



MENTORLY'S FIRST-TIME MENTORSHIP GUIDE

MENTOR EDITION

Practical guidance to support first-time mentors in building trust, setting clear expectations, and creating space for meaningful growth.



So you're mentoring for the first time...

Mentoring is a skill that develops over time. It starts with a willingness to support someone else's growth by listening, sharing perspective, and creating space for reflection.

If this is your first time mentoring, you are in the right place. This guide is here to support you with practical tips to help you build confidence and find your rhythm as you go.



Before the First Meeting

Prepare Yourself

1. Clarify your purpose and expectations

- Reflect on why you're mentoring and what you want the relationship to achieve.
 - *Why did I choose to become a mentor at this stage of my career?*
 - *What kind of impact do I hope this mentorship will have on my mentee?*
 - *What would make this mentorship feel meaningful for me?*
 - *How open am I to learning from my mentee?*
 - *What level of preparation do I expect from my mentee?*
- Think about what you need to know about your mentee (goals, background, motivations) and what they need to know about you (approach, availability, boundaries).

Before the First Meeting

Prepare Yourself

2. Reflect on and define your boundaries early

- Setting boundaries is critical in relationships, including mentorship. It protects us as well as reminds us to be respectful of others' boundaries. Are there topics that you'd be unwilling to broach in your sessions? What's off the table?
- Decide your preferred communication methods and what you can realistically offer in terms. of time and support.



Before the First Meeting

Prepare Yourself

3. Review the expectations of the mentoring program

All mentorship programs have a purpose to fulfill. A *raison d'être*. It can range from improving leadership and management skills for emerging leaders, to cross-generational learning or developing of technical skills.

Make sure you understand that mission and the part you will play in it.



Tip

Your aim doesn't need to be "change someone's life." Often, being a consistent, thoughtful presence is enough.

First Meeting

What to Cover

Introductions & Rapport

Your first conversation is less about solving problems and more about building rapport and alignment.

- Share personal and professional background (names, roles, pronouns).
- Ask open-ended questions to learn about the mentee's experience and motivation.
 - *What's been happening in your work or life that made this feel like the right time for mentoring?*
 - *What feels most unclear or challenging in your role right now?*



First Meeting

What to Cover

Expectations and Goals

Clear goals, agreed-upon expectations, and shared understanding of accountability ensure the mentoring relationship is productive, and safe.

Use this time to explore what success looks like, how you will work together, and how the mentee can take ownership of their growth. Need examples of prompts? Keep reading!



Tip

Discuss confidentiality up front as it contributes to trust building.

First Meeting

What to Cover

Helpful Conversation Prompts:

- Goal setting
 - What are you hoping to grow into over the next year or two?
 - Are there specific goals or themes you would like us to focus on?
 - What would success look like if this goal needed to evolve?
- Accountability
 - How would you like to take ownership of your learning and next steps?
 - What does accountability look like for you?
- Setting expectations
 - What would make this time feel valuable for you?
 - What kind of support are you looking for from me as your mentor?
 - What would make this feel like a safe and useful space for you?

First Meeting

What to Cover

Logistics & Planning

- Agree on practical details like meeting times, duration, and methods (in-person, online, etc.).
- Set objectives and action items to complete before the next meeting.
- Committing to checking in between meetings will maintain the relationship and contribute to trust-building.



Tip

Spend most of the time listening more than talking. This helps your mentee feel heard and respected.

Sharing your experience effectively

Finding the right things to say

- **Lead with the mess**
 - Drop them into the moment with you: what you knew, what you feared, what you got wrong. Let the lesson emerge rather than announcing it upfront.
- **Match stories to where they are, not where you ended up**
 - Think back to what you knew and felt at their stage. Stories from your peak are less useful than stories from when you were where they are.
- **Share successes and failures**
 - Sharing your successes and how you achieved them is a must. So are failure stories. They show that setbacks are survivable and smart people make mistakes.
- **Hold back sometimes**
 - If you fill every silence with your own story, you crowd out their thinking. Sit with a question rather than always answering it.



Mentor Do's

- **Listen actively.** Let the mentee drive the conversation before offering advice.
- **Build trust.** Set expectations and be consistent with follow-through. Keep it confidential when agreed on.
- **Hold space for emotion.** If frustration, fear, or self-doubt shows up, acknowledge it before moving into problem-solving.
- **Encourage independence** by guiding them to think critically and own decisions.
- **Normalize uncertainty** and nonlinear progress. Reassure that confusion, pauses, or changing goals are part of growth, not failure.



Mentor Don'ts

- **Assuming your time is more valuable than your mentee's.** It undermines the mutual trust, respect, and open communication necessary for great mentorship.
- **Dominating with advice early on:** your role at first is facilitator, not director.
- **Forgetting your own limitations.** You don't need to know all the answers: it's okay to say "let's explore that together."
- **Being judgemental,** whether about choices, backgrounds, or experiences.
- **Neglecting to follow up,** keep momentum between meetings.
- **Taking on the role of problem solver.** It undermines the goal of mentorship, i.e. fostering the mentee's growth, autonomy, and critical thinking skills.



Mentorly Resources

- [Mentorly Help Center](#)
- [Self-Reflection + Powerful Questions Guide](#)
- [Year-End Discussion Guide](#)
- [Mentorly 100 Career Growth Questions](#)

