

Creating a Successful Mentoring Partnership

Adapted from HRSA Learning Institute's
"Mentoring Now" Program Orientation Guide



For mentors, the relationship is about supporting your mentee. The focus is on what your mentee needs.

SECTION I: What is Mentoring, Why It's Important and Benefits

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a developmental partnership through which an individual shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else.

Why is Mentoring Important to the Corps?

- Helps prepare and retain the next generation of clinicians
- Improves leadership skills and develops new leaders
- Enhances career development
- Provides clinicians in training with additional support and guidance as they navigate through the program
- Promotes diversity
- Improves technical knowledge

Benefits for Mentees

- Build new skills
- Sounding board
- Valuable direction and insight
- Bridge gaps in professional development
- Understanding of strengths and opportunities for improvement
- Different perspective

Benefits of Mentoring

- Contribute to the individual and the program, pass on successes
- Practice interpersonal skills
- Enhance status
- Expand horizons, extend your network, gain a broader perspective
- Opportunity to reflect on your current practice

SECTION II: Four Essential Components of a Mentoring Partnership

1. Inquire—Active listening: listen to what your partner is saying

- **For Mentor:** Remember that the relationship is about supporting your mentee. The focus is on what the mentee needs.
- **For Mentee:** Time spent with your mentor is valuable for both of you and should not be wasted. Don't hesitate to ask questions. Listen. Ask for clarification.



One important value of the mentoring relationship is when mentors can build confidence in their mentees so they will be inspired to take chances, risk failure, and step out of their comfort zone.

2. Share—*It is critical to establish a safe environment to share information and past experiences.*

— **For Mentor and Mentee:** The mentor needs to know what's going on in the mentee's career and life in order to help the mentee learn and grow.

3. Encourage—*One of the values of the mentoring relationship is the confidence mentors can inspire in their mentees to take chances, risk failure, and step out of comfort zones.*

— **For Mentor:** Sharing mistakes shows that it's okay to make them, and that they are part of growth and development. Mentors can encourage mentees to expand their network, meet new people, and explore different career opportunities.

4. Care—*Caring takes the mentoring relationship to a level where there is a sense of mutual responsibility that is essential.*

— **For Mentor:** Allocating time to the relationship, honoring confidentiality, disclosing information, empathizing with challenges, sharing resources and contacts, and keeping commitments demonstrate caring.

— **For Mentee:** Allocating time to the relationship, honoring confidentiality, disclosing information, listening with respect, helping when asked/needed demonstrate caring.

SECTION III: Mentee and Mentor Roles

Characteristics of an Excellent Mentee

- **Eager to Learn:** New skills and abilities, or a desire to further develop existing skills and abilities
- **Team Player:** Welcomes the opportunity to interact with others as part of their development; understands the importance of cooperating and communicating with others
- **Patient:** Willing to put time and effort into the mentoring relationship; realistic enough to know career advancement and development don't happen overnight
- **Risk Taker:** Eager to move beyond tasks that he/she has mastered and accept new and more challenging experiences
- **Positive Attitude:** An optimistic mentee is more likely to tackle difficulties
- **Self-Motivator:** Takes the lead in evaluating his/her strengths and weaknesses; sets goals for self
- **Appreciative:** Of their mentor's time, follows through on commitments

Roles and Responsibilities of a Mentee

- **Know** self, goals, and what you are seeking
- **Communicate** needs and expectations to mentor, as they evolve and change
- **Learn** and grow, as an individual and as a partner in the relationship. Proactive, flexible, open to change, and able to accept feedback
- **Drive** the relationship
- **Collaborate** with the mentor to identify skill and competency strengths and weaknesses
- **Prepare** for each mentoring session (list of questions, completed the necessary self-assessments)





It is important to discuss and agree on the appropriate boundaries of the mentoring relationship between you and your partner early on. When boundaries are too loose, they may be misinterpreted, and when they are too rigid, they can inhibit the relationship.

Characteristics of an Excellent Mentor

- **Positive:** Communicates hope and optimism, sense of humor
- **Empathetic:** Ability to identify with the mentee, willing to disclose similar situations from their past
- **Open-Minded:** Willing to listen and not be judgmental or offended when mentee chooses a different solution
- **Consistent:** Reliable source of information, communication, and availability
- **Patient:** Willing to work with the mentee during the development process and understand it will not happen overnight
- **Honest and Trustworthy:** Be able to provide honest, accurate, appropriate feedback, and good ethical judgment

Roles and Responsibilities of a Mentor

- **Advise** in developing and achieving professional goals, on complex situations or problems, and offer observations
- **Guide** in learning about, and functioning successfully within, an organization
- **Model** professional behavior and integrity
- **Share** own experiences (successes and failures) and offer insights
- **Support** and council, provide developmental advice and feedback
- **Time** to take on a mentee and be available upon request from mentee
- **Challenge** through setting high standards, setting tasks, and offering additional points of view
- **Vision** with mentee, helping mentees to see a different reality

SECTION IV: Establishing Relationship Boundaries

While it may feel strange to do at the beginning, it is important to discuss and agree on the appropriate boundaries of the mentoring relationship between you and your partner. When boundaries are too loose, they may be misinterpreted, and when they are too rigid, they can also inhibit the relationship. If you haven't already, or have experienced misunderstanding or confusion on this issue, please take the time to cover these bases with each other in one of your initial meetings/communications.

Everyone has different boundaries, from the degree to which one is comfortable with physical proximity, to talking about personal and confidential issues, to the amount of time one wants to spend with a mentor or mentee.

Do take the time to talk frankly about what each of you expect to give and take in terms of time, as it will vary from relationship to relationship. Also, make sure that you are on the same page about how you prefer to interact.



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Questions below can guide you through this:

Both:

- Talk about your responsibilities, what you can and cannot do
- Agree on frequency, duration and intervals of meetings/communications and how this will occur
- Beyond agreeing to confidentiality, discuss what confidentiality actually means to each of you in various scenarios

Mentors:

- What kind of access does your mentee have to you? What is the limit?
- Does being a mentor mean the employee has unlimited access to you for the duration of the relationship?
- Does communicating require an appointment?
- What kind of telephone access does the mentee have to you?

Mentees:

- Avoid unhealthy dependence. For example, mentors are not expected to have definitive answers or be available 24/7
- Consider “what would I do if...” in assessing your own boundaries
- Prioritize how you wish to best utilize your mentor’s time and expertise