

Mentoring Skills for Mentors

Highlighted below are the important skills that will help you to empower your mentee to think, reflect and take the necessary action steps to realise his or her goals. Your objective should be to provide guidance and support; you are not expected to solve problems for your mentee.

Actively listen

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to paraphrase what he or she has heard the speaker say in order to confirm understanding. At the same time, the listener is also paying attention to non-verbal cues such as silence, facial expression, body language and overall comfort.

Tips for active listening

- Focus all of your attention on the speaker.
- Avoid distractions like phones and email.
- Do not interrupt the speaker or assume a conclusion before the speaker has finished.
- Do not react with judgment. Instead summarise main points once the speaker is finished.
- Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements when going over what you heard.
- Take notes to capture important thoughts and concepts.
- Resist the urge to provide solutions.
- Listen for feeling and tone in speech.

Ask thought-provoking questions

- Your main goal as a mentor is to help your mentee take the steps needed to pursue his or her goals. Use open-ended questions that provoke deeper thought and reflection. Your questions should create a space for open discussion and allow your mentee to reflect on his or her opinions, thoughts and feelings.

Role model behaviour

- As a mentor you are a role model and should be aware of your word choice, your demeanor and how you react to people and situations.
- Use examples from your own experiences to demonstrate how to receive feedback, take ownership, build effective partnerships, etc.
- Model how to effectively receive and respond to feedback when receiving it from your mentee.
- Model active listening when your mentee is speaking.
- Be present, engaged, and on time to meetings with your mentee.

Provide objective feedback and guidance

- Students may not have had much experience receiving critical feedback and therefore may not have the personal or professional skills to appropriately receive it and respond to.
- Ask your mentee how he or she best receives feedback in your first meeting. When you are ready to provide feedback, check for a willingness to listen by asking for permission to deliver feedback.
- Check for understanding. Make sure that you accurately understand the situation.
- Check for positive intent. Make sure that your intentions are to help with the other person’s growth.
- Focus on behaviours and results. Frame your message around concrete behaviours and results of those behaviours.

Demonstrate critical thinking

- When you provide feedback to your mentee you model your ability to think critically about the situation. A critical thinker clearly articulates a question or problem, gathers and assesses relevant information, tests solutions against relevant criteria, has an open mind to alternative solutions, and communicates the decision effectively to others.
- Identify the problem.
- Identify possible solutions to the problem.
- Analyse/evaluate possible solutions.
- Make a decision and implement the solution.
- Reflect on what happened and why.