Finding Your Path:

A Career Mentoring Guide for Indigenous Youth with Disabilities



Mentor Canada

case MentorAbility Canada

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities

Canada

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ABOUT MENTOR CANADA

Mentor Canada is the only national registered charity dedicated to supporting and building capacity for mentoring across the country, linking programs and initiatives to a comprehensive portfolio of leading-edge mentoring resources, research, training, and networking opportunities.

Our Mission and Vision:

To accelerate and scale world-class mentoring in Canada.

We envision a Canada where mentoring is valued and accessible to all —grounded by evidence, rooted in collaboration, and driven by a dynamic ecosystem that unlocks potential, fuels opportunity and strengthens communities. Our impact is clear, and our reach is nationwide.

Visit the Mentor Canada website.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) is a national association that facilitates opportunities for service providers and employers to increase employment inclusion in Canada for persons experiencing disability. CASE envisions a country in which all people experiencing disability have equal opportunity to secure and sustain relevant, purposeful employment.

Visit the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) website.

ABOUT MENTORABILITY CANADA

MentorAbility Canada is a national initiative that facilitates unique, short term mentoring opportunities between employers and people experiencing disability. By providing and celebrating successful mentoring experiences in communities across Canada, this initiative is part of a national effort to promote the employment of Canadians experiencing disability.

Visit the MentorAbility Canada website.

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Mentor Canada and the Canadian Association for Supported Employment, through its MentorAbility Canada initiative, have collaborated to develop this resource.

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

We are humbled and honoured to share this guide with you. It is offered in a spirit of community care, recognizing that we each carry unique experiences, strengths, and needs. There is so much abundance and strength that exists in all of us. We hope the guide can be a place where you can celebrate all that is you, as you find mentors to support you moving forward.

A Note About the Images in This Guide

We're honoured to feature original images by Indigenous artist Elena Sterritt throughout this guide. Elena is a Gitxsan artist from Gitanmaax First Nations. Each image was created through a collaborative process that included multiple rounds of feedback from our National Advisory Committee. This helped ensure the artwork was respectful, culturally relevant, and reflective of the diverse experiences and strengths of Indigenous youth. We are grateful for the knowledge, creativity, and guidance that helped bring these visuals to life.

Why this Guide Matters

Short answer: Because moving forward together makes the journey easier.

Long answer:

- Career mentoring can help. It gives you support, encouragement, and someone who "has your back" while you build your future.
- Not everyone has access. A lot of Indigenous youth and youth with disabilities want mentors, but never get access. This guide helps close that gap.
- Your strengths matter. Your strengths, story, and lived experiences are powerful. Career mentoring can help you build on them.

What You'll Learn

- What career mentoring is – and how it supports your goals.
- Indigenous perspectives on mentoring and disability.
- How to recognize your gifts and strengths – and use them to build your future.
- How to find and connect with career mentors.

Who Created this Guide

- **A team of experts**: Ten experts from across Canada. Most of them are Indigenous. Some also have a disability.
- **Mentor Canada**: A national registered charity working to make mentoring stronger and easier to access for people across Canada.
- **MentorAbility Canada**: A Canada-wide mentoring initiative of the Canadian Association for Supported Employment, that promotes employment and career mentoring opportunities for youth and adults experiencing disability.

National team of experts		
Name	**Organization**	**Role**
Shannon Beckstead	Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, Queen's University	Indigenous Programs Coordinator
Geri Costello	Resource Abilities	Director, Employment Services
Dr. Nima Dehghansai	Indspire	Vice President, Research and Impact
Colby Delorme	Chairperson	Influence Mentoring
Delaney Drachenberg	Consultant	Self-employed
Melissa Granovsky	Indigenous Friends Association	Mentorship Manager
Julia McEathron	Indigenous Disability Canada / BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society	National Coordinator
Sean McEwen	Real-Eyes Capacity Consultants	Consultant
Dr. Teena Starlight	Indigenous Youth Mentoring Program / Ever Active	National Director
Sophie Van Kessel	Canadian Association for Supported Employment/MentorAbility	Bilingual National Resource Coordinator

Make This Guide Fit You – Not the Other Way Around

This guide was made for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth across Turtle Island. Each Nation and community has its own teachings, stories, language, and practices. Use what fits your life. Leave what doesn't.

Self-reflection prompts that can help you make this guide your own:

- How does this fit my life, my community, or my teachings?
- How would we do this where I'm from?
- Who can I talk to if I want more guidance? (Elders, Knowledge Keepers, family, mentors, etc.).

Optional exploration: Indigenous frameworks
Some youth feel strongly connected to their culture – others may be reconnecting or learning for the first time.

If you're not sure where to start, you can explore Indigenous frameworks that might help you move through this guide.

Grounding in Indigenous Frameworks

The following frameworks are designed to help you navigate this career mentoring guide. Think of them as tools you can come back to at any point. You don't need to use all of them – use the ones that feel helpful to you.

Keep in mind: These frameworks are guides, not rules. Teachings, stories, colours, and meanings can be different across Nations and communities.

How to Use These Frameworks

Before or after a section, slow down and ask:

- How does this content connect to this framework?
- What fits for me? What doesn't?
- What feels missing or needs adjusting?



FRAMEWORK #1: THE MEDICINE WHEEL

What is it?

A holistic way of understanding life and well-being by looking at balance and connection. Many teachings focus on four interconnected parts of well-being: Spirit (East), Heart (South), Body (West), and Mind (North). Each area affects the others, so when one area is unsupported, the others feel it too.

How you might reflect using this framework:

- ***Mind***: What do I understand well from this section? What's confusing?
- ***Heart***: What feelings come up for me during this section?
- ***Body***: How does my body react to this content?
- ***Spirit***: Does this connect to my values or sense of purpose?

FRAMEWORK #2: THE FOUR R'S

What is it?

A framework for understanding what good mentoring, learning, or workplace experiences should include for Indigenous youth.

- **Respect:** You are valued for who you are and the knowledge you bring, including your identity, culture, disability, etc.
- **Relevance:** What you're learning connects to your real life, your culture, and your goals.
- **Reciprocity:** The relationship or environment is not one-sided. People listen, share, and support each other.
- **Responsibility:** Everyone has a role. Mentors and workplaces follow through on their commitments, and you are supported in making your own choices.

How you might reflect using this framework:

- **Respect:** Do I feel seen and valued in this section? Does it reflect who I am, including my identity, culture, and disability?
- **Relevance:** How does this apply to my real life or goals? What feels useful, and what feels disconnected from my experience?
- **Reciprocity:** Does this section invite my voice and choices, or is it one-sided?
- **Responsibility:** What is being asked of me here, and what support should mentors, programs, or systems provide in return?

FRAMEWORK #3: THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE

What is it?

A strength-based way for understanding how people learn, grow, and thrive. It says we do best when four core needs are supported:

- Belonging: "I am connected and accepted."
- Mastery: "I can learn and improve."
- Independence: "I can make choices and have a say."
- Generosity: "I have purpose, and I can contribute."

How you might reflect using this framework:

- **Belonging:** Does this section help me feel included and understood?
- **Mastery:** What skills or knowledge is this section helping me build? What kind of practice or support would help me learn this better?
- **Independence:** Does this section support me in making my own choices? Where do I want more say or control?
- **Generosity:** How could what I'm learning help me contribute – to my family, community, or future workplace?

