). In a sense, mentoring seeks precisely that. It brings together "knowledge and wisdom, good will, and love"—all the different aspects of the School's programs—academic, athletic, spiritual—into one single conversation. In so doing, mentoring helps each student reach his full potential both in his academic endeavors and in his personal formation as a man.

The mentoring effort is reinforced and made complete when the mentor works hand in hand with the boy's parents. Cooperation between parents and mentor is what makes the mentoring program successful. This relationship is necessary because the parents are the primary educators of their sons and are the ones who know him best. The mentor, therefore, must work in tandem with the parents in a *partnership for the good.*

Another component of the mentoring program is the interest and empathy the mentor shows for his mentee. The mentor looks out for his mentee. This is the most basic of all his duties. How is he doing in class? What do his teachers say about his academic work? Is he interacting well with his peers? The mentor thinks about each mentee. What are his talents and weaknesses? What could he do with his gifts? How should he be developing academically?

After observing each mentee and thinking about him, the mentor may point out things that the mentee may not realize about himself. A mentee may be reminded of the importance of using his time well on school nights. A second suggestion may be that it is better to study certain subjects first and take care of others later. Another suggestion could be that he needs to get his binder in order. Counsel may be tailored to the boy's personal struggle for virtue and excellence.

Mentors meet with their mentees often. Regular communication fosters fruitful conversation, goal setting, encouragement, support, and accountability. The mentor presents the mission of the School to each student so he may benefit from every opportunity the School offers.

2) **General Considerations Regarding Mentoring**

i) Definition of Mentoring

Mentoring is an individual means of education that personalizes the mission of the School for each student. At The Heights, every student is assigned a mentor who facilitates his full development as a man. The mentor seeks *to assist parents in the intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual education of their sons*. This formation takes place during monthly, one-on-one conversations between the mentor and mentee and in the ongoing dialogue between the parents of the mentee and his mentor.

Mentoring is a tutorial in Christian manhood. It is a means of teaching, personally and individually, the ideals that form the foundation of every aspect of the School. The mentor starts with a picture of what he hopes each boy will become as a man. Then, working in the context of each boy's personal circumstances, the mentor teaches him—through advice, example, and encouragement—how to acquire the virtues that will make that picture a reality. The Heights, through its curriculum and discipline, teaches these virtues in the abstract. The mentor and the faculty seek to exemplify and inculcate in the students these same virtues—addressing them specifically to each boy's needs.

What is this picture envisioned by the School? What kind of man would the School hope each of its students to be at the age of twenty-five? It wants each student to become a solid professional who will serve his family and society. He will be a man who is committed, faithful, and courageously noble in heart and mind. He will also be a man of faith, principled, with a well-formed conscience. He will be a man respected by his peers: a friend with sound judgment and a seriousness of purpose, good taste, and a sense of humor.

In dealing with the mentee, the mentor always has this picture in mind, and articulates it clearly to him, especially as he advances through high school. Long after the student may have forgotten anything specific the mentor told him, he will have the memory of this picture of what he should hope to be.

ii) A Partnership with Parents

At the core of the School's mission is the belief that parents are the primary educators of their children. The education of a person is not simply or exclusively the teaching of a series of facts and numbers—that's only a limited part of what an education entails. The education of a person in its deepest sense is how he knows himself and the world around him; how he grows in virtue; and how he, ultimately, reaches his full potential. Jacques Maritain also said that the aim of education, "is to guide man in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person—armed with knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtues—while at the same time conveying to him

the spiritual heritage of the nation and the civilization in which he is involved” (*Education at the Crossroads*, p. 10). In the full sense of the word *education*, it is obvious that the role of parents is crucial, and the role of the mentor, although important, only secondary.

The mentor’s secondary role complements the parents’ own because the mentor gets to know the boys in a different context: the school environment. There the mentor sees his mentee interact with his peers and with his teachers. He will see the student in class and on the playing fields. The mentor also will have regular conversations with the mentee. These conversations give the mentor a great opportunity to know his mentee well: What are his talents? What are his shortcomings? What motivates him and discourages him? How does he relate with his parents and siblings?

