



PEER MENTORSHIP GUIDE

Resource for peer mentors and those developing peer mentorship programs.

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SECTION 1: Importance and Benefits of Peer Mentorship

Peer mentorship pairs learners at similar stages of training to offer guidance and share their experiences, helping mentees develop comfort in new environments. Periods of transition such as starting a new program, entering into a clinical placement setting, or preparing for major career steps (e.g. CaRMS, licensing exams) can be incredibly uncertain and stressful. Peer mentorship helps to normalize these challenges, offers applicable advice, and creates a network of support that students can rely on.

Benefits of Peer Mentorship

Unlike traditional mentorship, peer mentorship has a learner-to-learner focus, which naturally results in fewer hierarchical roles and fosters psychological safety.

- **For mentees:** Decreased isolation and stronger belonging, practical insight into what lies ahead, strategies for academics and stress management, validation and normalization, awareness of campus/community supports, personal/professional growth.
- **For mentors:** Opportunities to give back, strengthen leadership and communication skills, build confidence in navigating training, expanding networks and perspectives, and satisfaction in guiding others.
- **For departments:** Better connection to learner experience, improved implementation of curricular changes, and networks that link learners to resources and each other.

Equity and Inclusion

Evidence indicates that peer mentorship can enhance belonging and well-being, and lead to professional growth and leadership development for diverse learners, particularly those from marginalized or underserved groups. Studies show these mentorship programs can be helpful for reducing isolation, increasing retention, improving coping skills, fostering healthy relationships, and strengthening career clarity (Agrawal et al., 2020; Gafni Lachter & Ruland, 2018; Hendrickson et al., 2020). When identity-informed or bias-aware approaches are used, mentorship can further promote inclusivity, cultural humility, and systems thinking.

In medicine and the rehabilitation sciences, traditional mentorship often lacks cultural relevance, especially as faculty members may not be fully representative of the diversity in the student population and Toronto area. Peer mentorship works in the context of a university committed to principles of equity and diversity ([University of Toronto, Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence, 2006](#)). Intentionally inclusive design through diverse mentor recruitment, equity-informed training, and ongoing feedback creates space to uplift learners, reduce hierarchical barriers, and address equity gaps across the learner experience.

SECTION 1 Key Takeaways

1. *Supporting transitions through shared experiences*
 - Learners at similar stages are connected to offer guidance during stressful transitions.
2. *Foster a sense of belonging*
 - Hierarchical structure is reduced and a safe learning space is promoted
3. *Empowerment of mentees and mentors*
 - Mentees gain community and are able to build networks, also receive practical advice. Mentors build leadership and are able to give back.
4. *Advance equity, inclusion, and representation*
 - Peer mentorship reduces isolation for marginalized learners and aligns with the University of Toronto's commitments to diversity and inclusion.

SECTION 2: Mentor roles and expectations

Below outlines a general overview of the mentor role and its responsibilities. We encourage mentors to appreciate that mentees may prefer to engage in different conversations in different mentorship settings. For example, faculty-student mentorship and peer mentorship will foster different types and topics of dialogue. Similarly, expectations regarding the scope and depth of advice/guidance that can be offered by mentors will vary in accordance with the mentor's level of experience and expertise. Mentors and mentees are encouraged to engage in mutual discussion of expectations for roles and responsibilities to facilitate an effective, positive, and synergistic mentorship experience.

Mentor Roles & Responsibilities

- Foster a comfortable and inclusive environment for your mentee
- Communicate and negotiate personal limits and boundaries
- Share expertise, knowledge, and professional insights
- Help identify areas for growth and set realistic goals
- Introduce the mentee to relevant networks and resources
- Offer constructive feedback, recognize achievements, and model professional and ethical behaviour (including protecting the confidentiality of discussions)
- Listen actively and observe mentee's performance and preferences
- Responding to your mentee within a timely manner.
- Including an auto-message if you are away for more than 3 consecutive days. This message should include your expected return date.
- Completing any program evaluations or requirements

SECTION 2 Key Takeaways:

1. *Adapt to Different Mentorship Contexts*
 - Mentors are encouraged to appreciate that mentees may engage differently depending on the setting (e.g., peer vs. faculty), and are suggested to tailor guidance based on their experience and expertise.
2. *Clarify Expectations Collaboratively*
 - Engage in open discussions with your mentee to clearly define roles and responsibilities.
3. *Create a Safe, Inclusive Environment*
 - Build a welcoming, respectful space by opening up conversations with sharing about yourself (not only professional/academic, but personal interests and experiences), communicating boundaries and maintaining confidentiality.
4. *Support Mentee Development & Provide Guidance*
 - Share knowledge, help set realistic goals, offer feedback, and connect mentees to relevant networks and resources.
5. *Demonstrate Professionalism*
 - Respond within an appropriate timeframe, complete program requirements, and model ethical behavior.

