

Mentoring skills: Ending a mentoring relationship

Coming to the end of an agreed mentoring relationship

Ideally the ending of a mentoring relationship is anticipated and planned for by agreeing to a timeline in advance. If you have agreed an end date, discuss the ending of the mentoring relationship at the penultimate session. It's important for the mentor to start preparing the mentee for this and to start talking about what alternative support or resources they might access after the end of the mentoring relationship. There are several things that would be good to consider when ending a mentoring relationship:

- Reflect on the mentorship—what have you learned?
- Talk about the future—what will both of your next steps be?
What parting words and/or feedback do you have for each other?
- When thinking about possible future contact be realistic about the extent of your contact with each other. Will the mentee update the mentor on their progress?
- Thank and acknowledge each other's contributions.
- Are you both happy to close the relationship? If you would like to carry on, then set the expectations - how long will this be for and what is it you would like to gain from the continuation of the relationship.

What to do when a mentoring relationship doesn't work out

While most mentoring relationships have an anticipated ending, any number of external elements can alter the course of a mentoring relationship, from a geographic move or new professional opportunity to an illness or family crisis.

External influences aside, a mentoring relationship may come to an end simply because of a mismatch on an interpersonal level, or a miscommunication between mentor and mentee. Despite everyone's best efforts, not everyone is a good fit and that's okay.

Signs that a mentoring relationship may not be working:

- Mentee/mentor cancels appointments, fails to turn up or regularly rearranges at the last minute.
- Mentee/mentor consistently fails to make progress on actions identified in meetings.
- Mentee/mentor appears distracted in sessions or cuts sessions short.

In this case there are several steps that can be taken:

- At the end of the session, honestly review how you feel it has gone. For example, what has been useful and what could happen differently next time. If you sense hesitation on either side, be honest and say this. For example “I’m sensing that you are unsure about the next date....is that right?” Check out your hunches – often they give you a clearer picture of what is really happening than what is said.
- Avoid blame and be clear and objective with your statements as much as possible. For example you could say:” I would like to offer you some thoughts on how I’m feeling that this mentoring is going. It seems that when we meet, you come across quite distracted and don’t look very interested. Is that right? Is there anything that I could be doing differently?”
- Give factual examples e.g. “You’ve cancelled a number of appointments. Are there any other reasons for this other than what we have already discussed?”
- Have a constructive discussion about how the mentee can progress beyond the mentoring arrangement. If you are on a mentoring scheme, inform your scheme coordinator and they may be able to identify an alternative mentor.
- Consider asking the programme manager of the scheme to meet with you both and discuss possible ways forward. It may be that you need an impartial intervention that will help you get back on track.

Self-care:

- Don’t feel guilty or ashamed if the mentoring relationship isn’t working out. It’s better to acknowledge this straightaway and explore why you’re feeling this rather than carrying on regardless. You might find that this process will be a valuable learning process in itself.
- One of the many advantages of being a mentor or mentee is learning to develop an open and honest working relationship that is mutually beneficial. This can be hard work at times and that is ok.
- No one likes endings. There will be a mutual sense of loss. Acknowledge this and talk about it.
- If you want any more support or advice on ending the mentoring relationship, please contact your programme manager.