

Best Practices: Mentoring from a Distance

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4 Quick Tips for Mentoring Success

If your mentor-mentee relationship is thriving, congratulations, and keep up the good work! If you're feeling, however, like you and your mentee aren't connecting as well as you were in the beginning, or that your rapport has stalled, don't worry—you are not alone! Even in the best of times, it's common for mentors and mentees to hit roadblocks. In pandemic times, the challenges for forging strong connections are greater than usual. The silver lining is that most of us have strengthened our skills for staying socially connected while physically distant. This brief handout contains four quick tips for assessing your mentor-mentee relationship and/or jump-starting a stalled exchange. The references at the end contain a few links for more in-depth reading.

Assess your mentor-mentee relationship

Take five minutes to think about how you've been connecting with your mentee over the past few months. What's working well? What needs some attention? Remember that the mentor-mentee relationship is a two-way street. The goal isn't to assign blame, but to create a quick action plan. If everything is going great and you're connecting regularly, take this time to think of an idea or two for next steps.

Ask your mentee what support they need

If you've been regularly reaching out but haven't heard much back, it might be time to simply ask your mentee what they need from you. Maybe what you agreed to in the beginning simply isn't fitting your mentees' circumstances anymore. Try reaching out with a short and sweet text or email to say, "How can I be helpful to you this week?"

Adjust how—and how often—you connect

Many folks are Zoomed out and tired of screens. Try changing things up—if you used to meet weekly, try biweekly. If you used to set Zoom meetings, try a phone call or a 6-foot-apart stroll through downtown to look at the window displays. Make things easy on your mentee by making a specific suggestion. "How about a 15-minute check-in phone call on the 15th of each month? I'm free from 10am-1pm" puts the ball in their court and preempts the back-and-forth of calendaring.

Show you care, and "keep it real"

Make it clear that you are open to suggestions and aren't expecting an apology. Perhaps you've stalled because one or the other of you is stuck in that guilty feeling of a lingering email that you just haven't gotten around to answering. Maybe your mentee is caring for children for many more hours than in the past, or is experiencing pandemic-related mental health struggles. Revealing something that's frustrating *you* can help make your mentee feel comfortable telling you what's going on for them, and might lead the way toward a more productive mentor-mentee relationship.

References for further reading:

1. Smith, David G. and W. Brad Johnson. [Social Distancing Doesn't Have to Disrupt Mentorship](#). (2020, April 6). *Harvard Business Review*.
2. Owens, B. H., Herrick, C. A., & Kelley, J. A. (1998). [A Prearranged Mentorship Program: Can It Work Long Distance?](#) *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 14(2), 78–84.
3. [Mentoring During COVID-19 Pandemic](#). (2020). UC Davis Clinical and Translational Science Center.
4. Gotian, Ruth. (2020). [5 Steps To Help You Effectively Mentor During A Pandemic](#). *Forbes*.