FRAMEWORK #4: IQ VALUES (INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGIT PRINCIPLES)

What is it?

A set of eight guiding principles that support how people live, learn, make decisions, work together, and care for community and the land.

- Inuuqatigiitsiarniq – respecting others and caring for people.
- Tunnganarniq – being welcoming, inclusive, and creating a good spirit.
- Pijitsirniq – serving and providing for family or community.
- Aajiiqatigiinniq – making decisions through discussion and agreement.
- Pilimmaksarniq – learning through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.
- Ikajuqtigiinniq – working together for a common cause.

- Qanuqtuurniq – being innovative and resourceful.
- Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq – respecting and caring for the land, animals, and environment.

How you might reflect using this framework:

- **Inuuqatigiitsiarniq:** Does this section show care for people and relationships, including people with different needs?
- **Tunnganarniq:** Does this feel welcoming to me? What would make it more inclusive or accessible?
- **Pilimmaksarniq:** Does this section support learning by doing, mentoring, or observing? What learning style works best for me here?
- **Qanuqtuurniq:** What creative ideas or tools could help me work through challenges in this section?
- **Aajiiqatigiinniq:** Whose voices should be part of decisions connected to this section?

FRAMEWORK #5: SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

What is it?

A set of teachings that support living a good life and building good relationships. A common set includes:

- Love
- Respect
- Bravery (Courage)
- Truth
- Honesty
- Humility
- Wisdom

How you might reflect using this framework:

- **Love:** Does this section show care for me and my well-being? Does it encourage self-kindness rather than pushing through harm or burnout?
- **Respect:** Does this section encourage respect for myself and others? Does it honour my needs and boundaries?
- **Truth and Honesty:** What is this section helping me be honest about – my goals, strengths, support needs, etc.
- **Bravery (Courage):** What feels hard or uncomfortable here? What small, brave step might I take?
- **Humility:** What don't I know yet – and where is it okay to ask for help?
- **Wisdom:** How can I use this information in a way that supports my long-term wellbeing?


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GROWING TOGETHER: LEARNING ABOUT CAREER MENTORING

Welcome! This section answers three questions:

1. What is career mentoring?
2. What are the roles of mentors and mentees?
3. Why is career mentoring worth your time?



What is Career Mentoring?

Career mentoring is a positive relationship with someone who:

- Moves forward alongside you.
- Believes in your potential.
- Offers guidance and support while you build the future you want.

In short: It's having someone in your corner.

10 Things You Can Do with a Career Mentor

1. Explore your goals and make a plan that feels right for you.
2. Learn from their journey – their choices, challenges, and lessons-learned.
3. Build real-world skills through practice, feedback, and support.
4. Discover your strengths – including the ones you didn't know about.
5. Share cultural teachings and talk about your Indigenous identity.
6. Learn about accessibility supports and your different rights at work.
7. Receive encouragement when things feel tough or confusing.
8. Build your community – meet helpful people, programs, and opportunities.
9. Practice self-advocacy and explore safe ways to speak up.
10. Teach your mentor – your knowledge and identity help them grow, too.

Three Quick Examples of Career Mentoring

Choose one to explore. Check out the others if you're interested.

Example #1: Learning about a career path

- An 18-year-old Indigenous youth with ADHD is considering a career in carpentry.
- They meet one-on-one with a local carpenter to talk through their interests and learn about what a typical workday looks like. The carpenter shares what they enjoy about the trade, the challenges involved, and how they completed their apprenticeship. They also discuss supports and routines that help many carpenters – including people with ADHD – stay organized and safe on the job.
- The mentee leaves feeling more informed about their options, and the carpenter feels good knowing their experiences can help guide someone just starting out.

Example #2: Learning about accessibility

- An Indigenous youth who is hard of hearing hopes to become a Land Guardian. They connect with a mentor who is also Indigenous, hard of hearing, and currently working in that role.
- The mentor explains their daily work on the land and how they navigate it with hearing loss. They show the mentee accommodations that make the job accessible – visual markers, Bluetooth streaming to their hearing aids, vibrating GPS alerts, and text-based check-ins.
- The mentee gains confidence knowing accessible practices are common and that employers must support them. The mentor learns from the mentee's questions and experiences, which helps them think about how to make the role even more accessible to new workers.

Example #3: Honouring identity at work

- An Indigenous youth feels anxious about starting a new office job and wonders how to stay true to their Indigenous identity in a professional setting. They connect with a mentor who describes how they bring their whole self to work — through values, relationships, and bringing cultural teachings into daily decision-making.
- They talk about gentle boundary setting, finding supportive coworkers, and remembering they don't need to "represent" every Indigenous person, or person with a disability.
- The mentee leaves feeling more grounded and reassured, while the mentor values the chance to support someone navigating challenges they once faced alone.

Who Can Be a Career Mentor?

Career mentors can come from **all walks of life**. They don't have to have a fancy title or have a specific job. What matters most is **how they show up for you**. A mentor could be:

- an Elder
- a neighbour
- a teacher, instructor, or professor
- a coach
- a coworker
- a family member
- a spiritual or community leader
- a professional in a field you're curious about

Does a mentor need to be Indigenous or have a disability?

No – that choice is totally yours.

- Some youth want mentors who share their identities.
- Some youth want someone with different experiences.
- Both are valid.

Different mentors offer different kinds of knowledge, support, and opportunities. It's about finding mentors who feel safe, respectful, and right for your path.

Remember: ***Being called a "mentor" is something people earn – not claim for themselves.***

You get to decide who is your mentor – and who is not. You can also pause or end a relationship with a mentor – at any time – if you feel uncomfortable.

How Do You Know If Someone Is a "Good" Mentor?

A good mentoring relationship feels safe, helpful, and respectful.

"Good" mentoring also usually means that both the mentor and mentee are "there" because they genuinely want to support and learn from one another.

The five elements below can help you understand when you've found a mentor who truly supports your journey.



1. IT'S RELATIONAL AND HOLISTIC

Good mentoring starts with a good relationship: trust, respect, and genuine care. A strong mentor cares about you as a whole person – your mind, heart, body, spirit, family or support network, culture, community, and so on.

They support your growth as an entire person, not just your knowledge and skills. This is what sets mentoring apart from coaching or tutoring: it's not just about tasks or performance. It's about supporting you while you grow in all areas of your life.

Ask yourself:

- Do I feel safe and respected when we talk?
- Do they care about my well-being, not just school or work stuff?

2. IT'S STRENGTH-BASED AND IDENTITY-AFFIRMING

A good mentor notices what you're already good at and helps you build from there. They don't try to "fix" or "save" you.

They also honour your identity as an Indigenous person with a disability, and they respect your culture, pronouns, access needs, and life experiences – without judgment or bias.

A good mentor makes you feel respected and valued for who you are and who you're becoming.

Ask yourself:

- Do they notice and name my strengths?
- Do I feel valued as I am – without pretending or hiding parts of myself?

3. IT'S FOCUSED ON YOU

In a healthy mentoring relationship, you're in the driver's seat.

Your goals, needs, and values are what's most important – every conversation and decision should align with what matters most to you, not your mentor's wishes or agenda.

Ask yourself:

- Do they ask about my goals and what I want for my future?
- Do they support my choices, even if they'd choose something different?

4. IT HAS GOALS – AND YOU CAN SEE PROGRESS

Career mentoring is about moving toward your future.

