

Psychology

# Peer support and mentoring systems in schools

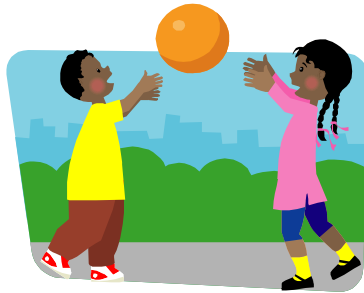
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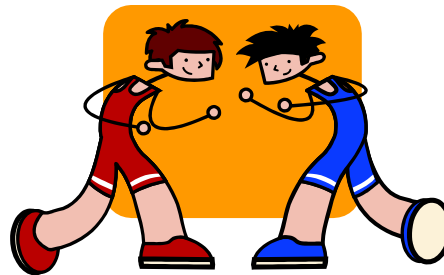
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# What is peer support?

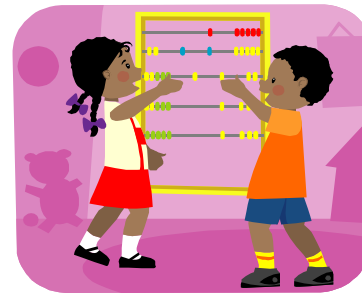
“a range of activities and systems within which people’s potential to be helpful to one another can be fostered through appropriate training.” — Cowie & Smith (2010)



Befriending



Mediation



Mentoring

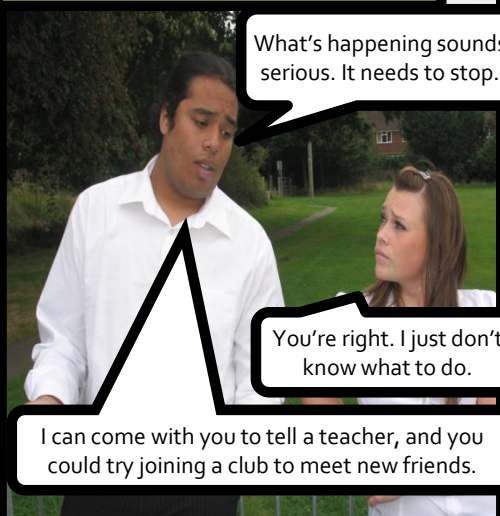
# Use of peer support and mentoring

- Houlston, Smith & Jessel (2009): estimated 62% UK schools
  - Primary schools - befriending and mediation
  - Secondary schools - mentoring and befriending
  - Aim to benefit: Target pupils; Peer supporters; Whole school
  
- Interventions
  - Academic support
  - Mental health and social-emotional support e.g. bullying
  - Part of systemic approaches

Sarah's old friends were sending her threatening text messages...



She went to see a Peer Supporter, a pupil who was trained to help...



I can come with you to tell a teacher, and you could try joining a club to meet new friends.



# Pathways to impact: target pupils

## Pupil users

Directly access help – one-off or sustained support

May be helped to access support from adults

Positive interactions with peers

## Peer supporters

Experience of providing help

Training and CV experience

Skills development

Positive interactions with peers and staff

E.g. Cowie et al., 2002; Ellis et al., 2009; Smith & Watson, 2004

# Pathways to impact: whole school

## School climate

Promote positive citizenship

Improve pupil-pupil and pupil-staff relationships

Change school values

Prevent problems escalating

## Bullying

Emotional support for victims

Direct intervention – peer mediators or staff

Fostering caring and safer school environment

## Student users:

- Majority report scheme helpful
- Largely self-report evidence but advances in certain domains

## Peer supporters:

- Self-report increased social skills
- Measured advances in social/emotional development

## Whole school climate:

- Teachers and pupils report safer climate
- Little evidence bullying is reduced

E.g. Cowie et al., 2002; Ellis et al., 2009; Houlston & Smith, 2009; Leung et al., 2013; Menesini et al., 2012; Salmivalli, 2001; Smith & Watson, 2004

