

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY PLAN AND MAP YOUR MENTORING JOURNEY



Planning for your mentoring relationship gives you the opportunity to think about how much time you need to set aside for your mentee and how you will use that time. It is also a good time to think about expectations, boundaries and how to frame your relationship to give it the best chance for success.

All mentoring relationships are different so you don't need to feel bound by the suggestions below but it can be useful to recognise the stages and understand the opportunities and challenges presented at each stage.

THE FOUR STAGES OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

There are four main stages of a mentoring relationship and each stage has a different focus. The progress of your relationship with your mentee will tell you when you are ready to move on to the next phase – a mentoring cycle might last one year or it could last three years but there should be signs of progression in that time.

STAGE ONE:

Beginning the Match

The beginning of any relationship is often awkward, and mentoring relationships are no exception. In your first few weeks together the focus should be on getting to know each other, exploring similar interests, discussing expectations, and starting to form norms and bonds that will shape the rest of your time together. During this phase mentors should work with their mentees to set boundaries for their relationship (refer over page), such as when to meet and for how long, what kinds of activities will take place, and how to contact each other.

Communication focus

- Getting to know each other – use open-ended questions, be an active listener and let your mentee direct the conversation.
- Avoiding prescriptive communication – don't tell your mentee what to do or how to do it, guide them to come up with their own ideas and solutions.
- Sharing information.

STAGE TWO:

Challenging and Testing

Once the mentoring relationship is off the ground, it is normal for your mentee to start testing the boundaries of the relationship. Though you've spent time affirming that you appreciate and enjoy your mentee, he/she may still want to see how far your commitment really goes. Because mentees often come from situations in which adults can't always be relied on, trusting another adult is difficult for them, and they may even try to sabotage the relationship by 'acting out.'

Communication focus

- Demonstrate respect, and be consistent in your communication even if it is difficult.
- Use open ended questions and build in problem-solving techniques.
- Be prepared to raise sensitive issues; do not leave these until the end of your time together.
- Make sure to separate behaviours from who your mentee is.
- Be prepared to disclose personal feelings and experiences when appropriate.

STAGE THREE:

Working together to achieve goals – making progress

At this stage of the relationship, trust and respect have been established and you and your mentee are comfortable sharing time together and relating to one another. It is during this phase that you can use the trust you have built to encourage your mentee to think about goals or try new things. This stage is often where the real impact of mentoring happens but it can also be when fatigue sets in – keep your mentee and yourself motivated by celebrating achievements and continuing to build in opportunities to have fun together.

Communication focus

- Highlighting strengths and achievements – use praise and positive reinforcement to help your mentee recognise what they do well.
- Talking about short-term and long-term aspirations – help your mentee break these into manageable goals.
- Recognising the power of choice – let your mentee see how their own choices change outcomes; this teaches them about responsibility and gives them a sense of control.

TIME TOGETHER

TIP

There are no set guidelines for the regularity of mentor meetings but remember a lot can happen in a young person's life in a week. If you aim to talk once a week face-to-face for an hour at least you will have time to establish a rapport with your mentee and you will be able to keep up with the events and changes taking place in their life. Later in the relationship regular meetings will give you the chance to assess progress toward goals and to motivate your mentee.

STAGE FOUR:

Transition – towards closure

The transition toward the end of the relationship can be a difficult time for both your mentee and you. There may be strong feelings on both sides but it is important not to let the process of ending the relationship cancel out the positive things that have been achieved. Try to mentally prepare your mentee so they finish feeling fulfilled and positive about the experience.

If there isn't enough warning or explanation the end of the mentoring relationship can leave the young person feeling abandoned.

Communication focus

- Finding common language to sum up your feelings.
- Providing feedback that describes the growth you have observed in your mentee.
- Being prepared to listen to and address fears that your mentee may have about the end of your time together.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

Creating appropriate boundaries in your mentoring relationship is critical to its success, and it is best done in the planning stages so you can be clear about your expectations from the outset. Once you set boundaries you need to be consistent.

When you are deciding on appropriate boundaries for your mentoring relationship, think about your expectations around:

- **Frequency and forms of contact** – are you okay with your mentee phoning you at work, texting or emailing you 20 times a day, or dropping by your place of work?
- **Night-time cut-off** – up until what time of night is it acceptable for your mentee to contact you?

- **Meetings** – is it acceptable for your mentee to bring their mates. Or to smoke in front of you? Do you expect punctuality?
- **Language** – what level of bad language are you prepared to accept? Some young people are brought up in an environment where certain language is accepted but this may not be the same for you.
- **Level of involvement** – what are you prepared to do outside your mentoring sessions? What happens if your mentee phones you at 2am, drunk and asks you to pick them up from town?
- **Obligations to your mentee's parents** – your relationship is with your mentee. What are you going to do if their parents phone you and ask you for information that their young person has shared with you?

Think carefully about the boundaries you set around your relationship and consider your mentee's age and background and their own expectations. For example it may not be reasonable to suggest that they never use bad language or that they can't use text messages to confirm your weekly meetings. In order for a mentoring relationship to work your mentee must feel comfortable to express themselves so

be prepared to discuss your boundaries and ask them if they would like to set any boundaries of their own.



WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Each mentoring programme should have clear guidelines about setting appropriate boundaries. Ask for these if they have not been provided to you.