While building a connection and "hanging out" matters, you and your mentor should also be setting clear, meaningful goals and taking small steps toward them together.

Ask yourself:

- Do we break my goals into steps that feel manageable?
- Do I feel like I'm making progress, even in small ways?

5. IT'S RECIPROCAL – YOU BOTH LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER
Mentoring is a two-way street. It's not a hierarchy.

Mentors aren't all-knowing experts, and you're not just a learner. You both bring knowledge, stories, culture, and lived experience to the relationship.

A great mentor is curious about your ideas and open to learning from you. Together, you both learn and evolve.

Ask yourself:

- Do they listen and learn from my perspective?
- Does the relationship feel like "walking" or moving beside someone – not behind them?

If these five elements are present, you're likely in a healthy, supportive, and helpful mentoring relationship.

Where and how can I connect with a career mentor?

Career mentoring can happen in lots of ways – through people in your life, through programs, or through quick moments of support.



INFORMAL MENTORING

These connections grow naturally in spaces you're already part of. You might get support from:

- An Elder or Knowledge Keeper in your community
- An extended family member
- A teacher or coach

These connections happen because you already know each other – it's mentoring that shows up in your everyday life.

FORMAL MENTORING

These relationships happen through a structured program that matches you with a mentor. You might connect with a mentor through:

- An Elder or Knowledge Keeper in your community
- A mentoring program or internship at a workplace
- A youth or community organization

Formal mentoring pairs you with someone who wants to support your goals.

MENTORING MOMENTS

These are brief interactions that still make a big impact. How they might happen:

- Asking a question at an event and getting helpful advice
- Meeting someone once – and they give you career advice that sticks
- Doing a short job-shadow that shows you what a career really looks like

These moments might be small, but they can spark ideas, open doors, or help you take your next step.

What Are the Roles of Mentors and Mentees?

This section helps you understand what mentors and mentees do – and what they don't do.

It's here to support safe, respectful, and impactful mentoring experiences.

Mentors ARE...	Mentors ARE NOT...
Collaborative guides who move beside you and support your goals.	**Authority figures** who tell you what to do or make decisions for you.
Active listeners who create safe, judgment-free spaces to talk and ask questions.	**Therapists or counsellors** who diagnose or give advice you didn't ask for.
Allies who respect your identities, cultures, values, and lived experiences.	**Belief-pushers** who impose their own cultural, political, or spiritual views.
Skill-builders who help you grow your confidence and abilities, and career-ready skills.	**Micro-managers** who take over your work or try to "fix" things for you.
Connectors who introduce you to helpful people, opportunities, and resources.	**Gatekeepers** who block you from helpful people, opportunities, and resources.
Supportive of your accessibility needs, open to adapting how you meet, communicate, or learn.	**Unsupportive** of your accessibility needs, dismissing your preferences and not adapting.
Co-learners who also grow through your ideas, perspectives, and experiences.	**All-knowing experts** who don't learn from mentees.

Mentees ARE...	Mentees ARE NOT...
Active participants who set goals, take initiative, and apply their learning.	**Passive** participants who expect mentors to "fix" things or lead the entire journey.
Decision makers who choose their own direction – the mentor supports, but you lead.	**Dependent** on mentors to make decisions or act on their behalf.
Curious learners who ask questions, talk through challenges, and share what they're comfortable sharing.	**Required storytellers** who have to tell personal stories or private details to get support. You choose what to share.
Equal partners whose voice, culture, identity, and experiences matter.	**Responsible for teaching mentors** about Indigenous identity, disability, or lived experiences unless *you choose to share*.
People with strengths – your lived experience, disability, and identity all add value to the mentoring relationship.	**People with deficits** – your mentor is not there to "save" you from yourself, your community, or your identities.

The main idea: Mentoring is about learning together. You lead your path, and mentors support you along the way.

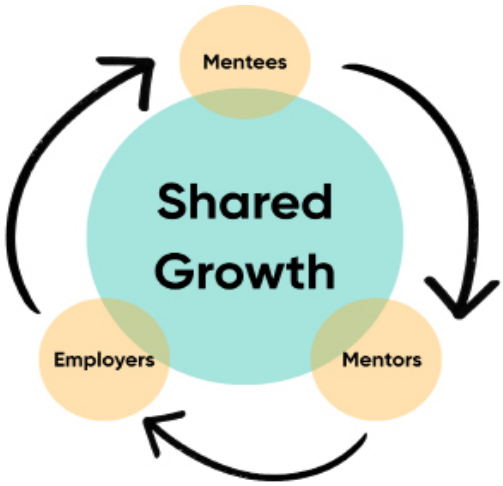
Remember: There isn't one "right way" to be a mentee or mentor. Every mentoring relationship looks different because every person, culture, and community is different

Why is Career Mentoring Worth Your Time?

Career mentoring can support you in real, practical ways.

It gives you a safe place to explore what you want, learn new skills, and connect with people who care about your future.

And it doesn't just help you – it helps mentors and employers



Top 5 Benefits for You

Here are five ways a mentor can support you as you explore your future.

1. **Set goals and make a plan.**
   • Mentors help you choose goals that matter to ***you***.
   • Together, you can break them down into small, doable steps.

2. **Having someone who listens and supports you.**
   • Mentors show up, listen, and care about your success.
   • You don't have to figure out everything on your own.

3. **Learn useful skills and connect with new people and services.**
   • Mentors help you learn and practice skills for work.
   • They also introduce you to people, programs, and services that open doors.

4. **Talk about your culture and your accessibility needs.**
   • If you want to, you can talk about your culture, identity, or teachings and how they connect to work.
   • You can also talk about tools, supports, or accommodations that help you learn and work better – and practice how to ask for what you need.

5. **Get help with barriers and learn how to speak up and make change.**
   • If school, job applications, or systems feel confusing, a mentor can explain steps and help you through challenges.
   • They can also help you build confidence to speak up in tough situations and take positive action when you want to create change.

Top 5 Benefits for Mentors

Mentoring also helps mentors. Here's how they grow from spending time with you.

1. **They get to make a real difference.**
   • Supporting you and seeing you grow is meaningful to them.
   • It helps them feel proud, happy, and good about the work they're doing.

2. **They learn from you.**
   • You bring your own ideas, experiences, and ways of seeing the world.
   • Spending time with you teaches them new ways of thinking and doing that help them in their own jobs and careers.

3. **They build their own skills.**
   • Mentoring helps them get better at listening, communicating, and supporting others.
   • These skills help them become stronger leaders at work and in their community.

4. **They grow their understanding of culture and inclusion.**
   • Mentors learn how to better support different accessibility needs, if you decide to talk about it, which helps them create more inclusive workplaces.
   • If you choose to talk about your culture, they learn from that too – but only if you want to share.

5. **They expand their network, too.**
   • Mentors often meet new people or learn about new programs through mentoring.
   • These connections can help them in their own careers.

Top 5 Benefits for Employers

Whether you're part of a formal workplace mentoring program or not, you can help employers grow as well.

1. **They build stronger, more inclusive workplaces.**
   • Mentoring can help employers and staff better understand what young people need to succeed at work.
   • Many workplaces find future employees through mentoring programs.

2. **They discover new talent and future leaders.**
   • Employers meet young people – like you – who bring fresh ideas, skills, and energy.
   • Spending time with you teaches them new ways of thinking and doing that help them in their own jobs and careers.