It is the partnership between the mentor and the parents that makes mentoring successful. The mentee should be able to recognize that the message he hears at home is similar to the one he hears from his mentor. The parents and the mentor work in a *partnership for the good*.

iii) The Importance of Mentoring

The mentoring program can have a tremendous impact on a student. The reason is simple: the individualized attention each student receives. This focused approach allows for the advice to be tailored to the specific academic and personal needs of the mentee.

At times, one may think that the School’s curriculum, religion and ethics classes, chapel periods, and assemblies are enough for the formation of the students. But The Heights would find it hard to attain its mission if it relied only on these means. Each student is different. Each student possesses an individual soul and a unique character. He needs to be guided and helped in the context of his particular family situation, academic and athletic abilities, and personal development.

Educators everywhere support this emphasis on personal attention. For example, *Independent School Management*, one of the leading voices in independent school education and research efforts offers: “Advisory [i.e., Mentoring] must attend to the individual student; otherwise, a group [mentoring] program constitutes more classes that students take... Each student must perceive that his mentor plays a particular role for him as an individual, not just a part of a group” (*Mission-Based Advisory*, 2010, p. 17).

The authors of *Mission-Based Advisory* also list, among others, the following positive outcomes of an individual mentoring program (see pgs. 16-17, *slightly modified to reflect a boy’s school reality*):

- Foster individual development, academically and personally, so that each student can maximize his experience at school;
- Ensure that each student perceives an environment of predictability and support and that both students and parents perceive a genuinely caring environment;
- Enlist students’ participation in athletic teams, performing arts, clubs and other extracurricular activities and, in so doing, enhance students’ sense of belonging to the school community;

- Serve as the primary “delivery system” for education on topics of importance to the boys (e.g., family relationships, friendships, study skills, drugs and alcohol, etc.);
- Personalize students’ school experiences; provide a safety net so that no student with emerging problems goes unnoticed;
- Enhance fulfillment of the broad school mission.

3) **Practical Considerations**

i) Number and Duration of Meetings

The mentor meets with each mentee at least once a month. The meeting is one-on-one where the mentor can give his full attention to the mentee. Accidental conversations in the hallway, quick check ups, group meals, sideline chitchat, etc., although encouraged and quite effective at times, do not take the place of a mentoring meeting. Although a meeting may be longer, especially at the beginning of the year, fifteen minutes will quite often be sufficient. For lower school students, five-to-ten minutes will be in most cases sufficient.

The emphasis on one-on-one is essential to mentoring. “A program that consists of group only (i.e., has no one-on-one dimension) is not a true advisory program” (*Mission-Based Advisory*, p. 3).

One meeting per month is the minimum required. However, due to special academic, social or family situations, a student may need two meetings per month or even a weekly conversation with the mentor. As the mentor gets to know the student better, he will be able to assess whether these extra meetings are necessary.

At the end of each month, the mentor enters the date of each one of his meetings with his mentees in the *Mentoring Form* provided by the head of mentoring. Diligent bookkeeping not only helps mentors track their work but also helps the School track the regularity and frequency of mentor/mentee meetings. At any given point in the year, the School knows how often a student has met with his mentor.

ii) The Mentor as Advocate

In his role as mentor, the mentor plays a key part in the development of the student. As mentor, he will seek advice from and share information with other members of the School community for two key reasons: first, to gain a better understanding of the mentee and, second, to formulate appropriate goals for the student. These conversations, of course, always respect the mentee’s privacy (See *Section 7, Guidelines for Student Privacy*). Among others, here are some key relationships:

- *With Parents:* As mentioned earlier, this is a partnership that needs to be established early on. Although there is only one required mentor/parent conference in the academic year, the mentor is encouraged to have regular contact with the parents—and the parents are encouraged to seek out their son’s mentor. These interactions may take the form of a quick

phone call, a conversation while watching a game or attending a musical performance, etc. Ideally, the mentor should have deliberate, purpose-driven conversations with parents and not simply reactive ones.

