

How to Find and Keep a Good Mentor

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The Case of the Missing Mentor(s): *Lindsey is a new resident in a community psychiatry program. She would like to become a child and adolescent psychiatrist, but her training in child psychiatry will be minimal and deferred to the fourth training year. Her program director is great but has limited information on child fellowships. Lindsey has also developed an interest in childhood obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and wonders how she could learn more about research in the area, but she doesn't know where to start.*

Every physician benefits from having a mentor (or two or three). However, mentorship, like any relationship, can be a funny thing. You can search your whole life and never really connect with a mentor. Or, you can be lucky and find the ideal mentor early in your career, then long to recreate that experience. Finding a true connection takes much more than luck, and this article provides the tools for finding and keeping a good mentor.

Does Everyone Need a Mentor?

Yes, everyone needs a mentor. We all have much to learn, and we all need guidance to improve our chances of success. Think back: Is there anything you wish you had known when you first started medical school? Residency? Early career? Good mentors help limit that “wish I had known” feeling through imparting their knowledge and experience in a proactive fashion. Mentors help guide us, help us overcome.

Mentors keep us focused on the prize. Not sure what “the prize” is? A good mentor can help by facilitating introspection. See Table 1 for commonly used terms.

What Is a Mentor?

The name “mentor” once referred to a person, the advisor of Telemachus. Today, the term represents a concept, an aspiration, and a belief: a belief that by partnering together in a shared goal, anything can happen. Good mentors, above all, are kind and trusted guides. They help us reflect upon what is important today so we may balance short-term options with longer-term ambitions.

What Is Mentorship? What Is Not Mentorship?

There will be many teachers, advisors, and friends that influence your decisions and success. What qualifies as mentorship?

- Mentorship is a dyadic relationship whose mutual goal is advancing the mentee
- Mentorship involves mutual respect and listening
- Mentors feel an inner sense of duty to help the mentees succeed
- Mentors guide and nudge mentees to discover their passions and reach their potential
- Mentees seek guidance and are willing to listen and explore ideas
- Mentees receive, process, reflect, and dialogue

Table 1. Terms About Mentorship in the Medical Field

Action Items: Term used to specify tasks with effort involved; usually reviewed at the end of the meeting to ensure consensus on the plan.

Mentee: Although the best mentorships are mutually beneficial, the term “mentee” generally refers to the junior person, the person receiving guidance. Mentees are seeking guidance and want to be part of something more.

Mentor: In medicine, mentors typically have advanced skills and knowledge, and use these skills to help a more junior individual in various aspects of career-building. Mentors want to provide guidance to help others obtain more for themselves.

Mentorship: The dyadic process/exchange that occurs between a mentor and mentee.

Peer Mentors: Individuals at a similar stage of training who are often able to offer practical advice on day-to-day details. Peer mentors like to share and learn tips along the way.

Magical moments of mentorship will happen throughout your lifetime; watch for them. For example, a sage conference-goer may offer some gems that, upon reflection, advance your research question in new directions. A peer may take a moment to provide tips on work–life balance, then check from time to time to see if you need a hand. Although these aren’t “meet every Tuesday at 12” mentors, the impact can be just as important.

When Is a Relationship NOT Mentorship?

“Real life” mentorships are rarely perfect, but almost all mentors are trying their best. Sometimes, however, a person may appear to be offering mentorship, but their agenda is personal, and the goals of the mentee do not come into consideration. This is more common with employment or when mentorship opportunities are limited. Also, teachers and attendings are not inherently mentors, although they will likely provide mentorship moments. The primary goal of mentorship is to advance the success of the mentee.

Three Potential Mentorship Styles

As suggested above, we must first recognize that a mentor isn’t merely a person, but also a concept. Indeed, the root word *mentos* means “intent, purpose, spirit, passion” in Greek. In fact, the ultimate goal of mentorship is to help mentees determine and meet their career goals.

As such, it is helpful to consider three core types of mentorship that physicians typically need to help determine and meet their goals: “Big Picture,” “Topic Specific,” and “Peer” mentorships (see Figure 1). Mentees gather information from all three mentorship types and integrate the information to advance their careers. Rarely, all three types can be provided by one mentor; more typically, multiple mentors are required.

The following describes the three core areas of mentorship in psychiatry and their purposes, topic scopes, and tips for finding them and making the most of the experience. Although every mentorship relationship is unique, general guidelines can be helpful. The ultimate goal is to have mentorship that covers these core areas.

