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# Relationship Building

## Stages of the Mentor-Mentee Relationship



### OVERVIEW

The mentor-mentee relationship often goes through at least three major stages. It is important to understand these stages so you can be prepared to respond appropriately.

The first stage of a mentoring relationship is “Familiarizing and Testing”. The second stage is “Commitment and Work”. The last stage is “Termination and/or Closure”. Since each relationship is unique, the amount of time spent in each of these stages will vary.

### STAGE 1: FAMILIARIZING AND TESTING

In this stage, you and your mentee are trying to get to know each other. Many mentees may be uncommunicative, answering questions with shrugs or one-word answers. There may be some jousting between you and your mentee to test the limits of the relationship. This is particularly true of those mentees who really want to see how far they can “push” you or trust you to be there for them. This pushing or testing might be demonstrated by the mentee:

- Missing appointments
- Giving you the silent treatment
- Making unreasonable demands
- Having angry outbursts
- Cursing to get a reaction

In Stage 1, the tone for the relationship is set. You should:

- Be on time for meetings
- Request that your mentee be on time as a matter of respect for you
- Express realistic expectations of the mentee
- Try to make only promises that you can keep
- Provide unconditional friendship and support
- Engage in activities that the mentee suggests
- Understand that your mentee may not be comfortable just talking
- Let the mentee know how his or her behavior is affecting you

While you should respect the confidences shared by the mentee, you should counsel your mentee that information that may be detrimental to him/her should be shared with the project coordinator. Encourage the mentee to share such information with the coordinator or other proper authorities.

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## **STAGE 2: COMMITMENT AND WORK**

In Stage 2, there is a deepening of the relationship. You and your mentee may begin to spend more than the required time together and may call each other frequently on the phone. You may notice visible signs of caring for each other, such as remembering special occasions. However, it's possible that as your relationship proceeds, your mentee may exhibit behavior that is problematic. Stage 2 is a time to do the hard work that can really make a difference for your mentee in the long run.

Goal setting is particularly important during this stage. The most successful mentoring relationships involve helping mentees develop specific skills and competencies. It's important to work with your mentee in developing goals, even if you think she/he should be working on certain things. Otherwise, you will be just another adult telling him/her what to do.

## **STAGE 3: TERMINATION AND/OR CLOSURE**

It is hoped that this formal mentoring relationship will grow into a more natural one that will sustain itself without agency support. However, some relationships will not continue, and others will end prematurely due to geographic moves, illness, incompatible relationships, mentee confinement, etc. How a relationship ends is key to how you and especially the mentee will think about and value the experience you shared.

Planned terminations can be facilitated in the following ways:

*If you initiated the termination:*

- The mentee should be alerted well in advance of your departure from the relationship.
- The reasons for the departure should be discussed with the mentee by you and reinforced by the project's coordinator.
- Mentees may feel they are being abandoned and may demonstrate anger. Allow them to give and be appropriately angry. In relationships that were less intimate, this process will of course be less painful to the mentee.
- If possible, continue contact with your mentee by phone or letters.

*If your mentee initiated the termination:*

- Don't view this separation as a failure but as an opportunity to continue the relationship at a new level.
- Engage in letter writing and phone calls.

*In both instances, focus on the:*

- Progress you made
- Fun you had
- New ways you plan to keep in contact