- *With Faculty Members:* Quite often the mentor may want to discuss his mentee's academic performance with his teachers. How is he in class? Does he turn in his homework? How does he relate with his classmates? What could I reinforce as a mentor? These conversations are carried out with professionalism and a positive tone.
- *With Administrators:* Two areas where the mentor can rely on an administrator are disciplinary and academic issues. First, it is important that mentoring not be perceived as a way to discipline students. Discipline is the prerogative of the individual teacher and, if needed, of the administrator in charge of student discipline. Students should always see their mentors as mentors, not disciplinarians. They should feel they could go to their mentor without fear—someone they can turn to when the going gets tough. Therefore, when disciplinary issues arise, mentors should let an administrator handle the situation.

It is important, however, for the mentor to be aware of any disciplinary issue his mentee may have, for it may be a great occasion for giving helpful advice.

Besides disciplinary issues, mentors can rely on administrators, especially the heads of schools, with issues having to do with course scheduling and course requirements. This is particularly true for upper classmen as they begin to have more options, or they want to add or drop a class. The mentor may help his mentee and the school head determine what course selection would be best for him (of course, parents have the crucial and final voice).

- *With Coaches:* At times the mentor may want to talk to the mentee's coaches. Perhaps the mentor has noticed how his mentee relates to the other players on his team, or has exhibited certain unsportsmanlike conduct during games. The mentor may talk to the coach and try to work with him in helping the boy grow in this or that virtue. The coach, of course, may also seek the mentor's help in his job with a particular player.
- *With the Head of Mentoring:* The mentor's relationship with the head of mentoring has a special quality because the head of mentoring is a member of the School's administration. It is through this link that the School supervises, supports, and fosters the mentoring program. The quarterly meeting with the head of mentoring may be seen as a chance for the professional development of the mentor. The head of mentoring will have a good sense of the School and its mission, and also ideas on how to effectively communicate that mission to the boys and to the parents.

iii) The Mentor/Parent Conference

The purpose of the mentor/parent conference is to unite the efforts of the parents and the School in forming the mentee. The conference seeks to put parents and mentor on the same page regarding the

academic and personal development of the mentee. It is meant to be a friendly conversation in which parents and mentor, who mutually want what is best for the student, can find ways to help him reach his potential.

For that reason, the conversation is usually centered on the concerns and expectations the parents may have regarding their son. At the same time, the mentor's input is very important since he knows the student in a different context from the parents.

Key ideas:

Each conference between parents and mentor requires preparation. As a result, the mentor knows where the boy stands academically and personally. The mentor is up to date with his mentee's grades and his overall performance in class and on the fields. Regular conversations with teachers and coaches help the mentor have a good grasp of the mentee's development. Some areas the mentor should be familiar with are:

- Courses
- Grades
- Talents
- Friendships
- Areas for character growth
- Shortcomings
- Attitude towards school work
- Athletic pursuits

Mentors may bring their mentoring binder to the meeting in order to be well versed and able to take notes. The mentor needs to show in a natural way that he knows his mentee, while at the same time recognizing that parents know him best. Therefore, listening is key.

Although the bulk of the conference may center on the mentee's academic performance, it is important not to let that subject overtake the whole conference. The conversation should also touch on character issues, which are regularly discussed during the mentor/mentee conferences.

For example, topics may include:

- Study habits
- Use of time on weeknights
- Use of time on weekends
- Household chores
- Relationship with parents
- Relationship with siblings
- Main virtues
- Defects and shortcomings

- Age-appropriate issues
- Screen time: TV, smartphones, internet use, videogames
- Friendships

In the course of the conversation, both mentor and parents should avoid drawing comparisons between the son and his siblings and/or classmates.

Final thoughts:

The tone of the conference should be warm, open, positive, respectful, and helpful. To this end, during the conference parents and mentor should:

- Avoid negative criticism of other teachers/mentors;
- Direct parents to the appropriate Head of School when unsure how to respond;
- Discuss only the mentee in question, avoiding negative comments about other students;
- Give each conference adequate time; if more time is needed and there are other parents waiting, mentors should reschedule a meeting for a later time;
- Be open and understanding about the advice given;
- Ensure that, whenever possible, both parents are present at the conference.

