

# Guidelines for successful Mentoring

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### Imprint

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## Mentoring as Part of yourTRACK – A brief Overview

yourTRACK is an qualification program for personnel development that supports junior research group leaders, junior and tenure-track professors during their qualification phase with training, coaching, mentoring and networking opportunities.

### Why mentoring?

In addition to undoubtedly indispensable specialist skills and scientific excellence, academic commitment and teaching qualifications, interdisciplinary skills and very good networks in the scientific community are also important for a career in science. In order to pursue your own academic career in a targeted manner, it is also advisable to develop effective strategies at an early stage. Mentoring has proven to be particularly effective here, as it enables a close exchange with a more experienced person who has already successfully mastered the desired career step.

The mentoring relationship between mentees and mentors focuses on passing on structural and informal (experiential) knowledge, as well as providing advice and feedback, and facilitating access to professional networks.

### General conditions

Junior research group leaders, junior and tenure-track professors have the opportunity to find a mentor for personal support during their qualification phase.

In order to ensure high-quality mentoring, Human Resources Development supports mentees in the search for and finding suitable mentors as part of yourTRACK. These can come from the University of Bonn as well as from other universities. A mentoring relationship is characterized, among other things, by freedom from hierarchy, a conversation at eye level and confidentiality. It is therefore important to ensure that the potential mentor does not have a hierarchical relationship with the mentee.

### Note for evaluation procedures

The mentors are independent and not part of the evaluation process (for TT procedures see [§8, TT Regulations](#)), but serve to provide professional and personal support to the participants. At the request of the TT professor, their mentor can take part in the annual status meeting with the dean.

### Duration of the mentoring relationship

Ideally, the mentoring relationship should cover the mentee's entire qualification period, but at least until the time of the interim evaluation. Regular support through mentoring discussions is particularly useful and helpful during the first 12-24 months in the new role. We are aware that this is a long period of support for mentors. However, the frequency and duration of the mentoring meetings can and should be arranged independently and individually between mentee and mentor, so that the time spent can be fully invested in supporting the respective mentee without any additional obligations.

## Prerequisites for successful Mentoring



### Freedom from hierarchy

Mentoring is about a voluntary exchange and advisory relationship between two people with different levels of experience. Hierarchy-free relationships guarantee that no conflicts of interest arise.

The mentors should therefore be independent and not part of the evaluation process (for TT procedures, see [§8, TT regulations](#)), but serve to provide professional and personal support to the participants.



### Openness

Within a mentoring relationship, not only questions and topics that are also openly communicated to third parties should be dealt with, but above all those that cannot otherwise be addressed but have a subliminal effect. Both partners should therefore have an interest in an open exchange. The mentee should be able to openly address their own insecurities and challenges within the mentoring tandem without having to fear repercussions for their own professional career.



### Trust

The basis for openness in interpersonal relationships is mutual trust. When discussing personal matters such as one's own life path or passing on informal knowledge, the mentee and mentor should always be sure that what has been discussed will not be passed on to third parties without their consent.



### Reliability and commitment

Reliability is an important factor in maintaining a mentoring relationship in the long term. This includes regular contact as well as continuous feedback and adherence to deadlines.



### Reciprocity

Not only the mentee benefits from mentoring, but the mentor can also gain new perspectives and learn about problems and challenges that may not have been recognized before.



### Appreciation and respect

Mutually respectful and appreciative interaction between the tandem partners is the basis for a promising exchange of experiences.



### Voluntariness

Mentoring is based on the voluntary, individual commitment of the mentee and mentor. As this is performed in addition to everyday obligations, it should therefore be valued accordingly by both partners.

## Information for Mentors

There are various roles expected of a mentor. They are role models, advisors, supporters, knowledge brokers, door openers and contacts in the mentee's professional network, but also a sounding board and source of inspiration for questions and suggestions. However, there is no relationship of dependency between the two. Voluntariness, freedom from hierarchy and encounters at eye level are essential for successful mentoring.

### Design of the mentoring program

In addition to face-to-face or online meetings and telephone calls, an interim email exchange can also help to keep in touch and provide brief updates on current developments. Participation in current ideas and projects is also an option, as is feedback on conference presentations, self-reports or research proposals.

### Advice & feedback

As a mentor, you advise your mentee on current issues and pass on your personal experience in this area to the mentee. As a mentor, you will point out important decision-making situations and development potential for the mentee and provide insights into the informal rules and structures of everyday academic life.

You also give feedback as a comparison of perceptions. This gives the mentee the chance to see their own views or behavior in a new context and to change them if necessary.

### Networking

As a mentor, you point out to your mentee the particular importance of professional and private networks for their career. Together, you can consider which (in)official networks the mentee already actively participates in and which contacts still need to be established. The mentee may also be able to participate in your network.

### Recognizing and promoting potential

Self-perception and external perception can often be far apart. As a mentor, it is therefore your task to show the mentee further professional or private options, as well as to recognize, make transparent and promote individual skills and competencies.