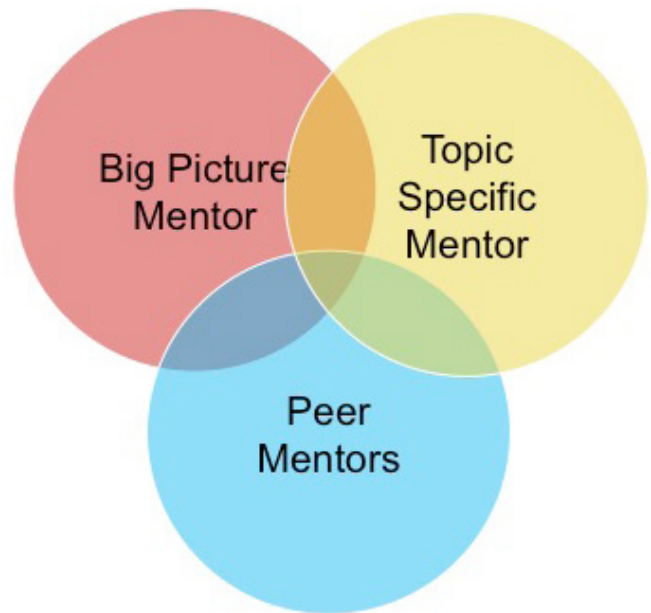


Figure 1: Integrating the experience of three mentorship types will help with career success. Although the types overlap, medical careers are complex and usually involve multiple mentors.

Big Picture Mentorship

(Provided by Program Directors, Division Chiefs, Chairs)

Purpose: Helps mentees discover and develop their career intent, purpose, spirit, and passion. Keeps mentees on track with stated goals. Redirects mentees when they are going astray from stated goals. Often helps guide career choices and writes recommendation letters for employment. Nominates mentees for awards and introduces mentees to leaders at the local and national level.

Acceptable Topics: First, focus on determining career goals, then segue into deciding which opportunities help advance career goals. New opportunities and networking should be frequent discussions. Awards, trainings, leadership positions.

How to Find: Start with your program director, division chief, or chair. They can either become one of your Big Picture mentors or direct you to someone who can help.

Tips: Start off with monthly meetings and schedule them several months in advance. Meetings will be

less frequent once you establish your goals. Many successful individuals keep their Big Picture mentors for many years and build a personal “advisory panel.” For each meeting, provide a basic agenda (see Table 2) but leave plenty of time for open discussion. Ask for opportunities. Do not waste time on matters better suited for immediate supervisors unless they are having an impact upon completion of your goals.

Topic-Specific Mentorship (Provided by Researchers, Academics, Experts)

Purpose: Specialist in a topic area. Helps mentee create goals and carve out projects/advance plans in that topic area.

Acceptable Topics: Any project/question related to the mentor’s expertise. Career goals related to that topic. Conferences, posters, papers, trainings, grants, travel awards related to the topic.

How to Find: Ask your “Big Picture” mentor, program directors, division chiefs, chairs. Browse your institution’s website for faculty and their areas of expertise. Search research web pages (e.g., Researchgate, Google Scholar Profile).

Tips: Weekly meetings to start. Provide a detailed agenda (see below) and stick to it. Go with the flow. Sometimes projects won’t match your goals exactly, especially at first. This is expected. Learn what you can from each project, then move on as you refine your interests. Most people only have one primary topic-specific mentor at any one time; additional mentors would be for smaller projects (like *JAACAP Connect* articles).

Peer Mentorship (Provided by Colleagues, Contemporaries)

Purpose: To guide with smaller tasks and issues that influence your career goals but are relatively simple, basic skill-building, or controversial, or challenging to discuss with an advanced mentor.

Acceptable Topics: Basic skill-building, general questions about career and family. Personal questions about work–life balance that may not seem ideal for other mentors.

How to Find: Socializing with individuals close to your career stage. Make efforts to attend lectures, social hours, and conferences (e.g., AACAP, ROCAP). Often-times great peer mentors are “one step” ahead in that topic (e.g., they just completed a fellowship and you are about to apply; they have a one-year-old and you are pregnant). Peers can be local, national, or international. Emails, calls, or personal meetings can be appropriate.

Tips: The definition of “peers” varies widely, and at this stage is based on the topic or career level. Discussions are usually informal and friendly. The goal is professional kinship and mutual advancement. Basic skills (including coping skills) are often learned through peer mentorship, and agendas are simple or not utilized.