3. **They strengthen their teams.**
   • Staff who mentor build skills like communication, leadership, and teamwork.
   • When their skills grow, the whole workplace becomes stronger and more connected.

4. **They can build a positive reputation (if they're committed to real, long-term, and ongoing inclusion, not tokenism).**
   • Communities notice when employers support youth in meaningful ways.
   • An ongoing and real commitment to fairness, inclusion, and creating opportunities can help build trust.

5. **They boost staff well-being and morale.**
   • Mentors often feel proud, energized, and motivated after supporting youth.
   • When staff feel good, the whole workplace benefits.



CIRCLES OF CARE: INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON MENTORING AND DISABILITY

This section shares how Indigenous communities guide and uplift youth through mentoring and inclusion. Together, we will explore two important questions:

1. What does mentoring look like in Indigenous communities?
2. How do Indigenous communities understand disability and support inclusion?

What does mentoring look like in Indigenous communities?

Although many Indigenous communities may not use the word ***mentoring***, the practices of guiding, teaching, and growing together have always existed within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families, communities, and Nations.

As you explore the teachings, you might think about:

- How do these teachings show up in your Nation, community, or family?
- If you don't feel strongly connected to your culture right now, what teachings connect with you on a more personal level?
- Which teachings feel most helpful for you as you think about school, work, or your future career path?

Keep in mind: These 10 teachings are just a starting point.

They are examples of what mentoring can look like in Indigenous communities, not universal rules.

You, your Nation, your community, or your family may have other teachings to include or remove from this list.

10 Teachings That Make Mentoring Strong in IndigenousCommunities

1. **It's communal and multigenerational**
   Mentoring isn't the job of just one person. Young people are surrounded by multiple mentors – all forming a circle of collective care. Everyone learns from each other, and teachings are passed from one generation to another.

2. **Mentoring is woven into daily life**
   Mentoring often happens through everyday moments – checking in, helping out, sharing stories, and being together. It's seen as something people naturally do for one another, not something youth have to earn or ask for. Mentoring is a living practice or way of being.

3. **Elders and Knowledge Keepers lead the way**
   Elders carry teachings, language, and lived experience that support community life.

Mentoring respects their role and follows cultural protocols for respectful engagement. Their presence provides grounding, continuity, and cultural safety.

4. **It's holistic**
   Mentoring supports the entire person – mind, body, heart, and spirit. All parts of a person matter and are cared for.

5. **It's relational and reciprocal.**
   Mentoring is built on relationships, not hierarchy. Youth learn from mentors, mentors learn from youth, and everyone learns from the land and community. Knowledge and teachings flow in all directions.

6. **It's strengths-based**
   Every young person carries unique gifts and strengths. Mentors help mentees recognize and grow these gifts so they can share them with their families, Nations, and communities in whatever ways feel right to them.

7. **It's land-based**
   The land is one of the most important mentors. Mentoring often takes place through time spent on the land – learning by doing, observing, listening, or simply being present. Teachings are grounded in place, seasons, stories, and relationships with the natural world.

8. **It happens through stories and observation**
   Stories carry teachings and history. Learning also happens through quiet observation, listening, and "walking" or moving alongside mentors as they work, live, and engage with community. Young people learn by participating, practicing, and gradually taking on responsibility.

9. **It strengthens culture, language, and identity**
   Mentoring helps mentees connect with their culture - through teachings, stories, language, ceremony and protocols. It supports a strong sense of identity and belonging, and reminds youth that they are part of something powerful and rooted.

10. **It is a form of cultural resurgence**
    By connecting (or reconnecting) youth with land, language, stories, and cultural ways of being, mentoring helps Indigenous culture grow even stronger. It supports healing, pride, and confidence.

These are just 10 of the teachings that make mentoring strong in Indigenous communities.

There are many others. Each Nation carries its own.

You also carry teachings. Don't forget to explore and notice the teachings that show up in your own life, in your disability experiences, and in the ways that people care for one another around you.

Putting It All Together: An Example of Indigenous Career Mentoring

Explore the story below to see these 10 teachings in action.

Indigenous Career Mentoring Story

When I look back on how I learned to follow my career path, I realize I was never walking alone. My mentors didn't always call themselves mentors, but they were there – my Auntie who listened when I wasn't sure what direction to take, my cousin who helped me practice for an interview, my teacher who reminded me that my disability was a source of strength I could carry proudly into any workplace. They were all part of this quiet circle around me, supporting me in ways without ever calling it "mentoring." It was simply how our community cared for each other.

Most of my career learning happened in small, everyday moments. Sitting at the table while someone cooked and told stories about their job. Helping out at community events and learning responsibility, teamwork, and how to show up even when I felt tired or nervous. At the time, I didn't think any of this was mentorship – but now I see how these daily moments shaped the skills I carry with me everywhere I go.

Elders were at the heart of it all. When an Elder spoke, everything slowed down. They didn't just talk about jobs – they talked about responsibilities, gifts, and working in a good way. They helped me understand that choosing a career isn't just about earning money. It's also about supporting my community, honouring who I am, and using the gifts I carry. When I sat with them, I was reminded that I am part of something much older and bigger than myself.

The support I received was holistic. When I felt overwhelmed by school or job applications, people didn't just give me instructions. They checked in on my spirit. They asked how I was really doing. They reminded me to rest, to breathe, to smudge, to spend time on the land. They showed me that I can't move toward a good future if I'm not taking care of my mind, body, heart, and spirit.

The learning went both ways. My mentors didn't act like they were above me or like they had all the answers. We learned together. Even when I was young, I saw adults listening to youth, learning from us, laughing at our jokes, and taking our ideas seriously. We were all part of the same web, sharing what we knew and receiving what others offered.

People in my community always talked about gifts. Not the gifts you get, but the gifts you ***carry***. A mentor once told me I had a gift for calming others down. Another said I was good at explaining things. I never saw these as strengths before. But once they named it for me, I started noticing it too. Slowly, I learned that each of us has something special we bring to our community, the workplace, and the world.

Some of the most powerful teachings came from the land itself. Time spent near the water taught me patience. Gathering medicines taught me responsibility. Fishing taught me problem-solving. These are qualities and skills that matter in any job. Whenever I got stressed about choosing a career path, being on the land helped me breathe and reconnect.

A lot of my career learning came from watching – watching people work, solve problems, speak respectfully in meetings, or handle challenges. I also learned through stories that carried teachings about leadership, conflict resolution, and community roles.

These experiences helped shape my identity and understand who I am. My language, my family, the stories I come from – they gave me a sense of belonging that I carry into everything I do. Knowing my story helped me answer questions in job interviews, stand strong when I faced barriers, and remember that my disability, like my culture, is a source of strength.

And now, I see that all this mentoring helped me become part of something bigger. When I grow my skills, follow my gifts, and pursue work that strengthens my community, I'm not just building a career. I'm helping carry our ways forward. I'm becoming the kind of mentor I once looked up to. Every step I take on my path gives something back to the generations coming after me.

That's what career mentoring looked like in my community. What does – or could – it look like in yours?

Your Career Mentoring Story

Take some time to think about your own story.

Here are five questions to help you reflect on your own circle of care:

1. Who are the people who have supported you on your career journey – even in small ways? What did they do that made a difference?
2. When have you felt mentored in a good way? What made it feel safe or supportive?
3. What strengths have you developed on your own?
4. When you think about your future, what kind of support would help you feel more confident about school, training, or work?
5. Which teachings guide you when you help others? What kind of mentor would you like to become in the future?

