

ENDING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP.

This resource provides both mentors and mentees with the tools for ending a mentoring relationship for a range of reasons. This resource relates to group intentions and why it is important to develop a safe exit plan at the beginning of a mentoring relationship so if the mentorship needs to end early, both parties feel supported and comfortable doing so.

The most important advice for ending a mentoring relationship is to be direct and honest, rather than avoiding it. If you act with integrity and respect for your mentor/mentee, the communication will go well. After all, it is natural for the relationship to change or evolve for both of you as your mentoring relationship progresses. By bringing the mentoring relationship to an end, you are respecting each other's time and potentially allowing for other development and peer support opportunities.

When Should You End Your Mentoring Relationship?

Pre-set end date

- This is typically determined by the program coordinator who specifically designed the mentoring program to follow a set structure including a start and end date.

Choosing your own end date

- When the option to choose your own end date is presented, it is best to set an end date when you first start your relationship. This date can change as the relationship progresses but by identifying an end date at the beginning of the relationship, this creates structure for the rest of the mentoring relationship. Based on this date, mentor and mentee can create a plan for the duration of their mentoring relationship which is especially important for setting and achieving goals. This can be built into the mentoring program when sharing expectations and setting intentions.
- If the mentoring relationship has already started, it is best to take a look at where mentee and mentor are in the relationship and assess what progress has been made toward meeting their goals. From there mentor and mentee can work together to decide on the appropriate timeframe needed to achieve their goals.

Ending prior to the agreed upon end date

- Mentoring relationships can require a great deal of emotional and mental energy from both the mentor and mentee. Sometimes it is best for folks if they step away from the mentoring relationship to take a break and focus on replenishing their energy. Ending prior to the agreed upon end date does not always have to be an uncomfortable experience, it can also be used as a time to assess your progress and celebrate the accomplishments you've made.
- Sometimes people can underestimate the number of other commitments they made prior to the start of the mentoring relationship and realize later that they are unable to balance all their various responsibilities.
- Other times the mentoring match-up just doesn't work. Humans are complex with a range of personalities, passions and skills; two folks may end up having totally different ideas of what they can provide and what they need in a mentoring relationship. This is bound to happen at some point. As people experience changes in their life, individuals who may have supported them in the past as a mentor may not be able to support them with what they need in the present. As mentors and mentees, it is important to recognize your individual skills, interests and goals. Knowing yourself and what you need or can offer in a mentoring relationship is essential to maintaining a beneficial mentoring relationship. Knowing yourself will allow you to make decisions which may move you to end your mentoring relationship. And this is okay. You are entitled to choose what works best for you, however please remember to end your relationship in a respectful way.

Here are some signs that may indicate it is time to end your mentoring relationship.

- Conversations have become a little flat and predictable.
- Goals have been met.
- Mentor and mentee end up talking about things unrelated to mentoring when meeting.
- Mentor and Mentee haven't met in several weeks or even months.
- Goals have changed since the relationship started.
- Not sure if mentor is committed to this relationship.
- Not sure if mentee is committed to this relationship.
- Priorities have shifted.

All of these (and many more!) are signs that it might be time to say goodbye to your mentoring relationship. Keep in mind that just because you may be ending the relationship at this point doesn't mean that you can't or won't have a relationship with this mentor again in the future. And for those in more formal programs where there is an assigned end date, keep in mind that you and your mentor can continue a less formal ongoing mentoring relationship if you are both open to it and still see value in connecting.

How Should You End Your Mentoring Relationship?

Ending a Mentoring Relationship for Mentees

As a mentee, when you first began a mentoring relationship, you most likely entered the relationship with a few goals in mind. These goals have the potential to shift over time as both individuals' needs, availability and priorities can change – this is normal. The best way to approach this situation is with honesty.

While every person's situation is unique and requires individual explanation, here is a straightforward approach that may help you plan the conversation when you have decided to end the mentoring relationship:

- Schedule a meeting with your mentor to discuss your desire to end the formal mentoring relationship.
- Be as transparent as possible about how you currently view the mentoring relationship and how your situation may have changed.
- Express gratitude to the mentor for their time and contribution to your progress.
- Let your mentor know how their help and conversation has benefited you.
- Suggest a date, time and focus for the final session. You might like to celebrate all that has been accomplished and have a more informal session. You could take this time to evaluate your progress based on the goals you set at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. Or you could also ask for help in identifying next steps.
- Thank your mentor again after the end of your final session.

Ending a Mentoring Relationship for Mentors

As a mentor, you may have had the motivation, time and energy to provide another person with help. Over time availability and priorities can shift which may impact your ability to maintain your role as a mentor.

When the decision has been made to end the formal mentoring relationship, consider the following suggestions:

- Set a specific date for your last meeting and inform your supervisor or coordinator as well as your mentee ahead of time.
- Start with a positive. Recognize what you have gained from the relationship and be appreciative. At best, a formal conversation about what worked well and what could be improved is another learning opportunity for both mentor and mentee.
- Be honest, candid, and supportive - regardless of the reason for ending the mentoring relationship. Be as honest as possible in your explanation of why the relationship is ending, while being diplomatic. It may be helpful to rehearse what you plan to say ahead of time and be prepared to give specific examples.
- Tie up any loose ends - don't leave details hanging. If possible, provide alternatives or referrals.
- Keep the conversation and details of the termination confidential.



Setting Expectations & Establishing a Safe Exit Plan

To make the process of ending a mentoring relationship before the agreed upon end date as seamless as possible, it is important to establish a safe exit plan at the beginning of the relationship. When referring to a “safe exit procedure”, this essentially entails making sure that both mentor and mentee have a plan in place so if the relationship needs to end early for whatever reason, both know how to end the relationship safely and respectfully. Having this discussion later on in the relationship may be an uncomfortable conversation to have so oftentimes, people tend to avoid it. This may result in an awkward disappearing act or “ghosting” where either mentor or mentee decided to end the mentoring relationship early without making the other party aware.

To avoid this situation, it is best to create space for this conversation at the beginning of the relationship when discussing group intentions or negotiating a partnership. For example: “let’s both agree to clearly communicate if this isn’t working and we need to end this relationship”. Then the mentor and mentee can then establish a plan for if this were to happen (an example would be for the mentor to provide the mentee with their coordinator’s information so that they can end the relationship that way if need be). This also allows the person ending the relationship to have a point of contact so they can receive resources for support if needed.

Ultimately, ending a relationship early is something that can be done as your own safety, comfort and health are top priority. However, it is important to emphasize the value of communication in this professional relationship.

For more information check out our other resources titled: [“Developing a Mentoring Partnership,”](#) [“Mentoring Agreement Template,”](#) and [“Setting Group Intentions”](#).

This information was adapted from [“Is it time to say goodbye to your mentor?”](#) by Francis at MentorcliQ.