

The following advice has been provided ‘off the cuff’ from a person who has mentored graduates in the past. It is not a set of guidelines or rules, but rather something for you to reflect on or consider as you develop your relationship with your graduate mentee. You may find it useful to re-read regularly or pair this advice with the monthly resources as some of its content may become more relevant as time goes on, or as certain situations arise.

Preparing to be a mentor

- Don’t take on the role of mentor unless you are committed to doing it properly and actively. Anything else is not fair to the mentee. This commitment means much more than just showing up for half an hour each month to catch-up and chat with the mentee. It involves an ongoing commitment to some professional learning, some deep thinking about the mentee’s issues, active negotiation with the mentee and collegiate problem solving when necessary.
- Be prepared to be “available” to provide an ear at any time, particularly in a crisis.
- Be prepared to share your own experiences with the mentee.
- Be prepared to create opportunities for your mentee, for example by introducing them to colleagues with similar interests. Invest in your mentee’s career progress.

Planning and administration of the mentoring relationship

- Read the PSC handbook and other materials again and again. Use them actively with the mentee for planning.
- Plan a mentoring program interactively with the mentee, using the PSC materials as a guide. Make sure each party knows what the other expects and really wants from the relationship. Record the mentoring plan in writing with a schedule of meetings, activities and some agreed indicators and strategy for evaluating success. Review the program together regularly and modify as necessary and as agreed.
- Talk openly about and agree upon “the rules of engagement” – particularly the rules for confidentiality and where the boundaries lie.
- Use a mix of formal meetings (structured meetings with an agenda) and informal meetings (for example, short catchups or telephone check-ins). It is a good idea to have two formal meetings for each placement.
- Get the mentee to take responsibility for all formal mentoring meetings – agenda, minutes, etc.
- Try to meet away from the office environment on some occasions. A coffee break or lunch together away from the office is always a good strategy. Once the relationship is established, Zoom or Teams meetings are OK.
- Evaluate the success of the mentoring relationship together as you travel the road. Solicit and accept criticism of your own performance from the mentee to identify and resolve any problems or shortcomings in the mentoring relationship.

Establishing a good mentoring relationship

- Always make time to talk about your personal lives to the extent that you are both comfortable. You need to show interest in the mentee as a whole person, not just as a future public service resource.
- Trust and confidentiality are paramount. Never talk to anyone about your mentee without the mentee’s knowledge and approval, even if this is well-intentioned. Expect the same in return from your mentee.

- Integrity is critical to maintaining trust. If your integrity is under a cloud in any way at all known to the mentee, you cannot obtain or maintain the trust necessary to be an effective mentor.
- A mentor is not a friend, but you must at least be like a friend – an “amicus mentee”. You should coach and advise the mentee according to what you honestly believe to be in the best interests of the mentee. In theory, this role could conflict with the Department’s interests, but hopefully such situations will be rare. An example would be when the mentee discloses an intention to resign due to dissatisfaction about the workplace.
- Use and disclose your own experiences to provide advice, including embarrassing experiences if you are confident of confidentiality. Advice based on real world experiences described in honest detail will be more powerful than simple doctrinaire statements of advice presented like rules.
- Listen actively, ask lots of questions and avoid rhetoric.
- Remember that mentoring is a learning experience, as much for the mentor as the mentee. The mentor may bring greater experience in some things to the relationship, but in the end both mentor and mentee are equals in the venture - and the mentee has more at stake.
- Have fun! If you are not enjoying the other person’s company, you won’t achieve much.

Supporting the mentee through workplace problems

- The mentor’s strategic role is to provide support and advice that will help the mentee to cope with workplace problems and find solutions.
- Regularly ask the mentee to identify and tell you their current problems - in order of importance.
- A problem that seems trivial to the mentor may be a total deal breaker for the mentee. If something is a problem for the mentee, it must also be a problem for the mentor. Put yourself in the mentee’s shoes when discussing any issue. Don’t let your experience get in the way when communicating.
- The role of the mentor is not to provide solutions for the mentee but rather to coach the mentee in developing workplace problem solving skills that can be applied when the mentor is long gone. Help the mentee to look at each problem through different lenses. Make several suggestions for the mentee to consider, explaining your reasoning. Let the mentee “find” the solution that best suits them. It should not be your solution; it should be the mentee’s solution which you helped them to find.
- Providing a quiet ear for the mentee to vent can be important of itself at times, but saying “yes, yes, I know how it is” when you know it is not correct is not helpful. Be supportive but know when to be frank and firm.
- Sometimes your role may be to explain why things are the way they are and help the mentee to just keep things in perspective. Promoting patience as a virtue is a key skill for the mentor.
- Don’t be upset or rattled if the mentee does not accept all of your great advice. That is the mentee’s prerogative. Be patient, this will likely change as trust and confidence grow. Most importantly, do not let any reluctance by the mentee to accept your advice chill or otherwise impair the relationship. Don’t let your own ego trip you up. Build a relationship that can handle disagreements and be prepared to accept that your advice may not be as good as you thought at the time. The mentee will often have better understanding and intuition about the details of the situation and other players than you will have – details that might be critical to finding the best solution.