### Self-reflection and role reflection

In the course of the mentoring process, mentors should repeatedly reflect on their own role and their professional and personal experiences. Sharing these can be of far-reaching benefit to the mentee.

### Posture

The mentor's attitude should be characterized by openness and honest interest in the mentee's questions and concerns. The participants do not have to agree on the career path, on the next steps, on leadership styles, on the best possible way to combine family responsibilities and an academic career, and much more. - You as a mentor may also be able to learn something by reflecting on your own career path in comparison to that of the mentee. In addition, you will gain an insight into the situation of current young academics and may learn about new views or behaviors, receive new ideas or experience alternative solutions.

## Expectations of the mentee

The mentee can be expected to take the initiative in making appointments, preparing for meetings and discussions, as well as being reliable and committed to keeping appointments and making agreements. Information that is passed on to the mentee in confidence should also be treated confidentially by the mentee and not passed on to third parties without prior agreement. The mentee is responsible for the decisions made as part of the mentoring program and their implementation and is responsible for their own willingness to develop, learn and, if necessary, change.

## Time investment

In order to keep the mentoring effort for you as a mentor as low as possible, the mentees are primarily responsible for preparing and following up on the meetings. For the mentoring process for junior research group leaders, junior or tenure-track professors, however, it makes sense to provide support for the entire duration of the qualification period, but at least until the interim evaluation. In particular, the exchange in the first 1-2 years of the new position is seen as very valuable and important for setting the course for subsequent career steps.

We therefore recommend a regular exchange. At the beginning of the mentoring process, this usually takes place more frequently and at shorter intervals, often on current pressing issues. As the mentoring process progresses, the intervals usually become longer, but no less important. Further exchanges if the mentee has a specific need are expressly welcomed and can be agreed individually between the mentoring partners.





## Organizing Mentoring Meetings

### Initial Meeting

The initial meeting should be used to establish an initial trusting relationship. To this end, both parties should talk openly about their expectations and wishes for the other.

The next step is to jointly identify the topics to be addressed during the mentoring process. It is advisable to agree not only on specific goals (short, medium and long-term), but also on interim goals and key milestones along the way.

It also makes sense to define the conditions for the mentoring relationship in the first meeting. These include, for example, the frequency, duration, type and location of the meetings. It is advisable to record these considerations together in writing in a mentoring agreement (see appendix).

### Interim Meeting(s)

After expectations and goals have been clarified in the first meeting and milestones on the way to achieving the goals have been defined, it is important to evaluate the current situation in subsequent meetings and to compare it with the target situation again and again. Were the previous target agreements helpful? Do other agreements need to be made? Where were or are there problems and a need for support in achieving the objectives? Have any new questions or objectives arisen in the meantime? Are there any important learning experiences or new topics that should be discussed?

The mentoring tandem can also be reflected on from time to time and it can be considered together whether something needs to be changed in terms of communication or support.

### Final meeting

The final meeting serves both to evaluate and assess the agreed objectives and to look back on the mentoring relationship. It also marks an important conclusion to the mentoring process so that both parties can come to an end with their respective roles. Further contact and occasional exchanges between the tandem partners are welcomed and can be arranged individually between mentee and mentor.



## Appendix

### Mentoring agreement as part of yourTRACK at the University of Bonn

*Please forward a copy of this agreement to Personnel Development after signing it. This serves to ensure the quality of the process and our offers.*

Mentee: \_\_\_\_\_ (Vorname Nachname)

And

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_ (Vorname Nachname)

form a mentoring tandem as part of yourTRACK.

#### 1. Mentoring topics and goals of the mentoring process

As part of our mentoring relationship, we want to discuss the following topics and achieve the following (interim) goals:

#### 2. Modalities of the contact

We agree on the mentoring tandem for the period

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year)

Frequency of meetings: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of the meetings: \_\_\_\_\_

Meetings should take place ☐ in person ☐ via video chat ☐ by telephone

We agree on the specific topics we would like to discuss at our meetings in advance. The mentee is responsible for the preparation and follow-up of the meetings (e.g. making contact, arranging appointments, preparation and follow-up of the topics).

#### 3. Confidentiality

We undertake to treat the content of our discussions confidentially. They are not the subject of status, development or evaluation discussions. We will only discuss the content and topics of our mentoring relationship with third parties if we have expressly agreed to do so. The obligation to maintain confidentiality continues to apply even if we end our mentoring relationship.

#### 4. Termination

If circumstances arise that no longer allow us to continue our mentoring relationship, it can be terminated (prematurely). In this case, we will inform Human Resources Development and, if necessary, seek advice.



## Sources of References

Quality standards in mentoring. Federal Association for Mentoring in Science, Forum Mentoring e.V.

Mentoring handbook. Guidelines for successful mentoring. University of Siegen

Successfully shaping mentoring relationships. A practical guide. TANDEM Mentoring Programs RWTH Aachen University

Mentoring guide. University Medical Center Göttingen

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Mentoring guide. Tips for successfully shaping a mentoring relationship. ICBM Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg