



**Davidson<sup>TM</sup>  
Institute**

# Mentoring Guidebook

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By  
Davidson Institute for Talent Development  
*Compiled and edited 2006*  
[www.DavidsonGifted.org](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org)

The mission of the Davidson Institute for Talent Development is to recognize, nurture, and support profoundly intelligent young people and to provide opportunities for them to develop their talents to make a positive difference.

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## SECTION ONE: Purpose of this Guidebook

1. Purpose of this guidebook
2. Anticipated outcomes
3. Organization and use of this guidebook

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### Purpose of this guidebook

One of the most valuable experiences a gifted student can have is working with a mentor who is caring, supportive, and willing to share his/her time and knowledge. With help and guidance, mentees can learn new skills and investigate potential career interests. However, initiating a mentorship can be overwhelming. Where do you start, who do you contact, and most importantly, then what?

This guidebook is specifically designed to help parents and students interested in developing a mentorship. The guidebook will help you answer such questions as: Is a mentoring partnership appropriate? How do I locate a mentor? What kind of relationship is most beneficial? What will the connection entail? Ideally, this guidebook is to be used as an information guide to help establish, maintain, and conclude a mentorship.

### Anticipated outcomes

This guidebook was created with the following anticipated outcomes for parents and students:

- To clarify the definition and purpose of a mentorship
- To assist in determining readiness for such a relationship
- To outline the process of commencing a mentoring partnership
- To explain possible types of mentoring relationships and projects to be completed
- To supply ideas on concluding the mentorship and project
- To answer Frequently Asked Questions (see Section 7)
- To offer tips for mentors as well as examples of how mentees can give back

### Organization and use of this guidebook

The information included in this guidebook is presented in a series of steps to prepare the student for initiating, maintaining, and concluding a mentorship. *Mentorships: A Guidebook* is organized in sections that may be read sequentially or independently. This guide, used in conjunction with the supplemental resources listed in Section Nine, is intended to be a thorough orientation to mentorships for exceptionally gifted young people. You will find links to key articles that will lead you to a more in-depth understanding of mentorships. While using this guidebook, keep in mind that it is only a resource. Each mentorship will be formed and proceed differently depending on the student, mentor, and parents involved.

## SECTION TWO: Why Mentoring

1. What is a mentorship?
2. Why mentoring?
3. Am I ready for a mentorship?
  - Interest Inventory
4. Potential pitfalls
5. Alternatives to mentorship
  - Helpful Resources

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### What is a mentorship?

Webster defines a mentorship as “a formal relationship between a student and a professional adult to further the student's knowledge, skills, or career.” (*Webster's New Millennium Dictionary of English, 2003-2005*). Variations of this definition abound, with the main focal point being individualized focused attention to further a student’s knowledge and abilities in an area of interest.

A mentorship is defined as a one-on-one learning relationship between a student and an expert in a specific topic or discipline. The mentor supports and guides the student to develop in that area of interest.

Torrance (1984) offers these additional descriptions:

- A mentor is a creatively productive person who teaches, counsels, and inspires a student with similar interests. The relationship is characterized by mutual caring, depth, and response.
- A mentoring relationship is a close, individualized relationship that develops over time between a student and teacher-figure.
- The mentor-mentee relationship is one of mutual respect and commitment. Students work with their mentors to develop their scholarly interests into research directions and design. Mentoring is a serious commitment of time and effort.
- Mentors are people with career experiences willing to share their knowledge, acting as a source of information. They give their support, encouragement and feedback.

Others describe a mentorship as a special bond, a role model connection and a developmental process. A mentorship can have different meanings for different people. Whichever meaning it has for you, the bottom line is that a mentorship is a unique relationship that should enrich the lives of both individuals involved.

### Why mentoring?

Are you asking yourself this question? Before you do anything else, decide if any of the following statements describe your situation:

- "I want to learn about what it's like to work in [fill in the blank], but I don't know whom to ask."
- "I need help with career planning and goals."
- "I'm curious about several different career fields, but I don't know which one would be best for me."
- "I have a project or idea and I would like to find others who are interested in working with me."

If any of these situations are similar to yours...you may benefit from working with a mentor!

When you think of a mentorship, what comes to mind?

- Are you interested in a specific field?
- Have you exhausted your resources in studying a particular topic but still want to learn more?
- Are you looking for a stimulating educational experience?
- Are you looking into a possible career path?
- Would you like to work on an in-depth project?
- Do you have an idea, but are not quite sure where to start?
- Are you looking to give back to the community?
- All of the above

A mentorship can be all of the above characteristics and then some, depending on what you would like to do with your time. A mentorship can be a time consuming event as well as a rewarding one. Are you ready for this challenge?

According to a study of presidential scholars from 1964-1968, Kaufman (1981) reviewed the benefits that come from having a mentor include gaining a role model and having someone to offer support and encouragement in the mentee's pursuit in an area of interest. These presidential scholars stated that the best mentors set an example, offered intellectual stimulation, and communicated excitement and joy in the learning process.

As noted by Gallager (1985), with mentoring, students can find direction, gain maturity and focus on the future by associating with someone who has not just been there and done that, but has succeeded.

Berger (1990) observed that by sharing time, talents and experiences, mentors and students can develop close relationships in which both parties collaborate and learn from one another. Often, mentors and mentees view one another as friends and colleagues rather than a student and teacher.

According to Ambrose, Allen, and Huntley (1994), the mentor relationship can be equally as valuable for mentors who learn more about giving from the heart and appreciate the positive impact they provide to blossoming students. Mentors find value in nurturing a young person who has the potential to make a difference in this world.

Mentoring is important to students not only for the knowledge and skills gained, but also for the professional socialization and personal support that are needed to facilitate success in the field and beyond. By all means, participating in a mentorship does not mean you have to turn this into your career path or even your college major. You may participate in a mentorship and decide that particular field is not for you.