4) **Content of Mentoring**

i) Nature and Scope of Advice Given

Mentoring seeks to help each boy in the areas suggested in the mission of the School: intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual. Before explaining each area in detail, there are some general considerations worth discussing.

The conversation between the mentor and the mentee should have a relaxed tone—an exchange among friends. It should have the tenor of a friendship of an older brother with a younger one, or a father with a son.

There are certain familiar subjects that should be brought up regularly:

- School Work
 - Grades
 - Reasons for good/bad grades
 - Study habits
 - Anticipating possible problems
 - Reading for pleasure

- Temperament and Personality
 - General temperament: extrovert, introvert, calm, nervous, etc.
 - Strengths and weaknesses
 - Self-knowledge
 - Interests/hobbies
 - Friendships
 - Human refinement: language/dress/personal grooming

- Family Life
 - Charity to parents and siblings
 - Use of time
 - Obedience to parents
 - Responsibilities at home: chores; spirit of service; example to younger siblings

- Moral Formation and Character
 - Learning to choose the good
 - Seeking truth
 - Use of technology
 - Respect for women: mothers, sisters, friends
 - Self-dominion
 - Courage to do and say the right thing

- Life of Faith
 - Taking advantage of the spiritual activities at school
 - Serving others
 - Learning to pray

- Aspirations: What are the mentee's short-term and long-term goals?

- Worries and Concerns

ii) The Mentor/Mentee Conversation

The mentor should always make the mentor/mentee conversations an occasion for the mentee to feel he is understood. It is not the time for reprimands or “guilt trips,” but quite the opposite. The mentor tries to create an environment where the young person opens up because he feels he is being heard. This, of course, is particularly important for older students as they are trying to exert their own personalities and independence.

The mentee should know from the beginning that this conversation is not a time to complain about his parents or teachers. The mentor will listen and help the student understand why his parents want this or that or why his teacher gave a particular assignment.

5) **Mentor Responsibilities**

The overall responsibility of the mentor is to personalize a Heights education for his mentee. As a result, the mentor seeks to help parents in developing their son into a Heights man: a professionally competent, morally upright man of faith. Specifically, the mentor should:

- Have at least one face-to-face conference per year with the parents of each mentee;
- Meet one-on-one, at least once per month, with each mentee;
- Record and submit the date of each monthly one-on-one meeting to the head of mentoring;
- Have a quarterly meeting with the head of mentoring.

6) **Characteristics of the Mentor**

The two most important characteristics of the mentor are his understanding of and agreement with the mission of the School and his understanding of and sincere concern for his mentees.

Since the goal of mentoring is to individualize the School's mission for each student, the mentor strives to live it himself.

The understanding and knowledge the mentor has of his mentee ensures his objectivity when looking at the student's strengths and weaknesses, as well as subjectively feeling empathy for the mentee and fulfilling the role of mentor and coach.

The mentor should also try to work on the following traits:

- Demonstrate sincere interest in mentoring boys
- Exhibit empathy towards each mentee
- Have a good rapport with mentee and his parents
- Show a real interest for the problems and life of mentee
- Know how to listen and be patient
- Offer encouragement and help motivate
- Give good example, trying to live what he teaches
- Respect the privacy and good name of mentee
- Know how to be demanding on mentees
- Help mentees set goals for themselves
- Demonstrate patience and perseverance
- Be positive with mentees

7) **Guidelines for Student Privacy**

i) Not a Closed Circuit

The conversation between the mentor and the mentee is confidential. In some cases, however—and *only* for the benefit of the mentee—the mentor may seek advice from the head of mentoring or the headmaster. In those cases, the mentor should avoid using the mentee's name.

