

Peer tutor tip sheet

Congratulations on deciding to be a volunteer tutor!
Here's some information and helpful hints to get you started.



Whether you are a university student volunteering as part of your course, or a secondary school student (peer tutor) you can be a great resource for younger school-aged students but did you know that being a volunteer tutor is good for you? There are many benefits of volunteering, in fact, you will learn as much as the students you work with. You'll practice leadership skills and increase your understanding of teaching and learning. Working in a multicultural environment, you'll be responding to the specific needs of learners who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). Volunteer tutors need to be flexible and creative to find the best approach to help each individual student. So you will develop some really useful skills to help with your course or put on your résumé. At the same time, you will be contributing to your community.

Of course, having you as a peer tutor is great for the students too! There's a lot of evidence that peer tutoring helps students both academically and socially. Students really appreciate having a friendly, approachable person to help them with their work. For newly arrived students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, you are a positive role model, supporting them to understand and feel part of the Australian community. As someone who is still at school or university, you have an up-to-date knowledge of educational requirements. Students may find it easier to ask questions of you than they would an older tutor or teacher.

What happens in a Learning Support Program (homework club)?

Learning support programs provide learning opportunities - in areas such as literacy, numeracy, study skills and homework - in a supportive environment outside the classroom. They are set up to provide extra help for primary and secondary school children, particularly those who have experienced challenges in their education journey. Many of the children who attend homework clubs are from refugee backgrounds and speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). Programs are run by a coordinator, but usually depend on volunteers to tutor the children. They provide healthy snacks, have an emphasis on fun activities and may incorporate active games into the program. Some programs involve students' families too.

What's the difference between a tutor and a teacher?

Being a peer tutor is quite different from being a teacher. As a tutor, you are not required to work to a curriculum, plan teaching sessions or assess the students' work. Volunteer tutors don't teach new information or skills, they support students with the work they have been given by their teachers. Your role is to provide encouragement and help them to work through the process to find answers. You are not on your own, the coordinator is there to guide and support you.

What will I be doing?

You might be working one-to-one with a student, or with a small group. As a volunteer tutor you may help students with homework tasks, reading and other skills. A student might want specific help with a homework task, or to go over something from class they haven't understood.

A tutor provides expertise, experience and encouragement. They do not provide 'answers', instead they assist in problem solving and getting answers through questioning.

www.peertutoringresource.org/



Role and responsibilities

As a peer tutor you need to be reliable and friendly. This makes a big difference to the students and over time they will build up confidence and trust in you. Communication is a really important part of being a tutor. Listen to the students. What are their skills and interests, what do they love talking about or doing? Always respect the values, beliefs and culture of the students you work with.

You'll be supporting students to reach the goals identified by them, the coordinator or the school. It will be part of your role to report on their progress and voice any issues or concerns with the coordinator. When working with a student, make sure you give plenty of encouragement and positive feedback. If you're asking a question, allow plenty of time for them to respond. If you're responding to an incorrect answer, explain and prompt without being critical. Provide more opportunities for them to understand and get the correct answer.

Being a volunteer tutor is different from being a friend, so you need to be aware of the boundaries: for instance, don't arrange to meet students outside homework club, become a friend on social media, or lend money. Respect confidentiality, but if you have concerns about a student's wellbeing, talk about it with the coordinator.

Support and training for tutors

If you are involved in a peer tutoring program, your school or university will have systems in place to support you. Your homework club will have an induction process to introduce you to the program. Don't be afraid to ask questions and seek help if you feel unsure. Your coordinator and other more experienced volunteers may be able to help.

CMY also offers free training for peer tutors. This is a great thing to do in your first few weeks. Training can be run at the homework club, school or university. The training includes: being a culturally responsive tutor, refugee journeys into Victorian schools, creating a safe and supportive environment in a homework club, and practical strategies for tutors. Check out the CMY website too, for a range of tip sheets and videos for homework club tutors.

www.cmy.net.au/homework-club-resources

Managing your tutoring commitments as well as studying can sometimes be a challenge, especially around exam times. So try to keep your life 'in balance' and communicate with your school/ university and the coordinator about how things are going for you.

Here are some tips from peer tutors...*

What do peer tutors need to know?

"To be patient, cooperative and friendly."

"The children are so friendly! There's no need to be scared/ nervous".

"Kids will get to know you and you will build a bond."

What are the best things about being a peer tutor?

"The kids are really appreciative, willing to learn- makes you feel good."

"Knowing that you're helping someone."

"You build bonds with teachers and students."

Best advice for new peer tutors?

"Be patient and help to your best ability, also don't be scared to ask for help."

"Enjoy it, the kids want to have fun and learn. Be friendly and mix, moving around to help others."

"Don't be scared to approach kids. Have fun with the kids."

*Thanks to Gleneagle Secondary College peer tutors and Mossgiel Primary School homework club