

Frequently Asked Questions: Mentoring

What is a mentor?

A mentor is a role model, advisor, friend, and guide. You are a caring adult who listens to your mentee and helps him/her set goals and pursue them. Being a mentor is important: you are a supporter and guide through academic, career, and everyday challenges. Being a mentor is fun: you and your mentee learn from one another and do activities you both enjoy.

Who are the mentees?

Mentees in the City Links Program are all immigrant students grades 9-12 at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) and Somerville High School (SHS). They are English language learners and come from around the world, with the biggest groups typically from Haiti, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh. Some have been in the US for years, others for months. City Links does not cherry pick top students, though many have strong academic skills; we look for students who are excited to get involved and take advantage of what our program has to offer.

How do the mentees get into the program and what are they expecting?

We promote the City Links program at the high school and work with CRLS and SHS teachers to identify students who are a good fit with the program. Interested students then apply. Once accepted to the program, Mentees attend a two-part training on mentoring. We encourage students to think of their mentors as guides who want to get to know them, have fun, and help with projects like learning English, improving academic skills, working on college applications, and exploring job options.

How do you match your mentors and mentees?

We make matches based on interests, strengths, personality, mentors' area of expertise (including language and cultural knowledge) and student needs. Typically, males are matched with males and females with females.

How will I meet my mentee?

You will meet your mentee in two structured, group mentor/mentee meetings led by Enroot staff. After these initial meetings, you and your mentee are free to decide what activities you will do.

How often should I meet my mentee?

You should meet your mentee once a week. Of course, this isn't always possible. If you miss a week, stay in touch with your mentee so they know you're thinking about them. You should meet a minimum of twice per month. If you haven't been able to meet your mentee for two weeks in a row due to cancellations or disconnects, contact the Volunteer Coordinator so he/she is aware and help find a scheduling solution if necessary.

How should I communicate with my mentee?

This is up to you and your mentee, and you should talk about it at your first meeting. Discuss the best way of keeping in touch, and try to get multiple methods of contact (phone number, email, Facebook, Snap Chat, etc. in case one approach doesn't work). If you are having trouble communicating with your mentee, get in touch with the Volunteer Coordinator and he/she will help.

What kind of activities should I do with my mentee?

First, talk to your mentee. What does he/she want to do? Common activities include: playing board games at CCS, playing a sport, going out for ice cream/coffee/dinner/etc., visiting museums, going to movies, visiting colleges, working on college applications, scholarships, or school work, doing informational interviews, and more. If you're having a hard time figuring out what your mentee would like to do, try a few different activities and see how it goes. Reach out to the Volunteer Coordinator to talk this over and get ideas.

If we go out, who pays?

There is no firm rule in this situation, but remember: a mentor is not an ATM. Your mentee shouldn't expect you to pay for everything, or come to see your relationship as a way to get free stuff. However, keep in mind some students won't have much (or any) pocket money. Look for free or inexpensive activities if this is an issue. Try to get a feel for how much your mentee can pay, or discuss the issue directly.

Is it okay to drive my mentee places?

We don't encourage this as it can open you (and us) to liability issues, but some mentors do take their mentees places in their cars. If you plan to do this, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator ahead of time to let him/her know.

How long does this mentoring relationship last?

This relationship lasts for an academic year, from approximately October-June. Many pairs continue meeting over the summer on their own, and even continue meeting for multiple years. We hope pairs will continue as a match in the program beyond one academic year, but can't guarantee this will happen (participants sometimes move, graduate, or decide to pursue different activities).

What program support/resources are available to me and my mentee?

If you have questions, a challenging situation with your student, or would just like to think through this experience with someone, call or email the Volunteer Coordinator. Also remember you have lots of fellow mentors in the City Links program. Use each other for support. You are not alone.

Program staff will call to check in on how things are going and offer support several times per semester. However, don't wait for us to call if there's an issue or you just want to talk something over – we'd love to hear from you!