## **Am I ready for a mentorship?**

So how do you choose a mentorship? What do you do if you are interested in many different fields? What do you do if you are good at many different things? This can be a difficult task for many. Luckily, there are many tools available to help guide your decision; but ultimately, you most likely know more than what a book or online assessment can tell you. Here are a few important questions to ask yourself:

- What am I currently passionate about?
- What motivates me?
- What am I currently involved in?
- Do I have the time, energy, and dedication to commit to a mentorship?
- What subject do I always appreciate learning? If there is more than one, try narrowing down the field. For example, if you enjoy science, try to pinpoint a

specific science field or topic. Look into the possibilities. Please see the Resource Section (page 28-30) for career and interest surveys).

Once your creativity is flowing, fill out the Interest Inventory that begins on the next page of this guidebook. The Interest Inventory is a way of organizing your thoughts on paper to help focus your interests. This will also help in determining where to start looking for a mentor.

### Interest Inventory

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

City and State \_\_\_\_\_

#### Topic Area(s)

Please indicate which field you are interested in pursuing at this time. Feel free to list other topics of interest you may want to pursue in the future. Please answer as specific as you can.

Why are you interested in this particular subject?

Have you done any research, coursework or volunteering in this field?

What role would you like a mentor to play in this process?

What activities are you currently involved in? Please list subjects and hours per week spent on any activity.

How do you most enjoy learning? (i.e. hands-on, lecture, computer simulations, independent research, building models, etc.)

Are you interested in working with someone locally or long distance?

Now that you have your thoughts on paper and have narrowed down your interests, ask yourself if you are ready to work with a mentor. If not, see page 9 for alternatives. If you feel you are ready, consider the potential pitfalls on the following page before moving on the next step, which is to locate potential mentors and contact them.



## Potential pitfalls

There are many reasons mentor relationships do not work out well, such as:

- the initial screening process not identifying either suitable mentors or young people with enough commitment to, or interest in being mentored
- if the mentors have access to a training session, it may not be addressing common fears or giving enough information on the intensity of the mentoring project, or the training may be run at an inconvenient time for the mentor
- insufficient ongoing support to mentors
- the matching process not working

There are at least three areas that need particular attention in any mentoring relationship.

**Time** - Studies have found that finding the time and energy for mentoring pairs to get together is a great obstacle. Take advantage of email, fax, telephone, etc., as ways of staying in touch. Email especially allows for relatively short but more frequent contact between the participants.

**Knowledge/Skills** - After you have located a mentor, you may discover that it is not a good match after all, or you may want assistance in an area in which the mentor does not feel particularly competent to advise. In this situation, you can politely and respectfully explain your specific need, and ask your mentor if he/she feels comfortable assisting you in locating another individual whose expertise may be more helpful for your particular interest. If things do not work out, you can contact another potential mentor.

**Over-dependence** - Over-dependence can go in either direction in a mentoring relationship. Given the busy schedule of a mentor, it is not wise for a mentee to become over-dependent on the mentor. It is helpful for you to realize and eventually anticipate the end of the formal mentoring relationship, although it's always nice for the former mentee to have someone to go to for advice at any time in the future.

## Alternatives to mentorship

If you do not feel ready to pursue a mentorship at this time, what other alternatives are available?

- Research. You may not be ready for a mentorship now, but what are your options at a later date?
- Create a time line and set goals for yourself.
- Try volunteering first. Start with an area of interest and go from there. Are there opportunities available within your community?
- Try an extra curricular activity. You may not be ready for a mentorship, but how about leadership opportunities?
- Independent study.
- Enrichment opportunities from your teacher.
- Relax. Just because you may not be in a position to start a mentorship now, doesn't mean there will not be opportunities at a later date.

## SECTION THREE: Parent Section

1. Are you ready for your child to have a mentor?
2. Would your child benefit from a mentoring partnership?
3. Is your child ready for a mentor?
  - Ideal characteristics of a mentee
4. Important considerations for parents
  - Supervision
  - Financial Considerations
  - Meeting Times
  - Legal Protection
  - Safety and Release Forms
  - Ethics
  - Screening Potential Mentors
5. Preparing for the next step
  - Helpful Resources

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### **Are you ready for your child to have a mentor?**

Before embarking on the process of locating the appropriate person and making a commitment to a mentoring partnership, it is important to consider your feelings as a parent and your child's readiness for the endeavor. You may be asking why your child would need a mentor when he/she has a loving, supportive parent such as yourself who goes above and beyond to provide ample opportunities for learning. Although this reaction is perfectly understandable, it may subside after becoming aware of potential benefits that your child may gain from participating in a mentoring relationship. Here are some thoughts to consider:

- Students of a high caliber need challenge and stimulation in their areas of interest. A mentoring partnership can address these needs by a professional or student in the field working directly with your child, providing enriching material related to your child's interest at an accelerated pace.
- A mentor can provide immediate and personal feedback to your child and allow her/him to work at her/his own pace.
- A mentor may offer opportunities to develop connections, professional relationships and become part of a network of individuals who share common interests.
- By working in such a network, your child may be exposed to related fields that were previously unknown and have the ability to expand his/her curiosity and learn about the newfound topics.
- Developing a mentoring partnership may help to build your child's self confidence, increase their academic motivation, communication skills, and help to affirm their goals for the future.

### **Would your child benefit from a mentoring partnership?**

Once you believe that *you* are ready for your child to embark the journey of developing a mentoring partnership, your next step is to consider whether your child would benefit from such a connection. Students who might find a mentorship advantageous:

- have a keen interest or desire to explore a subject or profession in depth.
- need more stimulation in certain subject areas or interests than they are currently experiencing.
- enjoy working in a one-on-one or small group setting with personal guidance and feedback.

If you believe your child would benefit from working with a mentor, the next step is to consider whether your child has the traits and characteristics that he/she will need to be a successful mentee.

## Is your child ready for a mentor?

It is typical for precocious young people to seek additional information about topics that interest them. A mentoring partnership is one avenue students can pursue. As positive as such an experience may sound, your child needs to have significant responsibilities in the partnership to make it successful for both parties. In order to be sure your child is ready to make such a commitment, there are many points to consider.

