

CLOSING THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP - MENTEES*

Closing the mentoring relationship may occur for several reasons, including reaching its natural ending or because the relationship is no longer serving the best interests of the mentee or the mentor. The latter may happen because you need to take a step back or because there was an unresolvable conflict.

Use this document as a conversation guide to help close your mentoring relationship. You are encouraged to make any necessary adjustments to prioritize what you think is best in your unique mentoring relationship.

Pre-Set Timeline

Your mentoring relationship may be on a pre-set timeline through a formal mentoring program or because you, as a pair, decided your connection was only going to last a specific length of time. Whether your relationship lasted a few weeks or several years, focus your last meeting around recapping your mentoring relationship and the development you both have experienced as a result of your time together. Discuss the outcomes of your SMART goals, various feedback you exchanged during your discussions, and other topics relevant to your personal mentoring relationship.

Thank your mentor for their investment in your growth both verbally during your conversation and by sending a written thank-you note through email or post. Although this specific chapter of your relationship may be ending, continue to reach out periodically to maintain the positive connection. You may desire further mentoring, a letter of recommendation, networking support, or other assistance in the future, and it helps to cultivate a rich network to ask for guidance.

Example: Alina and Dr. Morales

Alina is a third-year business undergraduate student who is moving through a formal mentoring program within the Tippie College of Business. During the month-long opportunity, she met weekly with Dr. Morales, a professor in the department. During their last meeting, Alina and Dr. Morales discussed their relationship as a whole, what they both had learned from their time together, and how they would like to keep in contact in the future, even if the program was coming to a close. After their conversation, Alina emailed a thoughtful thank-you note to Dr. Morales.

Taking A Step Back

You may need to take a step back from the mentoring relationship for a variety of personal or professional reasons. These may include: new time constraints on your project, an increased academic load, family or health issues, the birth of a child, or other life changes. If you feel the need to press pause on your mentoring relationship, take the initiative and contact your mentor as soon as you are able.

Discuss your changing context, provide them with the information you feel comfortable sharing, and discuss when/if you would like to continue the mentoring relationship. Be sure your new timeline is realistic with your new situation and keep your mentor updated as you feel more comfortable entering the mentoring relationship again. If you require additional assistance in closing out the mentoring relationship, or seeking out further campus support (counseling, emergency funds, etc.), please reference [Resolving Conflict Within the Mentoring Relationship](#) for a list of resources.

Example: Amy and Ji-hoon

Amy is a new hire within Student Affairs and Ji-hoon, her supervisor, is also her mentor. When she was first hired, Amy approached Ji-hoon to enter into a mentoring relationship with him focused around Amy's professional development through assisting with several extra projects. However, after three months, Amy's family situation changed and she no longer had the same amount of time or energy to invest in those side projects. She looked over her current responsibilities and decided that she needed to press pause on her mentoring relationship with Ji-hoon until her family situation settled down. As soon as Amy made this decision, she requested a meeting with him over email, explaining that she wanted to discuss taking a break from the additional work of being a mentee. During their meeting, they had an open and transparent conversation, with Amy explaining her new timeline and Ji-hoon working flexibly with her. Both left the meeting feeling comfortable and confident in their communication and in their paused relationship.

An Unresolvable Conflict

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, the mentoring relationship is not what you had hoped it would be. The mentor you thought would be best for aiding your professional, personal, and/or academic development, is not actually the right fit for you. This can happen for a variety of reasons, from incompatible communication styles or inappropriate behavior by the mentor. Enter the process with professionalism and know there are several resources to assist you in this transition.

Before ending the mentoring relationship due to a conflict, reference [Resolving Conflict Within the Mentoring Relationship](#) to make sure you have tried to work out your differences with your mentor. Additionally, seek out the advice of another trusted faculty member, peer in your program/department, or professional staff member to determine whether it is actually in your best interests to end the relationship. This is especially true if the relationship has a long history or if you are close to transitioning out of the University of Iowa.

The [Office of the Ombudsperson](#) (confidential office) and the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) (non-confidential office) may be especially useful if you wish to speak to professional staff members. Their contact information, as well as additional resources, can be found on [Resolving Conflict Within the Mentoring Relationship](#).

If you do decide to terminate the mentoring relationship, think about the most diplomatic, respectful way to express to your mentor why you would like to make this change. Refer to [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentors](#) and [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentees](#) for best practices on opening up an evaluation-based conversation.

Inform your mentor promptly about your decision, no matter how awkward this may be. During your conversation with your mentor, explain clearly, but politely, why you wish to end the mentoring relationship. If you owe them any work, be sure to discuss this and arrange a schedule to complete any outstanding obligations. Try to end the conversation on a positive note, and if you feel comfortable, thank them for attempting to be your mentor.

If you are changing research mentors, thesis advisors, or other roles where a more formal arrangement may be involved, be sure to complete or update any paperwork that your department or program may require. Ask your department or program head what their protocol for the process of ending a mentoring relationship is and complete all documents in a timely manner.

Example: Julio and Carla

If Julio is a transfer student and mentee in the second year of his graduate program. Earlier in the year, he entered into a peer mentoring relationship with a more experienced student in the program named Carla. At the beginning of their mentoring relationship, Julio was seeking support networking within the department and on campus; the two of them agreed to meet twice a month to discuss potential connections, learning opportunities, and more. However, after two months, it became apparent to Julio that Carla did not have the time to properly invest into their mentoring relationship. She would constantly reschedule meetings at the last minute, was not responsive to email or text communications, and always cut their time together short.

Even after Julio spoke with Carla about her inconsistent communication, she did not make any efforts to change her behavior. Julio decided that he wanted to end their mentoring relationship because he wasn't feeling properly supported and was frustrated with Carla. He spoke with a staff member in the Office of the Ombudsperson about the best way to end their relationship and received effective advice.

Before his meeting with Carla, Julio also took a few hours to go through [Practicing Giving and Receiving Feedback for Mentees](#), and thought about how he wanted to conduct that conversation. During their meeting, Julio clearly, but diplomatically expressed to Carla why he wanted to end the relationship and thanked her for her time. He left the meeting feeling like he made the right decision and communicated his needs transparently.

→ [MENTOR.UIOWA.EDU](https://mentor.uiowa.edu)

* Adapted from Rackham