Finding a Good Mentor

Most mentorships can be worthwhile with the right amount of time and effort. “Good” (a.k.a. dedicated) mentors are highly sought after and often hard to find. Since it is only possible to mentor a few trainees at a time, first impressions are important. It is good to spend time researching suggested mentor names, talking to peers who know the mentors, and preparing for first meetings. Many mentors will expect that you are somewhat familiar with their careers and previous publications, which are easily searchable on Google Scholar, ResearchGate, faculty pages, etc. Be prepared to discuss your short- and long-term goals, desired outcomes (projects, requests), and expectations you have of the mentor and the mentorship plan.

It is acceptable to meet with several mentors to determine goodness-of-fit, especially since one mentor can rarely provide all the core mentorship types described above. Some mentors are flexible and relaxed; others are serious and demand a high level of organization. Some mentors have expertise in your area of interest yet have little time to offer; other mentors are willing to meet weekly but may have few overlapping interests. Each mentorship is unique, so be open-minded to the possibilities, as all mentors have experience to share.

Tip: To maximize success, search for mentors with geographical proximity (down the hall is best!). Strive to meet in person each time. Avoid cancellations and

rescheduling. Never “no show.” Remember that each part of the mentorship team has expectations; failure to meet these expectations on a regular basis often results in relationship strain.

Keeping a Good Mentor

Finding a good mentor is the easier part. Keeping a good mentor takes time, effort, and commitment. In any relationship, the potential for greatness is possible when two like-minded people meet. However, somewhat specific to mentorship is that the mentee is in the driver’s seat. The progression of the mentorship is ultimately up to the mentee’s ability to properly (and repeatedly) access the mentor as a resource, and to do so with respect and agility (see Table 2).

Every mentor will have a skillset, preferences, and expectations. Over time, the mentee will learn how to best access the mentor’s knowledge and skills in a manner that is mutually beneficial. Organization, professionalism, and delivering on promises are all fundamentally important.

Setting goals, creating timelines for the goals, and using meeting agendas are helpful approaches for staying organized. Recognize that complex careers require multiple mentors. Understand that career goals and mentors often change over time. Understanding and flexibility are important traits for mentor and mentee; however, good organizational and communication skills can limit the need for forgiveness.

Remember, good mentors are trusted guides, and they want to help. If you are struggling in your career or the

Table 2. Common Tasks and the Expected Actions and Behaviors of Good Mentors and Mentees

TASK	A GOOD MENTOR:	A GOOD MENTEE:
Meetings	Is available, is prepared if given time. Helps mentee stick to planned agenda.	Always arrives on time; sends a reminder 24 hours in advance; sends an agenda 48 hours in advance; sends all documents 1+ weeks in advance.
Correspondence	Replies in a timely fashion to mentee emails. Facilitates introductions.	Initiates emails. Replies in a timely fashion (24 hours). Resends emails if mentor doesn't reply in 48 hours.
Setting Goals/ Outcomes	Helps mentee set goals and decide planned outcomes (projects, awards, grants). Helps mentee create a realistic timeline based on mentee's goals and outcomes. Reminds mentee to keep on track; helps mentee when problems arise.	Picks realistic goals. Sticks to the timeline. Asks for guidance if the goals and timeline are too ambitious.
Due Dates/Deliverables	Is aware of all requirements and due dates related to shared projects and guides mentee to success.	Informs mentor of all requirements and due dates related to shared project. Completes all projects on time. Seeks help when obstacles arise.
Overarching Goal	Seeks the professional and personal success of the mentee and to increase skills, self-esteem, confidence.	Seeks the professional and personal success of the mentee and to increase skills, self-esteem, confidence.
Characteristics	Is a volunteer; available to guide, counsel, encourage. Follows the lead of the mentee and reminds of stated goals. Is kind, supportive; gently challenges mentee without being overbearing. Listens. Adapts. Is respectful.	Is responsible for the success of the relationship. Discusses expectations and keeps promises. Informs mentor of changes. Listens. Integrates. Is respectful.

mentorship, try this: “I want to be better at [insert skill here]. Could you provide suggestions for improvement?”

Tip: Time is valuable; a brief agenda can be helpful, particularly for new relationships or for outcome-focused mentorships. The purpose of the agenda is to help maximize mentorship time and prepare the mentor for expectations. Agendas are sent at least 48 hours in advance to all meeting attendees. When creating an agenda, include the meeting information. The first agenda item is the “check-in” period that focuses on relationship-building and reviewing previous action items. Next, new items are discussed. Leave time to determine action items and plan due dates. The remaining time is open discussion. If your agenda includes requests that involve the mentor’s time (e.g., requested reviews or information), be sure to provide the due date and send drafts at least 1-2 weeks in advance. Use highlights and asterisks for items requiring review/response before the meeting. Figure 2 provides a sample agenda for topic-specific mentorship.