- First and foremost, has your child expressed interest in beginning a mentoring partnership? Does your child want to work with a mentor? Does your child understand the level of commitment involved in a mentoring partnership? Typically this commitment involves regular communication with a professional or student in the area of interest and the completion of a facilitated project to enrich the child's interest. If your child does not desire this type of commitment, a contact person, tutor or "buddy" that shares the same interests may be more beneficial.
- After concluding that your child has interest, you can discuss what your child would hope to gain from such a relationship. There are an endless number of possibilities depending on your child's interests, who the mentor is and what project is established.
- With outlined goals in mind, consider your child's temperament and what kind of person would work well with her/him.
- Also take into account your child's age and maturity level. Ask yourself how your child interacts with adults. Is he/she able to effectively communicate with adults?
- When considering which setting would enable your child to be the most successful, keep in mind whether he/she would be capable of maintaining a partnership solely through email or if he/she is prepared to spend a great deal of time with the mentor.
- Determine whether your child has the level of responsibility needed to support his/her side of the partnership. Does he/she have the responsibility to fulfill the commitment that a professional or college student would expect from a mentee?
- Finally, assess your willingness to assist your child in making a mentoring partnership successful. Is she/he independent enough to maintain a mentoring relationship on her/his own or are you going to have to help facilitate contact or remind her/him of expectations? Are you willing to do so?
- Of course, for safety purposes, as a parent you should monitor each step of the mentoring partnership between your child and the adult. How much monitoring are you willing to do?

## Ideal characteristics of a mentee

In order to further consider your child's preparedness to delve into such a partnership, look over the following ideal characteristics of mentees to establish if your child is capable of meeting such criteria.

- A certain level of developmental maturity.
- Immense curiosity.
- Willingness to ask questions.
- Ability to initiate and participate in discussion.
- Ability to accept praise and constructive criticism well.
- A positive attitude.
- High degree of responsibility.
- Eagerness to explore new topics and broaden capabilities.

## **Important considerations for parents**

If you and your child decide a mentorship would be a good fit, the next step is to search for potential mentors. Before embarking on this search you should take the following points into consideration.

### **Supervision**

Supervision is an essential part of a safe mentorship. It is recommended that the mentor relationship be constructed such that the mentee is never in a situation where his/her safety may be compromised. Agreed upon practices are important things to consider during the interview process. You may want to discuss your expectations with the potential mentor. For example, the mentor and the mentee must not be left alone; the mentor won't leave until the child/adolescent has transportation home, etc.

### **Financial considerations**

Establishing a protocol for financial considerations right from the beginning can significantly reduce the potential for misunderstandings. Deciding who will cover costs such as lab fees, materials, telephone calls, copier fees, computer usage fees, etc. should be agreed upon at the onset of the relationship. Compensation for the mentor should also be discussed. Most mentoring experiences are done on a volunteer basis; however, making this assumption can lead to a potentially embarrassing situation.

### **Meeting times**

Although it may seem premature to discuss a meeting schedule during an interview, it is essential to make sure that both parties have time to work together on a project. If the only time the mentor has time to meet is Tuesday afternoons, and the mentee has other commitments on that day that cannot be changed, then it is likely that the mentee is going to have to make a choice. It's also important to discuss communication. Is the mentor available via email or phone between meetings? How often can the mentor meet? In addition, establishing guidelines for handling cancelled meetings, last-minute changes, etc. can help to establish a solid mentor relationship.

### **Legal protection**

The scope of all the possible mentor relationships is so vast that it is impossible to cover all legal contingencies that could arise. We recommend that you seek legal counsel if you have questions. However, as part of the interview process, it is essential to discuss, what intellectual and/or physical property will belong to the company/university or the mentor and what will belong to the mentee. In addition, if the mentee is working in an arena where confidentiality is an issue, he/she needs to fully understand what this means and what is acceptable to discuss outside the mentor/mentee relationship.

### **Safety and release forms**

Laboratories, and many other places of business, often have safety procedures in place. Individuals working in these environments have most likely been given extensive safety training. During the interview, investigate potential safety issues and training requirements and establish a process to ensure the mentee has the appropriate safety equipment and has signed the necessary release forms.

### **Ethics**

Mentors and mentees are visitors to each other's worlds. Every care should be taken to ensure that neither person is compromised intellectually, physically or morally. Although it may seem uncomfortable to talk about this with the mentor, awareness of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behavior is important.

### **Screening potential mentors**

Another option you may consider is conducting a professional screening as part of the selection process. School districts require drug checks, references and criminal record checks where it is legal to do so. The National Mentoring Partnership (<http://www.mentoring.org/>) recommends a face-to-face interview and a home visit, character references, a child/adolescent abuse registry check, driving record check and criminal record check where legally permissible. Contact your local law enforcement agency for information regarding what is legal to ask in your area, how to go about the decided upon checks, and any other suggestions they may have.

### **Preparing for the next step**

The decision to establish a mentoring partnership has to be a joint venture between you and your child. Although you may feel that you are prepared and your child has what it takes, he/she must ultimately make the commitment and take responsibility for the partnership. Peruse this guidebook with your child so the two of you can gain a deeper understanding of mentorships together. Discuss with your child the available options and make a list of questions, concerns, and needs that both you and your child have before contacting potential mentors. Then, let the journey begin!

### **Helpful resources**

[“Tips for Parents: Finding a Mentor for your Gifted Child”](#)

## SECTION FOUR: Types of Mentoring Relationships

1. Types of mentoring relationships
2. Preparing for a mentorship
3. Developing and defining a project
4. Setting a timeline

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### Types of mentoring relationships

There are various types of mentoring relationships; which can be developed based on the needs and requirements of the mentor and mentee. There are several key factors to contemplate when determining which type of relationship will be the most beneficial to all parties; for example, geography, personality, goals, and time are all important to take into account. The following are three types of mentoring relationships and the potential benefits and constraints that each entails.

#### One-on-One Mentoring

One-on-One mentoring typically consists of regularly scheduled meetings that occur in a face to face environment. Mentors and mentees can determine the location, time, and frequency of meetings based on their needs.