How do Indigenous communities understand disability and support inclusion?

Indigenous communities across Turtle Island and the world understand disability in their own ways, shaped by their languages, teachings, and worldviews.

Some talk about spirit. Some talk about balance. Some don't use the word disability at all.

But a common teaching is this:

1. Everyone belongs
2. Everyone has gifts
3. Everyone contributes

This section introduces four key teachings that can help you understand how Indigenous communities understand disability and support inclusion.

As you explore the teachings, you might think about:

- How do these teachings show up in your Nation, community, family, or support network?
- Which teachings feel most helpful for you as you think about school, work, or your future career path?
- Which teachings do you want to carry into your own life and mentoring relationships – now or in the future?

Where these teachings come from:

This section is inspired by knowledge shared by Indigenous scholars, Elders, leaders, and people with disabilities from many Nations.

The quotes come from a book on Indigenous Disability Studies that brings together teachings from Turtle Island and Indigenous communities around the world.

You can click here to learn more about the book.

4 Teachings on Indigenous Perspectives of Disability and Inclusion

1. **Disability is a gift from the Creator.**
   In many Indigenous cultures, disability is seen as a sacred gift – something given to you with purpose, meaning, and responsibility.

   This teaching reminds us that every person carries their own gifts, wisdom, and ways of contributing to the community.

> ***"Many Indigenous languages of Turtle Island do not have a word that describes the concept of "disability." In fact, many Indigenous peoples around the world look at a disability as a gift from the Creator." (p. 71).***
>
> - Kevin P. Morgan, Métis leader, federal public servant, and person with a disability

> ***"We all have our own abilities, talents, and superpowers – what are yours?" (p. 192).***
>
> - Dr. John T. Ward, Métis scholar and person with a disability

2. **Disability is a source of strength, ability, and contribution.**
   Instead of focusing on what someone "can't" do, many Indigenous teachings focus on strengths, gifts, and community.

   Every person has something special they bring to the circle. Questions that matter in Indigenous worldviews include:

   - What gifts do you carry?
   - How can the community support you?
   - How do you make us stronger?

> ***"If the Western World could adopt an Indigenous perspective, where one expects individuals to have different strengths and focus on what makes them unique, society would treat people better. Instead of relying on a medical model to define a person's capability, rather just use their spirit and gifts. Rather than looking for what is wrong, notice what is exceptional. Drop the individualistic way of thinking. Indigenous cultures have always focused on what is best for the community, as the notable strategy for survival was to work together." (p. 95-96).***
>
> - Lexi Giizhigokwe Nahwegiizhic, two-spirited First Nations scholar and person with a disability

> ***"While at work, there remains a need for me to self-identify as a person with a disability to receive appropriate accommodation plans, such as adaptive screen-reading software. I, like many other Indigenous peoples, do not see myself as disabled, which makes the whole self-identification and accommodation process seem awkward, uncomfortable, and incongruent with my cultural norms. Certainly, I do acknowledge that my lack of vision does place some limitations on my ability to perform certain tasks, but by no means today do I feel that my low vision lessens in any way the contributions that I am able to make to my family, my community, and the Canadians I have helped serve through my public sector leadership role." (p. 80).***
>
> - Kevin P. Morgan, Métis leader, federal public servant, and person with a disability

3. **Disability is a colonial concept.**
   Many Indigenous peoples point out that the word "disability" doesn't exist in their languages.

   The Western world created this label – and used it to judge, separate, and limit people. This colonial way of thinking can make Indigenous youth with disabilities feel like they are "less than" or need to be "fixed."

   Indigenous peoples across the world push back against this idea. They reclaim disability as a source of identity, power, and pride.

"We must understand that everyone learns in a different way, for we all have our own gifts, talents, and abilities. The word 'disability' is rooted in colonialism and as such has caused so much pain and suffering, but as Indigenous peoples we must rise up and take back these negative words towards a 'reclaiming of disability' for now and forever." (p. 164)

- Noah Papatsie, Inuit politician, leader, broadcaster and person with a disability

" ... as a young boy growing up in a world where the colonial definition of a disability prevailed, where a disability was something that needed to be compensated for and that prevented one from pursuing certain interests, hobbies, and careers, I had no idea what capabilities or unique gifts I had been given nor how I might someday use them to benefit others." (p. 72)

- Kevin P. Morgan, Métis leader, federal public servant, and person with a disability

4. **Disability is a natural part of human diversity.**
Many Indigenous worldviews don't divide people into "normal" and "not normal." Everyone has strengths, challenges, and teachings.

These shift throughout life, and communities thrive when all kinds of abilities come together.

This teaching celebrates the truth that every person belongs – not because they fit a certain mould, but because diversity keeps communities healthy, balanced, and strong.

"... as Indigenous communities do not embrace an idea of a "fixed," "able-bodied," "normal," "average," or "ideal human," all beings both have and lack talents, allowing for the understanding that one can learn from areas where one lacks talent and teach from areas of talent. As talents and situations constantly shift, balance is not a position achieved and kept. It is a journey, not a destination." (p. 229)

- Dr. Lavonna L. Lovern, mixed heritage professor in Philosophy and Religious Studies and Native American Studies

"For many Indigenous peoples, one's capacity is not limited to one's physical attributes, but more to one's overall health – that is their emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual well-being and the balance among these attributes, as well as the way we engage with others and the world around us." (p. 71).

- Kevin P. Morgan, Métis leader, federal public servant, and person with a disability

What Does All This Mean For You?

These teachings show that:

- Your gifts and strengths are real, valuable, and needed.
- You are not alone. You belong to a long history of Indigenous people with disabilities who have strengthened their Nations, schools, and workplaces.
- Your words count. You – not colonial systems – get to define your own disability identity.



These are just some of the teachings shared here.

What stood out for ***you***?

Which teachings do ***you*** want to carry forward into your career?

Your Disability Story

Every person has a story – one shaped by family, Nation, teachings, school, and lived experiences.

Your disability story is part of who you are, but you get to decide how to tell it, how to understand it, and how it guides your future.

This is a chance to slow down, reflect, and connect with your lived experiences with the teachings in this section.

Here are five questions to guide you.

You can write, draw, talk with someone you trust, or just think quietly – whatever feels right for you.

1. How do the teachings in this section connect with your experiences of disability? Which teachings felt familiar? Which teachings felt new or different?

2. How have school or work shaped the way you understand disability?

3. Which teachings feel most grounding, empowering, or helpful as you think about your future?

4. What disability-related stories, assumptions, or labels do you want to reimage or let go of? How might Indigenous teachings help you tell your story in a new way?

5. How do you want to use your story to support others, now or in the future?


SERVICE DOG

WHAT YOU CARRY: DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS AND SETTING YOUR CAREER MENTORING GOALS

This section is here to help you: notice and celebrate your strengths and identify your career mentoring goals. Together, we will explore two guiding questions:

1. What strengths, gifts, and ways of knowing do you already carry?
2. What are your career mentoring goals?

You don't need all the answers today.

These questions are here to support reflection, conversation, and growth over time.

What strengths, gifts, and ways of knowing do you already carry?



You already hold many strengths.

Naming them helps you see what you bring into mentoring, school, work, and community.

