

Essential tips for mentoring new nurses

The workforce after the COVID-19 pandemic is much different from the prepandemic world. During the pandemic, many nurses left their current employers or exited nursing entirely. Shortages are persistent, and because of turnover, many in the current workforce are less familiar with the organizations they work for and less experienced in nursing. Travel nurses remain a mainstay in many areas of the country, and nurses who are newer in the field are being called on to serve as mentors early in their careers. Mentorship is a key part of helping new nurses to be successful in their current jobs and in their careers. It also helps with retention, which benefits all nurses working in an organization.

If you are an early-career nurse being asked to mentor new nurses, you may feel intimidated. However, you can take several steps to promote mutual success for both you and your mentee.

Understand the mentor-mentee partnership

Mentorship differs from preceptorship. Preceptorship [refers to](#) a temporary relationship where a nurse teaches a novice nurse the skills related to a new job as part of the orientation process. Mentorship is a more permanent relationship in which mentors share their knowledge as they guide and support mentees to help them grow professionally and personally. Mentorship can begin during or after formal orientation. (Mentorship and preceptorship frequently overlap, so many of the tips you see here apply in either situation.)

The mentor-mentee relationship is a partnership. As with any partnership, it's important to understand the responsibilities on each side. For example, the mentor should outline the types of support they can provide; the mentee should speak up when needs are not being met.

It's worth taking time at the start of the partnership to discuss expectations and ensure they are congruent. You'll want to discuss how it's best to communicate with you and set up established times to meet so you can discuss how things are going. It's a good idea to make these check-ins weekly for the first month after orientation.

Promote cultural integration

Each organization has its own culture, and as a mentor, you can help the new nurse integrate into that culture. Integration starts with helping your mentee understand "rules of the road" that aren't written down in policies and procedures. For example, you might explain who has informal power and how different staff prefer to communicate.

One of your biggest responsibilities is to help your mentee make connections with others in the organization. Invite others to share lunch with you and encourage the new nurse to join committees. Committee work has two advantages: It helps the mentee get to know people and it helps with career development.

You might also suggest group activities, such as potlucks or volunteer activities, that provide the opportunity for the mentee to connect.

Promote open communication

For the mentor-mentee partnership to succeed, you and your mentee must have strong lines of communication. Both of you must be open to feedback that is specific, yet kind. For example, if a mentee has

not handled a situation correctly, you will want to point out what went wrong, but avoid blaming and finger-pointing.

Suggest, don't solve

It can be tempting to answer all the questions a mentee brings to you. As a relatively new staff person yourself, it feels good to be in the position of answering instead of asking questions. And you certainly will be answering many questions, such as those related to processes or how to do a procedure.

But when it comes to questions about how to solve a problem, avoid jumping in with an answer. Instead, ask the mentee for their input and what they think should be done. This is particularly important in the case of an interpersonal problem with another clinician. After all, you only have part of the story. Discuss the issue with the mentee and if they seem lost as to what to do, offer some suggestions. You might also role play how the mentee might approach the person they are having difficulties with.

Keep in mind that if you solve mentees' problems, you are depriving them of the opportunity to learn.

Assign and delegate appropriately

You may be involved in assigning and delegating to your mentee. Assignments refer to fundamental skills nurses learn in their basic education programs. Your mentee likely has areas that they feel more comfortable with than others, and it's helpful to start with those to build confidence. For example, a good assignment for a new nurse is a postoperative patient without comorbid conditions as opposed to someone with an unusual, complex medical condition. You'll also want to ensure that your mentee is adhering to standards of nursing practice.

As the nurse gains more experience, you may be able to delegate tasks. Delegation refers to tasks that are not part of the nurse's traditional role and are not covered in basic education. In this case, the nurse will need to receive additional education and demonstrate competency with the delegated task. For more information about delegation, refer to the [national guideline](#) from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing and American Nurses Association.

Know when to end

Not every mentor-mentee partnership works out. Your manager may have thought you and your mentee were the

Quick mentorship tips

Here are some tips for ensuring a successful mentor-mentee partnership:

- **Set expectations up front.** These should include goals of the relationship.
- **Provide honest feedback** (both positive and constructive) to the mentee. Point out what is working and areas for improvement.
- **Recognize mentee accomplishments.** Everyone likes to hear when they do well.
- **Hold mentees accountable.** If they did not meet a previously established goal, discuss why and how to best move forward.
- **Be open to feedback about yourself** from the mentee. This can help you improve your mentorship skills.
- **Allow the mentee to solve their problems** if possible. This facilitates learning.
- **Be willing to make a change** if the partnership is not working.
- **Be a role model.** Don't expect to see positive behaviors in your mentee if you aren't role modeling them yourself.
- **Listen.** This is probably the hardest tip to follow but is also probably the most important. Listening helps ensure mentees feel they are being heard and enables you to provide effective support.

perfect fit, but once in the relationship, you find that it's not working well. Keep in mind that usually no one is to blame for this situation. Common reasons include communication styles being too different.

What's most important is that you notify your manager so a change can be made. You'll also want to thank the mentee for the opportunity to connect for a while on their career journey and wish them well for the future.

For partnerships that are working well, there is frequently no set time for the relationship to end. Even in organizations with formal mentoring programs that have end dates, such as 6 months to 1 year, information mentorship often continues.

Professional contribution

Mentorship provides you the opportunity to help patients in a different way from the direct care you normally provide — you are helping another nurse deliver excellent care. By following tips outlined in this article, you can help new nurses succeed and give back to the nursing profession.

By: Cynthia Saver, MS, RN, president of CLS Development, Inc., in Columbia, Md.

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