Some of the benefits of a One-on-One mentoring relationship include:

- Improved communication through real-life interaction.
- Project-based interaction can enhance learning.
- Experience in a laboratory or other professional setting can increase the student's depth of knowledge.
- Personal interaction can lead to increased academic and professional possibilities.
- The relationship and projects tend to progress faster with personal interaction.

Some of the constraints of the One-on-One mentoring relationship can include:

- Scheduling difficulties.
- Time limitations.
- Difficulty finding meeting/laboratory space.
- An increased need for parental supervision (although still vital in any mentoring relationship).
- Increased cost.
- More difficulty finding specialists to be mentors in rural areas.

#### Online Mentoring

Online mentoring can consist of emailing, instant messaging, or a combination of online communication methods. Mentors and mentees have more flexibility with online mentoring relationships. Some of the benefits of the online mentoring relationship include:

- Being able to communicate to and from any geographical location.
- No pre-determined meeting times make communication more convenient.
- Shy mentees may find it easier to communicate and interact through their computers.
- Importance of superficial characteristics like age can be reduced.
- More cost effective.
- There is a written record of correspondence which can make supervision of the relationship easier and reinforces learning objectives.
- No difficulty in finding meeting space.

Some of the constraints of the Online mentoring relationship can include:

- Miscommunication due to inability to read emotions in text.
- Difficulty of younger mentees with communicating through typed emails.
- Slower progress on projects and learning.
- Can inhibit development of a quality relationship.
- Both parties are required to have access to the Internet as well as a computer.
- Online mentoring relationships do not offer mentees the opportunity to learn proper procedures and experience a laboratory environment.

### **Group Mentoring**

Group mentoring relationships typically consist of one mentor who works with multiple mentees, usually during a set time.

Some of the benefits of group mentoring relationships include:

- When mentors are scarce it can provide opportunities for a number of mentees simultaneously.
- Mentees can share the cost of reimbursement for the mentor, lab time, and supplies.
- Mentees are given the opportunity to work with other students interested in the same subject.
- Mentees can gain knowledge and different perspectives from other participants and can develop a peer network for future projects.
- Mentees can learn to problem solve together.

Some of the constraints of a group mentoring relationship can include:

- Academic levels of the mentees may differ.
- Mentees may not have the time to develop their interest fully when sharing a mentor.
- Mentees may end up on a project that is not specific enough to their interests.
- Mentees could have more difficulty scheduling around a group's timetable.
- Mentees who are shy may feel uncomfortable interacting in a group.

### **Preparing for a mentorship**

Once you have established which type of mentoring relationship is the best fit, the next important component is preparing for the mentorship. One of the main elements of preparation is defining the relationship. If you will be meeting face-to-face, where will you meet? For how long? How often? If you will be working together online, how often will you email? Is the mentor available by phone if necessary? How long will you be working together? Is there compensation involved? If you will be working on a project together, who will get the credit? After these details have been agreed upon by both parties, you should prepare for the actual mentoring relationship.

Some of the items a mentee should accomplish can include but are not limited to:

- Be ready to discuss your objectives and goals with the mentor.
- Be ready and willing to accept feedback from the mentor.
- Be prepared to accept responsibility for the project and goals.
- Be willing to attempt new methods of approaching the project as directed by the mentor.
- Complete the research, homework, and take quality notes required for a project.
- If at all possible, define the project with all necessary background information before meeting with the mentor.
- Have a flexible timeline prepared for completing the project.

## Developing and defining a project

One of the most critical portions of a project is the selection of a topic. Selecting a topic that interests you is just one important key. First and foremost, you must identify an achievable project that follows the ethical and safety guidelines set by the facility you will be utilizing. Next, you should consider the time and money that will be required to complete the project.

You can take several steps to develop your topic:

- Develop a short broad list of topics
- Gather information from an array of sources while taking quality notes
- Narrow your topic based on current research trends, your literature search, and your interests, keeping in mind potential constraints while considering your reasons for selecting this particular area to research.
- Define your objectives and goals for the project.
- Develop a question and hypothesis if applicable.

For additional, in-depth information, refer to [Section Three](#).

## Setting a timeline

Mentees may wish to consider the time constraints and commitment the mentor has agreed upon when devising a timeline. The timeline should reflect the projected amount of time needed to complete the project, along with any follow up time you wish to have with the mentor.

In order to set a timeline you may want to perform some of the following as suggested by Bimrose (2003):

- List all the tasks you need to accomplish to finish the project.
- Approximate the time required to finish each task.
- Determine how much follow up time will be required after project completion.
- Draw up a calendar timeline of the project based upon your task list and time estimations.



## SECTION FIVE: Searching for a mentor

1. Expected characteristics of a successful mentee
2. Finding a mentor
  - Characteristics to look for in a mentor
  - Safety tips to consider
3. Interviewing tips
4. Making the relationship meaningful

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### Expected characteristics of a successful mentee

A mentor relationship involves a large amount of commitment and responsibility. Professionals who typically take on the roles of mentors have high expectations for their protégés. In addition to the ideal characteristics of a mentee listed in the previous section, the following is a sampling of what mentors may expect from a prospective mentee.

- Students who are prepared to spend a significant amount of time (as determined by the student and mentor) working on the objectives of the mentorship, such as the project, reading, and assignments.
- A level of maturity to handle frustrations and obstacles successfully.
- A dedication to see the mentorship through to the end. The partnership will not be successful if the mentee changes his/her mind part-way through the project and it will most likely discourage the mentor from participating in that type of relationship again.
- A respectful attitude for the mentor's time; understanding that the mentor is probably very busy with his/her own professional and personal commitments.
- An ability to be responsible for managing time and project deadlines along with simultaneous obligations.
- A great amount of enthusiasm geared toward the subject at hand
- A clear understanding and distinction between the mentee's role, the mentor's role and the parents' role.
- Ability to ask questions and request help when necessary; this is a key characteristic because the mentor will expect to guide the mentee's discoveries.

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### Finding a mentor

Locating a mentor has the potential to be the most difficult component in the mentoring process. The time commitment involved makes many adults hesitant to volunteer for this type of partnership due to their already demanding schedules. To increase the likelihood of success in a search, it is recommended that parents and students use the networks available to them to find a mentor. For example:

- A potential mentor may be a personal contact.
- A member of a social circle may know someone who would be willing to participate in a mentoring partnership.
- Professional networking may also make locating a mentor a success

It is important that the student be willing to assist in locating the mentor. This shows he/she is ready to take on the responsibility and is dedicated to making the effort it will need to be a success. Students and parents may also want to contact personnel at the following organizations for assistance in locating a mentor:

- A professional group or industry association will have members that are interested and knowledgeable in their given subject area.
- A practicing professional in the field will be able to offer current information that may be pertinent in the field of study.
- On the other hand, a retired professional would be able to provide an extensive, reflective attitude for the subject.
- A professor or student at a local college (or one further away willing to participate in a mentoring relationship online) would have experience in the field, and also may be able to help make connections.
- An online community with similar interests may have participants interested in being a mentor.
- Clergy and congregations might also provide guidance in finding a mentor
- National organizations and associations are also able to assist in a search for mentors. Such organizations include:
  - The National Mentoring Partnership <http://www.mentoring.org/>
  - iMentor <https://imentor.org/>

It is possible that mentors may be more responsive to contact initiated by a student, rather than a parent. This increases the likelihood that the student is ready for a mentoring relationship, not just that the parent(s) think he/she is ready.

### **Characteristics to look for in a mentor**

While searching for a mentor, parents and students also need to carefully consider what characteristics will work well with the student interested in the mentorship based on the child's temperament, communication skills, and ultimate goals of the partnership. There are also ideal characteristics that mentors should possess:

- First and foremost, an interest in working with and supporting a bright, motivated young person.
- A willingness to provide guidance, support, encouragement and direction for the student and his/her proposed project.
- Can foster an open environment in which the student feels comfortable and can participate in discussions and ask questions.
- Ability to display patience and is a person of high integrity.
- Ability to provide constructive feedback and suggestions on the mentee's projects and skills.
- Possesses great knowledge and interest in the area of study chosen for the mentorship.
- The capacity to be flexible when working with the student.
- Willingness to work with a student outside of professional and personal obligations.
- Someone who has shown responsibility in his/her achievements.

You may also want to consider a mentor who:

- Provides students ample opportunity to develop their research skills.
- Recognizes and validates a student's professional growth and development.
- Assists the mentee in developing a professional network of individuals.
- Maintains confidentiality about the student.
- Devotes time to one-on-one discussion with the mentee.
- Has earned the respect of peers, the organization, and/or the community.
- Expresses a desire to help others and share experiences and expertise.

While the above characteristics are all important to keep in mind, it should also be known what a mentor is NOT:

- Someone who will only answer basic questions about a topic that have the potential of being answered by further research.

- Someone who is interested in making decisions about parenting the child.
- Someone to baby-sit or be solely responsible for the child.

### **Safety tips to consider**

When beginning any new relationship there are issues concerning safety which need to be addressed. This is especially true when a young person is going to be in close contact with an adult. There are actions that both parents and students can take to ensure the mentoring relationship proceeds safely and successfully.

- You may consider learning more about running a background check on an individual who has volunteered to be a mentor. Contact your local police department for more information.
- Meeting in public places is a simple way to eliminate the element of seclusion during contact.
- Parents should monitor phone, email, and face-to-face contact.
- Students and parents need to maintain an open line of communication so concerns can be discussed and addressed as they arise.

### **Interviewing tips**

Once you have located a potential mentor, an interview should be arranged. At this point, parents need to be actively involved. The interview is a way for each participant to learn more about each other and determine if the mentor relationship would be a good fit. Keep in mind that every candidate will have both strengths and weaknesses. Utilize this time with the potential mentor to gain knowledge of his/her background and experience. To help guide your interview, we have included a list of suggested questions below. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely to serve as a guide. We have also included some important points for consideration in Section Three: Parent Section.

### **Suggested Interview Questions**

- How did you become interested in your area of expertise?
- Do you have any prior experience with mentoring (either as a mentor or mentee)?
- How long have you been in your current position?
- How would you describe your teaching style?
- Why are you interested in becoming a mentor?
- Do you consider yourself comfortable working with children/adolescents?
- What kinds of activities or plans do you envision for your relationship with your mentee?
- Are you comfortable with generating new questions for the mentee to pursue?
- How comfortable are you with providing constructive criticism?
- What would you do if your mentee became frustrated and discouraged with a project that you had been working on together?
- How long do you see yourself working with this child/adolescent?
- How much time do you think you will be able to realistically dedicate to this relationship?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself, your work or your ability to work with this mentee?

### **Making the relationship meaningful**

- Welcome the opportunity to be mentored.
- Know yourself, your strengths and your challenges.
- Understand mentoring is a professional relationship that should benefit both you and your mentor. He/she may be the senior partner, but the relationship can still be reciprocal.
- Define your relationship together, including how often and how long you will meet. Stay within the set parameters.
- Respect your mentor's time. Except for unusual situations that cannot wait, save questions for your scheduled meeting or discuss the mentor's expectations for communication between meetings.
- Stay organized to make the most of your sessions. Keep a notebook binder with the following categories: Mentor Questions, My Action Plan, Mentor Notes/Emails, Items for Discussion and Meeting Notes.
- Be prepared. Do the research. Know your mentor. Know what you want to learn or explore.
- If you are given an assignment, get it done on time and make it ready to present in a professional way.
- Keep your mentor informed about your work, your goals, and your achievements.
- Be early for meetings. If you can afford it, pay for any meals or beverages served during your meeting. Even if your mentor is Bill Gates, don't expect your mentor to pick up the check.
- Be open minded. You may get feedback you do not like. Take it in the spirit in which it was given.
- Ask for criticism and challenges. Apply the feedback or advice your mentor offers and let her/him know the results.
- Share your appreciation. Your mentor is giving up precious time and sharing valuable knowledge with you.