Remember:

- Mentoring is a two-way street.
- Mentors and workplaces learn from you and your strengths, just as much as you learn from them!

Quick-Start Strength Finder

Here are five questions to get you started. Answer the ones that feel right for you.

1. What strengths come from your disability, culture, and/or life experiences?
2. What have you gotten better at over time? What is something that once felt difficult but now feels easier?
3. How do you naturally support, help, or show up for others? What do people tend to ask you for help with?
4. What do you enjoy teaching, explaining, or doing with/for others?
5. What strengths do others notice in you? What do people say you're good at or appreciate about you?

If this felt hard: Strength-finding is a process, not a one-time activity.

Strengths often emerge over time and through conversations with Elders, family, peers, and mentors.

Explore Your Strengths Through Indigenous Frameworks

Want to continue exploring your strengths?

Below are two Indigenous strength-finding frameworks you can use, if they feel helpful to you.



Some important notes before you begin:

- Different Nations use different colours, words, stories, and teachings. These frameworks are optional starting points, not rules.
- You, your family, or your Nation may use different frameworks and teachings.
- Take what fits, leave the rest.
- You don't need to do everything in this section. Choose one set of questions, or even just one question, and start there.

OPTION #1: THE MEDICINE WHEEL
The gifts you carry in mind, body, spirit, and heart

The medicine wheel reminds us that our strengths are interconnected.

Each part of you – mind, body, heart, and spirit – holds gifts that support balance and well-being.

Use the questions below to notice the strengths you already carry.

	Strength-finding questions
East **Spirit (Spiritual)**	• What values, beliefs, or life principles guide you? • What strengths do they bring you? What strengths will they bring? • How does caring for your spirit support you and those around you? • What helps you feel grounded, connected, or motivated?
South **Heart (Emotional)**	• What emotional skills have you built over time (e.g., patience, honesty, self-control, empathy)? • What do others appreciate about your emotional presence? • How have your lived experiences, culture, and/or disability strengthened how you connect and build relationships with people?
West **Body (Physical)**	• What strengths have you developed by living, learning, and working in your body? • What does your body help you do that you value (e.g., move, create, rest, learn, work, sense, express)? • What strengths does your body bring into relationships, school, work, or community spaces?

North Mind (Mental)	• What topics or skills do you know a lot about? How can this support your career? • What kind of learning, thinking, or problem-solving are strengths for you? • What knowledge have you gained from your lived experiences, culture, and/or disability?

OPTION #2: THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE
Discovering your circle of strengths

The circle of courage describes four core strengths that support growth and well-being.

Use the questions below to discover your four core strengths.

	Strength-finding questions
Belonging	• What strengths do you bring that help others feel safe, comfortable, or included? How can this benefit your career? • What strengths help you work well with others or be part of a team? • How do your lived experiences, culture, and/or disability help you create more inclusive spaces?
Mastery	• What are you good at right now (big or small)? • What is something you've practiced and improved over time? • What skills have you developed through your life experiences?
Independence	• What strengths help you advocate for yourself, ask for help, or set healthy boundaries? How might these skills help you navigate your career? • What leadership skills do you have? • How do you show independence and responsibility at work, school, or in your community?
Generosity	• What strengths help you support your friends, family, co-workers, or community? • What community-based experiences (volunteering, caregiving, helping out) have shaped your strengths? • What strengths do you bring into situations that require care, generosity, or compassion?

Bringing Your Strengths Into Mentoring

Thank you for taking some time to notice your strengths – this is important work.

Mentoring isn't about changing who you are. It's about growing from the strengths you already carry.

When you know your strengths, you can set mentoring goals that:

1. Deepen what you're already good at.
2. Support growth in areas you choose, at your own pace.

As you move forward, keep in mind:

- A strength doesn't lock you into one career. It gives you **options**.
- You can:
  - Build on a strength
  - Use it to support growth in another area
  - Carry it into a new industry
  - Shape how you work – not just what job you do

Examples of Turning Strengths Into Career Mentoring Goals

Strength	Potential mentoring goal
Strong listening and empathy skills	• Exploring career pathways that would benefit from listening and empathy skills. • Learning how to advocate for others using their lived experiences. • Exploring and developing leadership styles that are relational and collaborative.
Navigating disability systems	• Exploring advocacy or support roles. • Learning how to act as a bridge between community and organizations (e.g., governments, workplaces, services, schools, etc.). • Learning how to describe system navigation as a skill on resumes and applications.
Hands-on learning and problem-solving	• Exploring careers and workplaces that are hands-on, experiential, or land-based. • Learning how to use hands-on skills to make environments more accessible. • Learning how to describe hands-on skills on resumes and applications.
Cultural knowledge and community connection	• Learning how to carry culture into workplaces. • Practicing how to protect oneself against tokenism. • Developing confidence in naming cultural strengths in professional spaces.
Strong sense of justice	• Learning how to raise concerns professionally in workplaces. • Exploring roles that involve policy, quality assurance, ethics, or compliance. • Learning how to protect your energy while standing up for values.

What are Your Career Mentoring Goals?

Career mentoring works best when you have a sense of what you want to learn!

Clear (but flexible) goals make mentoring stronger by:

- Keeping the focus on what matters most to you
  (your mentor isn't guessing what you need, or telling you what to focus on)
- Making conversations more useful and less awkward
  (goals give you something concrete to talk about and move toward)
- Helping career mentors support you better
  (they can share the right kinds of guidance, resources, and connections)

Quick Career Goal Reflection

These can be great conversation-starters with your career mentor(s).

1. One thing I want to learn or practice with a career mentor …
   (a skill, task, role, way of thinking, etc.)
2. One area where I want to feel stronger or more confident … (communication, self-advocacy, teamwork, problem solving, etc.)
3. One strength I want to build on …
   (e.g., leadership, communication, teamwork, creativity, hands-on skills, etc.)
4. One experience I want to try or explore …
   (a job shadow, volunteering, a workplace, a role, etc.)
5. A person, community, or network I want to connect with …
   (an industry, organization, cultural space, group, etc.)

How to Share Your Career Goals With a Mentor

Now that you've started thinking about your career mentoring goals, the next question is:

How do you talk about those goals with a mentor?

The GROW framework is a simple (yet powerful) tool you can use to guide these conversations with mentors.

You don't need to memorize it or follow it perfectly. Think of it as a helpful map, not a rulebook.

The GROW Framework



1. G – Goal: What do you want to explore or work toward right now?
This first step is all about naming what matters to you at this moment. Your goal(s) can be small, short-term, and flexible. They can also change over time.

- Your mentor's role here is to listen carefully, follow your lead, and support the goal(s) you find meaningful – not to decide for you or push their own path.

2. R – Reality: Where are you right now?
This step is about understanding your starting point, not judging it.

You might talk about: strengths you already have, supports and tools that work for you, your accessibility needs, experiences you've already had related to your goal(s), and what feels possible right now.

- Your mentor's role here is to help you describe where you are now, so future steps feel realistic, respectful, and supportive.

3. O – Options: What are some possible ways forward?
This step is about exploring possibilities, not choosing just one path. Together, you might: explore different roles or career paths related to your goal(s), consider multiple timelines or approaches, think about people, programs, or resources that could help, or identify several possible next steps.

- Your mentor's role here is to share ideas and possibilities without pressure, allowing you to decide what feels right for you.

