



The role of a digital mentor

Digital mentors have the highly valuable role of supporting people to learn new digital skills. Working in partnership with the learner, a digital mentor listens for and creates **teachable moments**.

Their overall aim is to help learners feel more confident when using digital technology so they can be happier, healthier and empowered. Remember you don't need to be an IT expert but, like most roles there are a few key points you will need to keep in mind.



What is a teachable moment?

A teachable moment is one of those golden moments in time, whereby an unplanned teaching occasion presents itself. You will recognise this moment by the learners' increased interest, the questions they ask and their desire to learn more about the topic.

Inspire

Think about who inspired you when you were learning something new and try to do the same.

Learners will feel more motivated when their digital mentor is inspiring, engaging and fun to work with. Plus, learners are able to better recall and apply the information they have learnt when they have had a positive experience in learning it.

Ask your learners, "How do you like to learn new things?" and use that information to create different ways for your learner to learn. Some may like to read information in a factsheet, while others may want to jump right in and start doing it. Being inspirational also means you need to be flexible in your teaching approach.

Motivate

Get to know your learners.

Talk to them one on one and discover what it is they hope to achieve. Ask your learners open-ended questions about their current digital ability and interests and use those topics to motivate them to get online.

Use this golden opportunity to create a teachable moment, tailoring your support to help them achieve what they have chosen to learn, at their own pace. With learners having a wide range of interests, you'll be able to expand your own knowledge and might even pick up some new skills too!

Increase confidence

Take the opportunity to provide regular praise and feedback to your learners, especially when they have mastered a new skill.

This helps to build their confidence and their desire to keep learning. To keep your learners motivated and challenged, break learning tasks into smaller chunks so it does not seem overwhelming.

Use their existing digital skills as building blocks for future learning. This approach reinforces what they already know plus boosts their confidence when it is applied in a new way.

Build trust

It pays to invest in creating trusting relationships with your learners.

Though it can sometimes be a really slow process, building trust with your learners is a must for being a successful digital mentor and creating better outcomes for everyone.

One way you can do this is by maintaining the confidentiality of your learners. Do not discuss learners' concerns or personal matters with others. If you do, this is considered a breach in trust. As a result, your learners may no longer feel safe or comfortable in that type of learning environment and choose not to return to your sessions.

Using your active listening skills is another great way of creating trust. Learners will feel valued and heard when you use skills such as listening, paraphrasing, asking additional questions, and by showing empathy.

Boundaries

As a digital mentor you will need to establish clear boundaries which sets out the ground rules of your relationship with your learners.

Learners prefer consistency and knowing what to expect. Clear boundaries help everyone to feel safe, confident and supported whilst they are learning.

Take the time to discuss boundaries and expectations with your learners when you first meet with them. This is a very useful habit to adopt as a digital mentor, as you can then refer back to that discussion if the learner tries to push the boundaries at a later date.



TOP TIP: When setting boundaries with learners, remind them that sessions are about learning, and are not the place for discussing personal issues.

Be impartial

Using a non-discriminatory and non-judgemental approach to your digital skills sessions will help to create a positive and safe learning environment.

Thinking about what you want to say and choosing your words carefully when facilitating group sessions or when providing feedback will help you to remain impartial and gain the respect of your learners.

Being mindful of your tone of voice and body language is just as important as the words you say. All three of these aspects - word choice, tone of voice, and body language - need to be consistent for the right message to be delivered.

Policies and procedures

Make sure you always follow workplace policies and procedures.

Your role as a digital mentor may be one of many roles you hold within your workplace. Always understand and follow your workplace policies and procedures to ensure you are doing the right thing and your learners remain safe.

If you work across a number of different organisations, then be sure you are up to date with each organisation's respective policies and procedures.



Remember!

- Be as inspiring, engaging and as creative as you can possibly be.
- Learners will thrive on your enthusiasm.
- A sign of a job well done is when your learners can do it for themselves!