## SECTION SIX: Ending the Project

1. Reasons for ending the mentorship
2. Reflection & evaluation
  - The project
  - The relationship
3. Transitions & closure

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### Reasons for ending the mentorship

The majority of mentoring relationships inevitably come to an end. For this reason, it is important that both the mentor and the mentee recognize when the mentorship is nearing an end, rather than simply allowing the relationship to disintegrate or the project to stagnate. Mentorships can take on various forms; some may have resulted through the cultivation of an inspiring relationship, others may have been driven by the project itself and facilitated through a formal mentoring program. The relationship may be an intensive experience with the mentor and mentee laboring together over a project, while others mentorships may consist of infrequent communication over a long distance. Due to the varying nature of these relationships, reaching closure in the relationship and the project may take on various forms.

The first step is to recognize when the mentorship should reach a conclusion. Here are some thoughts for the mentee to consider:

- Have you already met your goals for the mentorship?
- Have you reached the end of a pre-determined timeline?
- Would it be useful to create new goals for the mentorship?
- When you pose a question, can you predict your mentor's response?
- Are you ready for a new mentor?
- Have you lost interest in the project, or do you need a break?
- Are you ready to continue on your own?

Mentorships are intended to foster continual learning, and inspire participants to meet goals and formulate their thoughts. An experienced mentor should recognize when the mentee is in need of a fresh perspective or ready to continue independently.

### Reflection and evaluation

Throughout the mentorship, it is important for the mentor and the mentee to reflect upon the direction the mentorship is taking, its impact on the participants, and identify when goals are met. Furthermore, many relationships are enhanced when the pair communicates with other interested parties, particularly the mentee's parents and teachers. Solid mentorships are maintained in this way, and when it comes time to end the mentorship, this communication enables a smooth transition.

Prior to ending the mentorship, carry out an exit interview. The mentor and mentee may be most comfortable with the same form of communication as they employed throughout the mentorship, via email, phone or in person. Below are questions to consider including in an exit interview.

#### The project

Throughout the mentorship it is useful to reflect upon the project's development, and take note when goals are being met, or why they are not. When ending the project, the mentor and mentee should evaluate the project itself. Here are a few questions for both to consider:

- Have we met the goals we outlined at the beginning of our project?
- Were the original goals practical?
- Did we or should we have set new goals throughout the mentorship?
- What was the significance of the project or its findings?
- What were the project's shortcomings?
- How could you have avoided any pitfalls that may have occurred?
- What directions could this project take?
- How could the findings of the project be applied?
- Is the project incomplete or missing something?
- Does the mentee need a new mentor who is specialized in another area in order to continue with their project?
- Will there be concerns of intellectual property? How will those issues be handled?

### **The relationship**

It is important for the mentor and the mentee to reflect upon the mentoring relationship together. Here are a few questions for both to consider:

- What have you taught each other or what have I learned from this process?
- What do you value in the relationship?
- What, if anything, would you have done differently?
- What are your future plans?
- How can you help the other prepare for future plans?
- Is it difficult for you to say good bye?
- Should we maintain the relationship after the project is complete?

### **Transitions and closure**

The evaluation process is actually a form of transition from a formal mentoring relationship to a new arrangement for the mentor and mentee or a finalization of the relationship. One positive way to close the mentorship is by recognizing its significance. In formal mentoring programs, typically a certificate is issued or a ceremony takes place. While this form of recognition may be meaningful for participants, others choose more individualized approaches. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Write about the project.
- Informally present the project to parents and teachers.
- Locate a research group, association, or other students in the field and formally present the project and its findings.
- Submit findings to be published.
- Celebrate with your mentor and significant others in your life.
- Write a letter of thanks to your mentor and share what the experience has meant to you.

As mentioned, many relationships end with the project; however, this is not always the case. The relationship can also take on a new role. The mentor may agree to be available to answer questions or support the mentee in future endeavors. Many mentees note a digression in their learning, and a lack of reflection on their projects when mentorships end abruptly, and when they do not have a formal structure in place for learning. Successful mentorships may continue with new projects and the creation of new goals. As the mentee develops and furthers their knowledge, the mentor may shift from providing direction to a more collaborative relationship, as a peer.

## SECTION SEVEN: FAQ's

Many of the following questions have been addressed throughout the guidebook. We've summarized the information pertaining to the most frequently asked questions.

1. What is a mentorship?
2. Why is mentoring important?
3. What do mentors and mentees do together?
4. Do you have to be in the same location as your mentor?
5. Will mentoring require a large amount of time?
6. What happens if the mentorship match isn't working to either party's satisfaction?
7. Why is a mentor hard to find?
8. What are some problems that can occur in a mentorship?
9. How can these problems be prevented or resolved?
10. Who should manage the relationship?

### What is a mentorship?

Torrance (1984) defines a *mentorship* as is a formal relationship between a student and a professional adult to further the student's knowledge, skills, or career. The relationship should develop over time to be close and individualized. It should also be characterized by mutual caring, depth, and response. A *mentor* is a creatively productive person who teaches, counsels, and inspires a student with similar interests.

### Why is mentoring important?

According to a study of presidential scholars from 1964-1968, Kaufman (1981) reviewed the benefits that come from having a mentor include gaining a role model, support and encouragement. These presidential scholars also stated that the best mentors set an example, offered intellectual stimulation, and communicated excitement and joy in the learning process.

As noted by Gallager (1985), with mentoring, students can find direction, mature, and focus on the future by associating with someone who has not just been there and done that, but has succeeded. Mentors can have a profound effect in guiding a student through the often-difficult formative years.

Berger (1990) observed by sharing time, talents, and experiences, mentors and students can develop close relationships in which both parties collaborate and learn from one another. Often mentors and mentees view one another as friends and colleagues rather than a student and teacher.

According to Ambrose, Allen, and Huntley (1994), the mentor relationship can be equally as valuable for mentors who learn more about giving from the heart and appreciate the positive impact they provide to blossoming students. Mentors find value in nurturing a young person who has the potential to make a difference in this world.

Mentoring is important to students not only for the knowledge and skills learned, but also for the professional socialization and personal support needed to facilitate success in the field and beyond.