Topics normally dealt with in mentoring are ones that the mentor could address even if the parents were present. These subjects may include issues such as order in the mentee's room; suggestions for improved use of time; the appropriateness of playing two varsity sports; or playing a second musical instrument. This is particularly true for lower school students and in most cases, with middle school students. Respect for the privacy of each student should be kept in mind.

As the mentee gets older, the issues brought up in mentoring change. A student may discuss difficulties in dealing with his parents or seeking greater independence from them. Another student may discuss doubts of faith or difficulties with the use of the internet. It is here that the student's right for privacy begins and should be respected.

Teenagers quite naturally seek independence from their parents, and yet it is precisely at this time when they need advice most. The mentor can be the person the mentee confides in for guidance. Keeping that line of communication open and building a sense of trust between mentor and mentee is crucial for a good mentor/mentee relationship.

In a few instances, and *only* for the benefit of the mentee, the mentor may determine that a certain issue needs to be discussed with the boy's parents. In this case, out of respect for the privacy of the mentee, the mentor will first encourage the student to discuss the matter directly with his parents. Quite naturally, he may find it very difficult and not be willing to do it. The mentor will then try to help the mentee by seeking his consent in disclosing that information himself. If the mentee still declines his consent, then the mentor will respect the mentee's decision.

In extreme cases, however, where the mentee brings up an issue that poses a significant threat to himself or to some other person either because of its nature or immediacy—such as suicidal thoughts—the mentor will communicate with the head of mentoring and the parents immediately, without the need for the mentee's consent. Yet, even in these cases, the mentor will notify the mentee of his intent to disclose that information.

Furthermore, if a mentee were to mention any incident(s) of his being subjected to physical, psychological or sexual abuse, or even were a mentor simply to have reason to believe that the mentee has been or is being subjected to such abuse, the mentor is mandated by law to report the abuse to state authorities. In such instances, it is recommended that the mentor first communicate to the school's administration his decision to file a mandatory report, but doing so is not strictly necessary.

When in doubt, the mentor should always seek the advice of the head of mentoring.

The mentor must respect the mentee's privacy when meeting with the parents. In the vast majority of cases, the topics discussed between the mentor and the mentee will deal with issues already familiar to the parents. It is only when dealing with more sensitive issues that the mentor should be cognizant of the mentee's need for privacy and mindful of the guidelines indicated above.

ii) Recordkeeping and Written Communication

The mentor may want to keep a record of his meetings with his mentee in order to make future meetings more productive. However, the mentor should always be aware of the need to respect the good name of the mentee as well as his privacy.

“There may have been a time when casual notes about a student could be kept by a mentor... Times have changed, and this practice may no longer be prudent. And now is certainly the time when much communication about mentees is exchanged electronically. This e-communication is quick and easy and tends not to ‘feel like’ recordkeeping” (*Mission-Based Advisory*, 2010, p. 89).

Mentors should not communicate issues brought up in mentoring with parents by email. Phone conversations or face-to-face meetings should be the normal forums for discussion.

A good rule of thumb: a mentor should never write anything (either by hand or electronically) about a mentee that he would not like to see printed on the front page of the *Washington Post*.

However, it is often useful and necessary to have some type of written record about each mentee. This recordkeeping can help the mentor in his efforts to mentor his mentees. So, what may be written down?

- Family make-up: siblings, etc.
- Chores at home
- Weekend schedule
- Hobbies and interests
- Best friends
- Sports played
- Favorite/least favorite subjects
- Grades
- Extracurricular activities
- Books he likes to read
- Monthly goals set during mentoring

This is not an exhaustive list. The guiding principle when recording personal information about the mentee should be never to write anything negative or of moral content. Mentors should not write down or keep track of matters having to do with the student's moral life: defects, shortcomings or

struggles. These issues should, of course, be brought up in meetings, but always in the context of a one-on-one conversation.



The Mentoring Program is indeed the trademark of The Heights School. Every mentor, through the personal attention he gives his mentees, demonstrates his dedication and commitment to the formation and development of every student who walks the halls of The Heights. The mentor truly seeks, as the School's mission states, *to assist parents in the intellectual, moral, physical, and spiritual education of their sons.*