

## How to make the most of your mentorship program



*Mentoring can be a fantastic way to help mentees transition into a new environment successfully and to develop their ideas, interests and aspirations. Here are some suggestions for mentors and mentees about how to make the most of this mentoring program.*

**Meet face-to-face for the first meeting.** Try using video calls if you live far. Personal contact is important and will make conversations and setting expectations much easier.

**Connect regularly.** Mentoring is more than a one-off chat; it's an ongoing dialogue. Maintaining regular contact will help you cultivate a stronger relationship and assist in the overall mentorship process. We suggest 3-4 sessions minimum to give you time to learn more about your interests and revisit topics in depth. Mentorship programs work best when there is a consistent schedule, so try and establish a set time (i.e. once a month) when you and your mentor/mentee can meet. Between sessions you can keep in touch via email, messaging apps or other agreed upon channels. You can map out loose ideas to discuss over several sessions to set clear expectations.

**Treat it as more than a Q&A session.** This is a common pitfall. Some of you will have very specific questions and once they are answered it can be easy to see that as the end. Instead, allow yourself space to identify new topics as you go, including those mentors might suggest. They have a wealth of experience to share with you. Ask about the future.

**Design with end in mind.** Having an end goal will help provide direction to your mentorship relationship. As a mentee some questions to keep in mind include:

- What do I hope to gain from this mentorship relationship?
- What kind of outcomes will equal success for me?
- What kind of activities/conversations/etc will help me achieve my goals?

Before your first session, consider developing [REAL goals](#) to work towards with your mentor.

**Be respectful.** Mentors are volunteering their time, and mentees may be students or working, so treat each other's time as valuable. As a mentee, come prepared to direct the conversation with questions, problems or opportunities you would like to discuss. Mentors act as guides rather than experts with ready-made answers, so appreciate the explorative dimension of mentoring as a chance to offer/receive a longer-term perspective on your personal development and career. To help ensure mutual respect, mentors and mentees should agree upon expectations for the relationship early in the process.

**Ask open-ended questions.** A lot of the insight in mentoring comes from the ability to explore a topic. For example, rather than asking "should I do this?", consider asking "what do you see as the pros and cons of this choice?" or "have you ever made a choice like this and on reflection what would you have done differently?".

**This is about your personal learning rather than your work.** If you both have similar interests (ex. endangered species in Ontario), it can be tempting to spend time describing these, as opposed to chatting about your planning and reflecting and decision making. Try to focus on what you have learnt and can share from your own experiences.