### What do mentors and mentees do together?

While often times mentors and mentees work on a specific project together, the relationship does not have to be defined by that project. Mentors and mentees can talk to each other not only about past experiences, goals, plans, and skills, but also about the mentor's career path

and useful problem-solving strategies. They can attend meetings and conferences together, and exchange and discuss written materials. Mentors and mentees may often interact with other individuals who may be of help to the mentee.

### **Do you have to be in the same location as your mentor?**

Co-location is not crucial for a mentoring partnership. There have been many successful mentorships that have taken place during set times over the telephone, or over the internet via either email or instant messaging.

### **Will mentoring require a large amount of time?**

The duration and consistency of a mentoring relationship is a deciding factor in its success. Because the venue of a mentorship varies between in-person mentorships, cyber-mentorships, or telephone-mentorships, expectations need to be established at the beginning of the relationship so both parties can adjust their schedules accordingly. There are a lot of creative suggestions out there regarding a mentorship. It is not unheard of for mentors to fit meetings into their lunch breaks or even use instant messaging as a communication tool.

### **What happens if the mentorship match isn't working to either party's satisfaction?**

Unfortunately, you may discover the mentorship match is not quite a perfect pairing; either there is no common ground, or the mentor and mentee don't actually hold the same interests like initially thought. In this situation, you can politely and respectfully explain the circumstances, and perhaps ask your mentor if he/she feels comfortable assisting you in locating another individual whose expertise may be more helpful for your particular interest. If things do not work out, you may have to begin your mentor search again.

### **Why is a mentor hard to find?**

Finding a dedicated and interested mentor is key to a successful learning relationship. Exactly what the potential mentee desires should be made clear in the initial contact with a potential mentor. This desire will most likely indicate a significant time commitment, and because most mentors also work a full-time job, they may not be able to balance the needs of a mentorship with other, professional or personal, obligations.

### **What are some problems that can occur in a mentorship?**

A problem often encountered in the beginning of a mentorship is the lack of clear objectives on the part of the mentee. Not enough time devoted to the relationship is another common problem; unreasonable expectations of each other or one member taking unfair advantage of the other member can also be problem areas. Unfortunately, sometimes there is a general lack of mentoring skills on the part of the mentor, mentee, or both.

### **How can these problems be prevented or resolved?**

From the very beginning, both parties of the mentorship should aim for realistic, focused goals. The two parties should make these goals and expectations clear to one another and maximize their time together and apart by using the phone, e-Mail, and other timesaving strategies.

### **Who should manage the relationship?**

The mentee should manage and set the goals for the relationship. After all, it is the student's development that is primarily at stake. That is not to say that the mentor does not have any input, or that the student's parents need not play their expected, responsible role; however, the mentee must be the one who takes responsibility for the process and outcomes.



## SECTION EIGHT: Tips for Mentors

1. Mentors should...
2. Mentors should not...
3. Where to draw the line
4. Tips for long distance mentoring
5. Tips for local mentoring

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### Mentors should...

Partly adapted from the Epilepsy Foundations NoLimits Telementoring Program:

- Be enthusiastic - have a positive attitude.
- Be your student's friend, not a buddy -- A friend is a person who looks out for one's best interest. For instance, a friend never allows a person to do less than his/her best, to dodge responsibilities, or to do things that will be harmful to him/herself.
- Help the mentee improve her/his attitude toward education and learning. A mentor should emphasize that the student works and learns for her/himself and her/his own self improvement -- not for parents or for you.
- Approach the mentee on a basis of mutual respect -- Your student has many life experiences that you do not and may have knowledge that you do not have. Always be respectful of these differences and do not belittle the students for things not known or skills not yet acquired.
- Listen to the person you are mentoring without an agenda.
- Always encourage the student to try -- even if the work seems too difficult.
- Support, compliment, and model positive behavior.
- Encourage your student to express his/her ideas, even if they are different from your own.
- Help students develop the ability to look at situations from other points of view.
- Try to demonstrate and communicate patience.
- Always show respect for your student's parents.
- Share common experiences.
- Be sincere in your praise, and praise the attempt as much or more than the right answer.

### Mentors should not...

- Be afraid to admit that you don't know something – you can use these opportunities to show your student how to access and use the resources that contain answers.
- Approach the relationship as an authority figure.
- Concentrate on the past failures of your student -- focus on the now
- Complete assignments or activities for your mentee. If you help your student develop skills, independence will come.
- Be judgmental or controlling in the relationship -- Don't give lectures on ways to behave. Information, possibilities, suggestions, and alternatives may be presented, but only for consideration.
- Be alarmed at remarks made by the mentee. Instead, focus on the reason behind what was said or done.
- Develop an inflated view of your role.
- Make false promises or reassure the mentee that things will be all right. This will be recognized as superficial. Instead, communicate a feeling for the mentee and a desire to see and understand the problem. Do not appear to be overly concerned or to assume the mentee's problem. Look for ways to demonstrate change and progress.

## Where to draw the line

- **Investing financially in mentee's business or life pursuits** - Occasionally the mentee may request the mentor to buy something. This invitation can be presented in a myriad of ways: pay some sort of bill, invest in a possible venture or business, or to bring money into the relationship in some way. It is not advised to bring money into the mentorship in any form; doing so creates a dual-relationship, and creates its own problems. It takes away some objectivity in the relationship, from both parties, and the mentee could develop a dependency on the mentor. The mentee may not be willing to discuss issues or concerns as openly as before for fear the mentor may withdraw whatever funds s/he has contributed.
- **"Working" for your mentee** - The mentor should stay away from all incidents in which he or she is essentially "hired" by the mentee. Examples of this include writing the mentee's résumé, completing scholarship applications for the mentee, or anything the mentee should be doing for him or herself.
- **Playing personal counselor** - While effective mentors don't limit their help to work-related issues, they are very aware of "the line," and do not cross it. Avoid giving critical personal advice and counseling when it involves psychological challenges. Suggesting setting the mentee up with a mental health professional would be wise. It may be helpful to set some boundaries when setting up the partnership.