4. W – Will: What will you try with your mentor?
This final step turns ideas into action. You and your mentor might decide: one small, realistic action to try, who will do what, what supports or accommodations you'll need, and when to check in



Example #1: Exploring a first-career path in community-based work

An Indigenous youth with a learning disability is meeting with a mentor who works at a Friendship Centre.

G – Goal
Mentee: "I want to learn more about community-based work. I'm not sure what roles exist, but I know I like helping people and being in community spaces."
Mentor: "Thanks for sharing that. Let's focus on exploring community roles and what might fit you."

R – Reality
Mentee: "I'm good at talking with people one-on-one and explaining things. I sometimes struggle with long paperwork and fast-paced environments."
Mentor: "That's helpful to know. You already have strong relationship skills, and we can think about roles and supports that work with your learning style."

O – Options
Mentor: "Some options could be job shadowing here at the Centre, volunteering at events, or talking with outreach workers. We could also look at training programs that are hands-on."
Mentee: "I like the idea of job shadowing first."

W – Will
Mentee: "My next step could be shadowing someone for half a day here at the Centre." Mentor: "I can help set that up and make sure it's paced in a way that works for you. Let's check in after."

Example #2: Building confidence and self-advocacy at work

An Indigenous youth with a physical disability is working part-time and meeting with a mentor through a formal career mentoring program.

G – Goal
Mentee: "I want to feel more confident asking for accommodations at work."
Mentor: "That's a strong and important goal. Let's work on that together."

R – Reality
Mentee: "I know what I need, but I get nervous explaining it. I already advocate well in school, just not at work yet."
Mentor: "That tells me you already have advocacy skills – we're just adapting them to a new setting."

O – Options
Mentor: "We could practice what you want to say, write it down together, or talk about when and who to approach. There's more than one way to do this."
Mentee: "Practicing what to say would help most."

W – Will
Mentee: "I'll practice with you today and then talk to my supervisor next week."
Mentor: "Great. Let's also plan what support you'll want if the conversation feels stressful."

Setting Career Mentoring Goals: Five Final Tips for Success

1. **You're in charge of your goals.**
   Mentors can offer ideas, experiences, or guidance – but you decide what feels meaningful, realistic, and right for your life.

2. **Don't become a "clone."**
   You don't need to follow your mentor's path. You're allowed to choose a different direction, move at a different pace, and define success on your own terms.

3. **Your access needs are part of the plan.**
   Good goals include: accommodations, pacing, flexibility, rest and support.

4. **It's okay to revise your goals.**
   As you learn more about yourself, your interests, or the world of work, your goals may change. Career mentoring is a journey, not a straight line.

5. **Start small and build from there.**
   Career mentoring works best when goals are manageable. One small step is enough to move forward.

   And don't forget: curiosity counts as a goal. Wanting to explore, learn, or try something new is a valid and powerful mentoring goal.





MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER IN A GOOD WAY: FINDING AND BUILDING STRONG CAREER MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

This section explains how to find career mentors and build strong, respectful connections with them. Together, we will explore two important questions:



1. Where can you find career mentors?
2. How can you learn alongside career mentors – from start to finish?

As you explore this section, keep in mind:

- Mentoring works best when both the mentor and the mentee show up with care, effort, and respect.
- Mentors also have a role in listening, supporting, and meeting you with respect.
- This section is about helping you do ***your part*** – not about carrying the entire mentoring experience on your own.

Where Can You Find Mentors?

Career mentors can come from many places.

They don't all look the same – and they don't always call themselves mentors.

Mentors don't always need:

- a fancy job title
- a university degree
- a high-status role
- a position of authority

What matters most is how they show up for you:

- Do they listen?
- Do they respect your culture, identity, and access needs?
- Do you feel supported learning alongside them?



Five Practical Places to Look for Career Mentors

These are starting points, not a complete list.

People you already know: Mentors may already be a part of your life, even if you've never thought of them that way.	Who this might include: • Aunties, uncles, grandparents, cousins • Chosen family or caregivers • Friends, peers, and colleagues • Elders or Knowledge Keepers • Neighbours or community members
School or work: Mentors often show up where learning and working are already a focus.	Who this might include: • Teachers or instructors • Peers, co-workers, colleagues • Guidance counsellors, transition workers • Professors or trainers, support staff
Community and cultural spaces: Community spaces are rich with knowledge that doesn't always come from job titles.	Where to look: • Friendship centres • Indigenous organizations • Cultural or land-based initiatives • Community gatherings and events
Disability and access spaces: People who understand disability can be powerful career mentors.	Where to look: • Disability organizations • Advocacy groups • Supported employment workers or job coaches • Access coordinators or navigators
Online spaces: Some mentoring relationships start online, especially when in-person access is limited.	Where to look: • Indigenous or disability-led online organizations • Youth networks or forums

A reminder:

- These are just some of the many places mentors can be found.
- Mentors may appear in these spaces – or in others that fit your life better.

Another Way to Find Career Mentors: Community Cultural Wealth

Now that you understand where to look for career mentors, let's explore how to find career mentors.

Community cultural wealth = a framework that views communities (especially more marginalized communities) as places full of wisdom and mentorship potential.

It highlights six different types of "capital" that people and mentors can carry – beyond just their job titles.

Here, capital doesn't mean money.

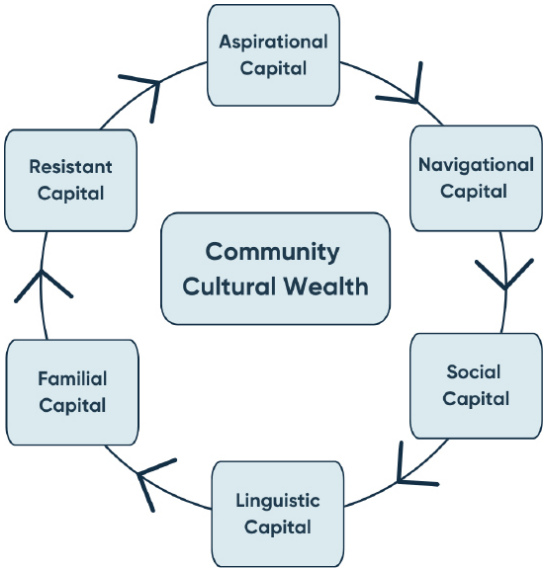
It means strengths, knowledge, skills, relationships, and support that you can draw on to help you move forward.

For example, instead of only asking:

- "Who has the job I want?"
- "Who works in this industry?"
- "Who works for this company?"

Try asking:

- "What kind of support do I need right now – and who can offer that?"



The Six Types of Mentorship and Capital

Not all mentors help in the same way.

Everyone carries different types of capital.

As you explore the six forms of support, you might think about:

How do these forms of capital and mentorship show up in your Nation, community, or family?

Which forms of capital do you already carry within yourself?

What career mentors do you already have in your life that provide you with some of these forms of support?

Are there forms of support that you'd like more access to right now? Who might fill that gap for you?