SECTION 3: Mentorship Topics

It can often be unclear for new mentors and mentees alike to know what topics they can discuss and safely manage boundaries. This section provides a framework for potential topics of discussion in mentorship meetings. These topics are designed to help mentors and mentees identify relevant areas for dialogue, maintain appropriate boundaries, and ensure conversations remain constructive and goal-oriented. Mentors can adapt the scope and depth of each topic to align with their personal stage of training, experience, and expertise.

Prior to meeting with your mentees, please reflect on your experience regarding:

- **Academics**
 - Learning progress
 - Learning strategies
 - Exams
 - Time management
 - Note-taking
- **Career exploration**
 - Experiences when starting different phases of training
 - Problems and challenges
 - Research opportunities
 - Networking

- **Organization**
 - Orientation of campus
 - Semester schedule/course components
 - Practical courses
- **Psychosocial**
 - Exam stress
 - Fear of failure
 - Motivation
 - Getting along with faculty/teachers
 - Loneliness in training
- **Social/Other**
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Finances
 - Personal challenges
 - Personality icebreakers
 - Housing and accommodation
 - Travel or neighbourhood exploration
 - Other hobbies / what to do in free time

SECTION 3 Key Takeaways:

1. *Mentors are encouraged to adapt the scope and depth of topics to align with their level of expertise and mentee needs*
2. *Possible topics of discussion include, but are not limited to: academic and career support, well-being, and navigating student life*
3. *Personal boundaries of mentors and mentees alike should be respected by all parties*

APPENDIX: Peer Mentorship Implementation

Purpose & Boundaries

Clear goals, scope, and ethical boundaries should guide the peer mentorship program. It should include policies on **privacy, confidentiality**, and support for both **mentors and mentees**. Think about who your target is for mentors, mentees, and what info would be flowing between them.

Mission & Elevator Pitch

All peer mentorship should aim to empower students through inclusive, supportive mentorship relationships that promote personal growth, academic success, and professional development. When developing a new program, what is the unique need or gap that you are hoping to fill?

Tools for Effective Implementation

1. Clear Roles & Responsibilities

- Defined roles ensure expectations are met and relationships stay productive.
- Griffith et al. (2025): Formal descriptions help mentors guide and mentees stay goal-focused.
- Drossard et al. (2024): Structured sessions and reflection tools support role understanding.

2. Mentor Selection Tools

- Use applications or interviews to assess qualities like leadership, empathy, and reliability (Gafni Lachter & Ruland, 2018).
- Programs may include scenario-based interviews to evaluate boundary-setting and motivation (Griffith et al.).

3. Selection Criteria

- Criteria often include: academic performance, interpersonal skills, and time availability.
- MENTOR (2024): Recommends requiring some leadership experience and offering training to fill gaps.

4. Recruitment & Training

- Inclusive outreach through brochures, videos, testimonials, or classroom visits.
- Effective training includes ethics, inclusion, active listening, and boundaries (Griffith et al.).
- Interactive workshops and peer-reviewed content boost consistency and engagement.

5. Meeting Documentation Tools

- Meeting logs or goal trackers to stay accountable.
- Drossard et al.: diaries to track progress and group dynamics.

6. Evaluation Plan

- Programs should regularly assess impact using **both formative (midway feedback) and summative (post-program surveys)** tools.
- MENTOR's toolkit measures confidence, belonging, and growth.
- **Gafni Lachter & Ruland**: Used leadership questionnaires to assess development.

Best Practices for Inclusive Peer Mentorship

| Practice | What It Looks Like | Why It Matters |
|--|--|--|
| Bias-Awareness & Inclusivity Training | Mentors receive prep in active listening, anti-oppression, and cultural humility | Equips mentors to support underrepresented students effectively and safely |
| Identity-Concordant Matching | Match mentors/mentees by lived experience (identity, gender) | Improves trust, relevance, and mentorship success |
| Group Mentorship Models | Small group sessions with faculty facilitation | Builds community, reduces isolation, supports intersectional learning |
| Culturally Responsive Curriculum | Include discussions on microaggressions, systemic barriers, and advocacy | Prepares students for real-world equity issues |
| Structured Evaluation | Track belonging, engagement, and satisfaction via surveys | Ensures program accountability and improvement |
| Peer Academic Coaching | Senior students lead inclusive case reviews, study sessions, or simulation debriefs | Helps first-gen and historically excluded students navigate hidden curriculum and academic culture |
| Structured Flexibility | Mix of required sessions and open drop-ins; hybrid (online/in-person) options | Increases accessibility and accommodates varying needs (disability, caregiving, mental health) |
| Wellness & Belonging Focus | Mentors check in on stress, imposter syndrome, life balance; affirm diverse identities | Reduces isolation, builds resilience, and fosters community for equity-deserving groups |

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