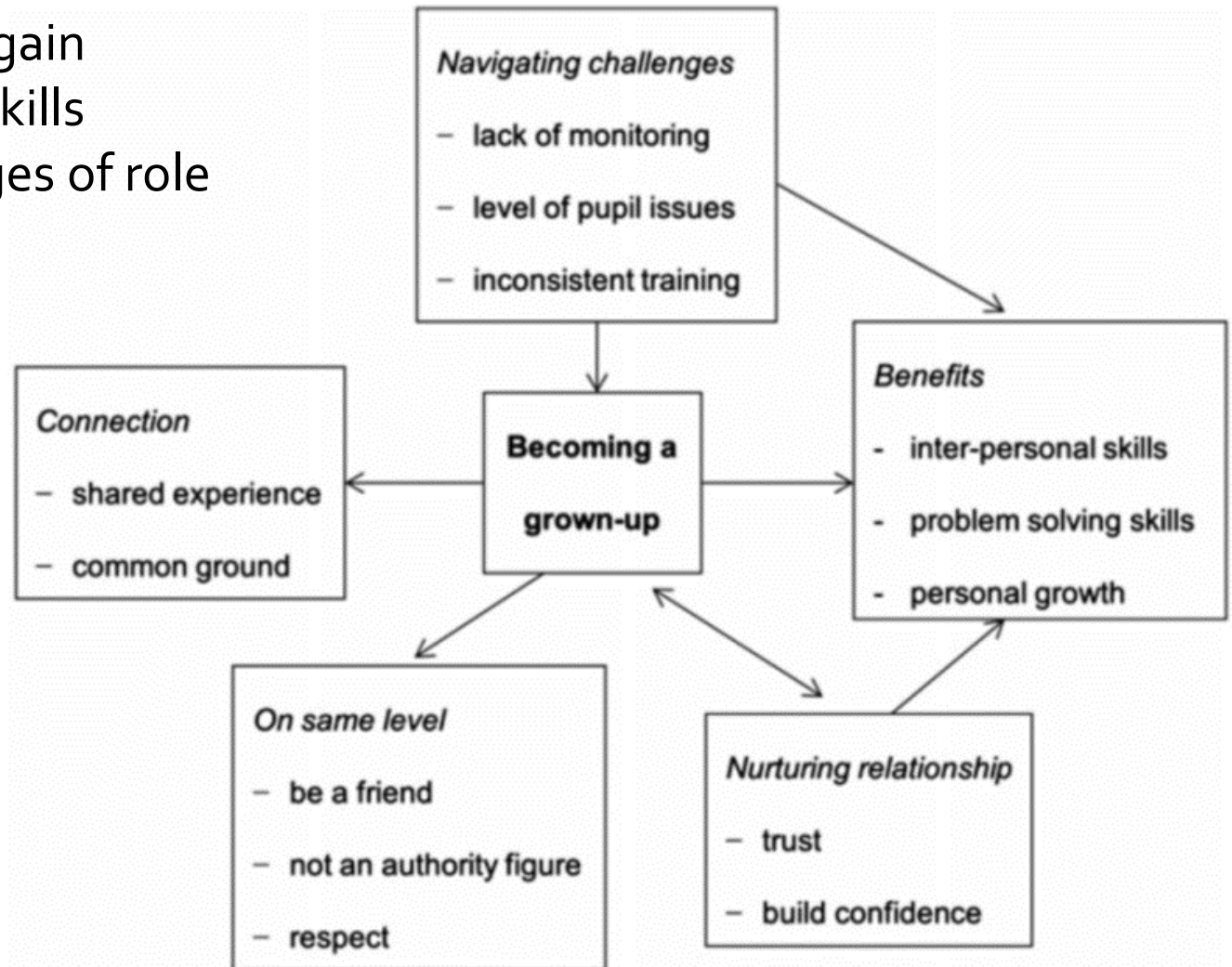
The background of the slide is a repeating teal geometric pattern. The pattern consists of interlocking lines that form a grid of diamond shapes. At the center of each diamond is a small, stylized floral or starburst motif. The overall effect is a dense, textured, and symmetrical design.

# Being a peer mentor



# Peer mentoring: thematic analysis

- Peer supporters gain experience and skills through challenges of role



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# Developing a peer support system

# Longitudinal case studies



## Two schools developing peer listening systems

- School 1: 18 months; School 2: 6 months
- Pastoral care and tackle bullying
- Year 10 supporters
- Year 7, 8 and 9 target users



## Pupil questionnaires

(possible sample of c.360 target pupils)

- Peer support knowledge, use, and attitudes (Smith&Watson, 2004)
- Bullying experiences (ABA)
- School climate perceptions (ABA)
- School 2: Peer Supporters (Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale; SDQ; modified Conflict Tactics Scale)

## Qualitative

(Smith&Watson, 2004)

- Peer supporters: focus groups
- Pupil user/non-user: interviews
- Staff co-ordinators: interviews
- Observation (informal)

## Student users

- Low use in both schools
- Helpful for vulnerable pupils
- c.50% pupils thought was a good idea

## Peer supporters

- Self-reported gains
  - Communication skills, peer relationships, CV experience

## Whole school climate

- Little impact on whole school environment
- Bullying reduced in 1 school

# Implementation factors

## School One

- Low use and peer supporter frustration
- Lack of management response
- Hidden peer listening room
- Gender imbalance

## School Two

- Low use and peer supporter frustration
- Listening -> mentoring
- Unclear mentee selection
- Lack of confidentiality

- Low use -> need for adaptation
  - Need for match between aims, needs, and design
- Scope for impact limited by practical issues
  - Dedicated co-ordinators but need for management support



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Supporting effective peer support

# Questions to consider

- Peer support systems as **interventions**
  - What are the target outcome(s)?
  - How might peer support achieve change(s)
  - How will you know if it is successful?
- Identify **practical factors**
  - Where and when?
  - Who will be the mentors? Who would benefit from the role?
- **Monitoring and adaptation**
  - How will peer mentors be supervised?
  - How will you know if it is meeting pupil needs?

# Thank you for listening

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Key references:

James, A. I., Smith, P. K., & Radford, L. (2014). Becoming grown-ups: a qualitative study of the experiences of peer mentors. *Pastoral Care in Education*. 32 (2), 104-115.

Cowie, H. & James, A. I. (2016). Peer support in England, Japan and South Korea. In: Smith, P. K., Kwak, K. & Toda, Y. (Eds.) *School Bullying in Different Cultures – Eastern and Western Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press.