Finding the “Missing Mentor”

Lindsey’s case (above) details a typical scenario: mentorship is needed, but “the perfect mentor” isn’t obvious or geographically convenient. How should someone like Lindsey proceed? First, read the articles in this issue of *JAACAP Connect* to gain inspiration and practical tips. Then, talk to program and division directors and chairs to describe (or determine) what kind of mentorship is desired. To find local mentors, use the resources at the end of this article to reach out to mentorship programs within regional CAP organizations or AACAP. Access mentorship at the national level by attending AACAP meetings and participating in activities designed for medical students, residents, and early career psychiatrists. These include the AACAP mentorship and career development programs, inspirational talks, and many other networking and educational experiences available for multiple stages of career development such as skill-building workshops offered at AACAP Annual Meetings.

Table 3. Example of a Brief Agenda for Mentorship Meetings

Agenda for Meeting with Michelle: July 4, 2017, 1-2pm in Dr. Mentor’s office

1. Check-in
 - a. Discuss progress on action items from last meeting
 - i. (Michelle) Complete first draft specific aims for *JAACAP Connect* article (attached in this email, please review for next week)
 - ii. (Michelle) Email Dr. Wise to add as mentor to article (**he said he is too busy, do you have a second option for me?)
 - b. Discuss poster project ideas
 - i. (Dr. Mentor) Determine if OCD database will be ready in time
 - ii. Decide on final topic
2. New items
 - a. AACAP Pilot Award: Due March 15, 2018 (provide URL or attach description).
 - b. Letter of Recommendation request for fellowship program **Due August 4th (CV attached)
3. Review action items for next meeting
4. Open discussion

Conclusions

Medical careers are complex, and mentorship increases success. Accessing mentorship on “big picture” issues, “topic-specific” projects, and “peer-related” matters provides an integrated approach for career advancement. Find mentors by accessing resources; keep mentors by demonstrating organizational skills, professionalism, and, above all, kindness.

When a mentor–mentee relationship forms, that moment in time is unique and can never be duplicated. As with many relationships, we don’t realize how irreplaceable a mentor is until the relationship is gone. So start looking around for your next mentor. Being prepared, flexible, and introspective helps; success occurs when we are true to ourselves, cherish each experience, learn from mistakes, and pay it forward by mentoring others.

Take Home Summary

- Mentorship is essential for career development.
- At the end of the day, mentor and mentee are equally responsible for finding each other and for fostering and maintaining the mentorship.
- Access tips to improve chances for success.

Resources

- AACAP Mentorship Network
http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Medical_Students_and_Residents/Mentorship_Matters/AACAP_Mentorship_Network.aspx
- Medical Students Awards
http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Awards/Medical_Students_Awards/Home.aspx
- Resident and Early Career Psychiatrists Awards
http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Awards/Resident_and_ECP_Awards/Awards_RECIP_Home.aspx
- AACAP Regional Organizations
http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Regional_Organizations/Home.aspx
- AACAP Life Members Mentorship Grants for Medical Students
https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Awards/Medical_Students_Awards/Life_Members_Mentorship_Grants.aspx

About the Author

Michelle S. Horner, DO, is assistant professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins Medicine. She is the editor-in-chief and founder of *JAACAP Connect*, which provides mentorship for authorship and editor experiences. She has published data-driven papers on mentorship and has been involved with AACAP's mentorship programs for many years, including founding AACAP's Career Development Forum.

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JAACAP June Issue — Available Now!



When Sir Edwin Henry Landseer memorialized the subject of his 1838 portrait *A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society*, he made sure to capture the sitter's commanding presence. Renowned for the number of people he saved from drowning in the Thames (23 over 14 years), the sitter, a Newfoundland named Bob, exudes the same gravitas as any respected human member of society. But the utility of man's best friend is not limited to rescuing poor swimmers: this month's Clinical Perspective, "The Transformative Power of the Dog: The Growing Use of Canine Assistants in Therapeutic Interventions and School Settings," explores the particular ways that human-canine interactions benefit adolescents' mental wellbeing. The arguments for incorporating animals into certain areas of psychiatric treatment are gaining ground; just last year this page highlighted an article exploring the efficacy of equine therapy for youth with autism, "Randomized Controlled Trial of Therapeutic Horseback Riding in Children and Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorder." Indeed, animals are proving to be valuable adjuncts to mental health treatment. It remains to be seen, however, whether a descendent of Landseer's "distinguished member of the Humane Society" could ever hold a similar place of recognition within our own Academy...