

MENTORSHIP FOUNDATIONS

- role clarification
- best practices

This is a quick introduction to the foundations of mentorship. Learn what it is and what it isn't.

What is mentorship?

Mentoring is an intentional, outcome-driven relationship designed to foster the growth and development of your mentee. Overall, the relationship is predicated on a mutual willingness to learn and share.

A good mentor

- Has strong communication skills
- Stimulates the mentee's own thinking and reflection and supports his or her personal development
- Is available and willing to connect with his or her mentee, giving appropriate guidance and feedback
- Is open-minded, flexible, empathetic, and encouraging

Mentor responsibilities

Depending on the particular goals of the mentee, as a mentor, your responsibilities may include:

- Helping to set short-term learning objectives and short-term and long term academic goals

- Recommending and/or creating specific learning or development opportunities
- Transferring substantive knowledge related to your academic field of study
- Relaying and modeling the best practices, values, and culture within your department, including challenging aspects
- Introducing the mentee to professors and staff in your department
- Recognizing strengths and areas for development

A mentor is not:

- A tutor
- A counselor
- A teacher

As a mentor, you always want to:

- Treat your mentee with respect and sensitivity
- Focus on sharing your knowledge and insight
- Support your mentee in achieving their learning goals

Advisor

- You can act as a sounding board and facilitator
- You maintain privacy and confidentiality
- You are not responsible for fixing problems directly

Protector

- You act as a safety net - someone who supports your mentee
- You ensure a safe environment
- You refer your mentee to appropriate services or staff

Developer

- You give structure and direction to the mentee
- You provide guidance based on observations during your interactions with the mentee
- You empower the mentee to handle his/her problems independently
- You should avoid telling the mentee what to do or look for quick fixes

Broker

- You can identify skills or competency gaps through an objective lens
- You can identify and facilitate development opportunities
- You can positively encourage the mentee to meet high standards for academic conduct

Clarifier

- You can provide needed support and enhance your mentee's self esteem
- You can clarify organizational values within your area of expertise (academic and/or co-curricular)

Affirmer

- You give needed support
- You exhibit empathy and understanding
- You should not discount your mentee's feelings or concerns

Best practices within mentorship relationships

Successful mentoring requires a reciprocal and comfortable relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Both parties must work together to be open minded and respectful of one another.

Mutual benefit and mutual respect

The mentoring relationship is designed to foster the growth and development of the mentee; however, the relationship should be defined from the beginning as mutually beneficial

Some goals that you may have as a mentor include: contributing to the mentee's academic development - sharing skills that are useful in your field of study and influencing the mentee's experience beyond the classroom

Confidentiality

Maintaining an environment of confidentiality is important in building trust between you and your mentee

You and your mentee are responsible for identifying and observing areas of confidentiality

Professional communication, honesty, frank feedback

Your mentee will look to you to set the tone for acceptable levels of professionalism

Building the mentoring relationship

1. Help your mentee set goals

- Setting goals with your mentee at the start of your mentoring relationship is critical as it informs the direction the relationship will take.
- If your mentee is not clear on his or her goals, setting these goals can be the topic of your first mentoring meeting. You may ask questions like:
- What made you sign up for the mentoring program?
- What specific concerns or questions do you have?
- How may I help you?
- There are resources to help you and your mentee set goals at the bottom of this document

2. Set expectations with your mentee:

- Work with your mentee to agree on how and when you will communicate with one another and renegotiate as needed
- If your mentee is unresponsive, contact you program's coordinator. Remember that students sometimes get overwhelmed

3. Share your story

- Tell your mentee about yourself (you can choose how much personal information to share; a mentor is a guide and a resource, but is something more than a friend)
- Share any challenges or mistakes you've made and present them as learning opportunities
- Share your university experiences: what did it take for you to get where you are?

4. Get to know your mentee

- Ask thoughtful questions about your mentee's interests and experience
- Ask what their University of Toronto experience is like
- Use active listening skills: reflect back what the mentee says, avoid interrupting, and show interest in your voice and body language
- Offer options rather than solutions:
- Avoid offering solutions to your mentee's concerns or challenges and instead help your mentee explore various options
- Share your own related experiences