## Tips for long distance mentoring

- Contact your mentee by telephone, email, Skype or regular mail.
- Let your mentee know how s/he can contact you (e.g., telephone, email, Skype, regular mail).
- Make an effort to contact your mentee periodically throughout the year, especially when you come across information that might be of interest to him or her.
- Encourage your mentee to join any of the Special Interest Sections or local chapters. Help your mentee with networking (for example, try to arrange a "local" contact for your mentee by calling your colleagues in the area where your mentee resides/works).

Here are a few additional tips from Rosen (2000):

- **Take it slower.** Know that it will take time. Allow your mentoring relationship to grow at a slower rate than you might with someone you can easily meet with face to face. In the beginning stages, don't expect more from your mentor or mentee than a strong commitment to work with you to develop your partnership.
- **Commitment is imperative!** Okay, here's where the pedal meets the metal. As in all mentoring relationships, a strong commitment is imperative. But it is even more necessary in a distance relationship, because it's what will get you through the weeks or months of establishing a solid bond. And this leads us to our next point . . .
- **Creating and signing of the initial contract is especially important.** We recommend having a signed document. We recommend this for all mentoring partnerships, but it is even more important in a distance mentoring relationship. This contract should define explicitly the areas that may often be called into question: What is our level of commitment? When should we meet? How long and how often should we meet? What are we comfortable talking about? What goals do we want to set? Add any other areas you think need defining. Keep the document up to date. It will go a long way to help you organize your meetings, keep you on track, and keep the commitment fresh.

## Tips for local mentoring

As suggested by the American Association for Law Libraries (2005)

<https://www.aallnet.org/careers/mentor-program/>

- Meet your mentee—have coffee or lunch together, or invite him or her to your workplace for a tour and to get acquainted.
- Invite your mentee to a local function or an educational or professional meeting.
- Call a few of your friends and ask if they would be willing to meet with your mentee to share their professional experiences.
- Invite your mentee to call or e-mail you occasionally if he or she has questions or needs ideas.

## SECTION NINE: Resources

### Articles

Advisor, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/5789/adviser-teacher-role-model-friend-on-being-a-mentor-to>

Articles of Interest – The American Physiological Society APS Career Mentoring Program:  
<https://www.physiology.org/professional-development/career-professional-development/mentoring?SSO=Y>

Career planning for gifted and talented youth

<http://di.davidsoninstitute.website.bc.kps3dev.com/gifted-blog/career-planning-for-gifted-and-talented-youth/>

Mentor relationships and gifted learners

<http://di.davidsoninstitute.website.bc.kps3dev.com/gifted-blog/mentor-relationships-and-gifted-learners/>

Mentoring: an educational alternative for gifted students

<http://www.casenex.com/casenet/pages/readings/specialPops/dataGifted/mentor.htm>

Mentoring and Your Child: Developing a Successful Relationship

[https://www.wku.edu/gifted/documents/resource\\_articles/mentoring-and-your-child.pdf](https://www.wku.edu/gifted/documents/resource_articles/mentoring-and-your-child.pdf)

Mentorship of the highly creative

<http://di.davidsoninstitute.website.bc.kps3dev.com/gifted-blog/mentorship-of-the-highly-creative/>

Nurturing for wisdom and compassion: Influencing those who influence

<http://di.davidsoninstitute.website.bc.kps3dev.com/gifted-blog/nurturing-for-wisdom-and-compassion-influencing-those-who-influence/>

Mentoring – Start a Program

<http://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/start-a-program/>

Tips for Parents: Finding a Mentor for your Gifted Child

<http://di.davidsoninstitute.website.bc.kps3dev.com/gifted-blog/finding-a-mentor-for-your-gifted-child/>

### Books

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<https://www.amazon.com/Gifted-Kids-Speak-Out-Hundreds/dp/0915793105>

Dunning, D. (2001). What's your type of career?: unlock the secrets of your personality to find your perfect career path. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0891061541/sr=8-1/qid=1145549901/ref=sr\\_1\\_1/104-3274011-8772713?\\_encoding=UTF8](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0891061541/sr=8-1/qid=1145549901/ref=sr_1_1/104-3274011-8772713?_encoding=UTF8)

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Karnes, F., Stephens, K. & Siegle, D. (2005) Developing Mentorship Programs for Gifted Students (Practical Strategies Series in Gifted Education). <https://www.amazon.com/Developing-Mentorship-Practical-Strategies-Education-ebook/dp/B005CKKETA>

Torrance, E.P. (1984). Mentor relationships: how they aid creative achievement, endure change and die. New York, NY: Bearly Limited. [https://books.google.com/books/about/Mentor\\_Relationships.html?id=ExUiAQAAIAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Mentor_Relationships.html?id=ExUiAQAAIAAJ)

## Online Career and Interest Surveys

- Free Career Interest Survey <http://www.mi-career.com/>
- Identifying Your Skills and Career Interests <https://www.washington.edu/doit/identifying-your-skills-and-career-interests-0>
- What Can I Do With This Major? <http://artsci.utk.edu/future-students/need-a-major/what-can-i-do-with-this-major/>

## Mentoring Organizations/Finding a Mentor

*The following organizations sponsor mentors, have mentoring programs or suggest mentoring resources. They are not endorsed by the Davidson Institute for Talent Development.*

- Big Brothers Big Sisters <http://www.bbbs.org/>
- iMentor <https://imentor.org/>
- Institute for Educational Advancement's Mentorship Program <https://educationaladvancement.org/programs/iea-explore/explore-mentors/>
- Mentors for Gifted Students <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/mentors.htm>
- Mentored Pathways <https://www.mentoredpathways.org/>
- Mentoring Group <https://mentoringgroup.com/>
- National Mentoring Partnership <http://www.mentoring.org/>
  - Find a Mentor <http://www.mentoring.org/get-involved/find-a-mentor/>
  - Growth Mindset Toolkit and Implementation Guide <http://www.mentoring.org/growth-mindset-tool-kit/>
- National Mentoring Resource Center <http://www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/>
- Science Buddies <https://www.sciencebuddies.org/>
- UCONN Mentor Connection <https://mentor.education.uconn.edu/>

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