Types of capital	Mentors with this type of capital might:
Aspirational: The ability to hold hope, imagine a future, and keep dreaming – even when things are hard.	• Remind you of your strengths when you doubt yourself • Encourage you to keep going after setbacks • Help you imagine possibilities that fit you • Share stories of persistence, growth, and survival
Navigational: Skills for moving through systems like school, work, healthcare, social services, or disability supports.	• Help you understand confusing systems • Explain unspoken or unwritten rules • Help you prepare for interviews or meetings in unfamiliar settings • Support you in advocating for yourself
Social: Access to networks, relationships, and community connections.	• Introduce you to people • Invite you into community spaces • Connect you to opportunities you didn't know existed • Help you feel less alone

Linguistic: Skills in communication, storytelling, language, and expression.	• Help you explain your strengths and "sell" your skills • Support you with interviews or presentations • Help you find your voice • Connect (or reconnect) you with an Indigenous language • Share traditional stories and knowledge to give you a new perspective
Familial: Knowledge passed through family, kinship, and community care.	• Treat you like family • Check in on your well-being • Help you feel safe and valued • Teach you about community values • Teach you how to care for yourself and others
Resistant: Knowledge gained through resisting racism, ableism, and exclusion.	• Teach you how to advocate for yourself • Help you recognize unfair treatment • Support you in setting boundaries • Teach you how to protect your dignity

Pulling It All Together: How This Helps You Find Career Mentors Differently

In short, mentors don't just guide careers. They support different parts of your growth.

While looking for potential career mentors, you can now ask:

- Who can help me believe in myself?
- Who understands the systems I'm navigating?
- Who can help me build community and connections?
- Who communicates in ways that work for me?
- Who can help teach me about cultural and community values?
- Who advocates for themselves and others?

Two final reminders

- Finding mentors is a process, not a checklist. Your mentoring circle can grow slowly and naturally.
- What matters most is not where you find a mentor, but how it feels to learn with them.

How Can You Learn Alongside Career Mentors from Start to Finish?

Now that you've identified some potential mentors – or at least know where you might look for them – the next step is learning how to grow together and move forward in a good way. This section will help you:

1. Connect with career mentors on your own

   OR

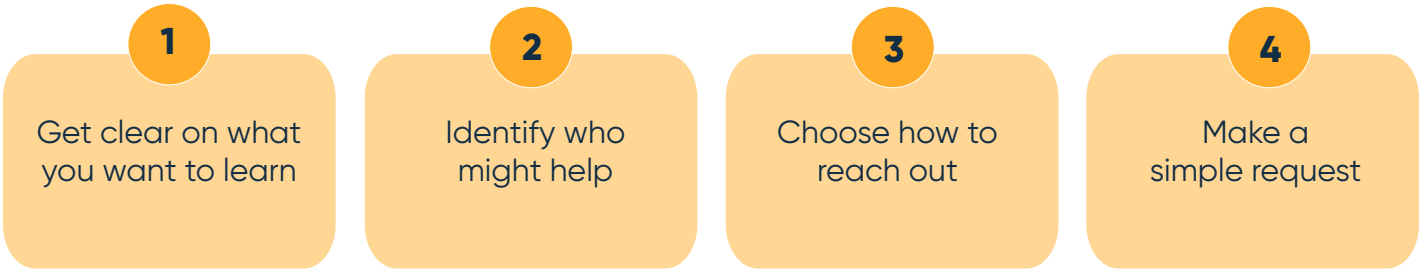
2. Prepare for mentoring conversations supported by mentoring programs.

How to Contact Potential Mentors (on your own)

Reaching out to a potential mentor can feel uncomfortable and scary, but it doesn't have to be.

You're not asking for a lifetime commitment. You're asking for a conversation.

Here is a simple four-step process you can follow:



Step #1: Get clear on what you want to learn.
Before you invite someone to a mentoring conversation, you need to identify what you want to learn from them.

- What do you want to learn, practice, or understand better?
- Where do you feel stuck or unsure?
- What are 1-3 questions you'd like to ask them?

Step #2: Identify who might help.
Before you invite someone to a mentoring conversation, you need to identify what you want to learn from them.

You don't need to find the "perfect" mentor. You just need to create a list of 1-3 people who could support your learning goals.

If you don't know anyone directly, think about who could introduce you to a potential mentor.

Step #3: Choose how to reach out.
Pick the method that feels easiest and most accessible for you. Options can include:

- Text

- Email
- In-person
- Phone or video call
- Or asking someone else to introduce you.

Step #4: Make a simple request.
Contact your potential mentor with a short and concise mentoring request.

- Introduce yourself: Briefly share your past experiences, current role, educational history, etc. If you already know your potential mentor, give them a brief refresher of your role and background (if it's been a while since you last spoke).
- Share your learning goals: Tell your potential mentor why you're contacting them.
    - How did you find their contact info?
    - Who is your shared connection?
    - What are you hoping to learn from them?
    - Why are they best suited to answer your questions?
- Do your homework: Don't expect your potential mentor to do everything for you.
    - Don't ask them a question that could be answered by a simple internet search.
    - Show them that you've already done some deep thinking and learning.
    - Show them how and why you need to draw on their direct lived experiences to answer your questions.
- Respect their time: Keep the time commitment small at first. 15-30 minutes should be more than enough time.
- **Be careful about using the word mentor**: When people are asked, "Will you be my mentor?" all sorts of red flags can go up.
    - Instead of using the word mentor, try to just share your learning goals and how you think they could help you during a brief conversation.

Three Examples of Mentoring Requests

Example #1: Reaching out to someone new

Hello _____ ,

I hope you're doing well. I found your contact information by/on _____ .

My name is _____ , and I'm currently exploring different career paths. To share a bit of context, my career journey so far includes [insert 2-3 bullet points].

Lately, I've been learning more about _____ and wanted to hear from someone with real-life experience in this area.

I've already done some exploring on my own, but I still have some questions that are hard to answer without hearing directly from someone who's doing this work.

If you're open to it, I was hoping to ask you a couple of questions, such as:

- What does a typical day look like in your work?
- What do you wish you had known when you were first starting out?

- What kinds of volunteer or entry-level experiences could help someone prepare for this field?

A short conversation (15-30 minutes) would be more than enough. I was thinking we could connect [insert your preferred connection method], but I'm open to alternative suggestions as well.

If now isn't a good time, no worries at all. If there's someone else you think I should talk to, I'd appreciate that too.

Thank you for your time.

Example #2: Reconnecting with someone you've met before

Hello _____ ,

My name is _____ . You may remember me from _____ .

I'm currently exploring different career paths and have been especially interested in learning more about
_____ . Your experience stood out to me, and I thought you might be a great person to learn from.

I've been doing some learning on my own, but I'd really value the chance to hear directly from someone who has lived experience in this area.

If you're open to it, I'd love to ask you a few questions, such as:

- How did you get started in this field?
- What skills or experiences have been most helpful in your work?
- What challenges exist around inclusion in this field?

I'd be happy to meet in whatever format works best for you, and I would keep it to no more than 30 minutes.

If you're not available right now, I completely understand. If there's someone else you'd recommend I connect with, I'd appreciate that as well

Thank you for considering,

Example #3: Reaching out through a trusted connection

Hello _____ ,

I hope you're doing well.

My name is _____ , and I was encouraged to reach out to you by _____. They mentioned that you might be a good person to talk to as I'm exploring career paths related to _____ .

I'm an Indigenous person with a disability, and I've been spending time learning about career options that respect access needs, lived experience, and community values. I've done some research and had a few conversations already, but I'm hoping to learn more from someone who understands what this work looks like in real life.

If you're open to it, I'd love to ask a couple of questions, such as

- What parts of your work do you enjoy the most?
- What parts are harder or take more energy?
- How do people navigate access or accommodations in this field?

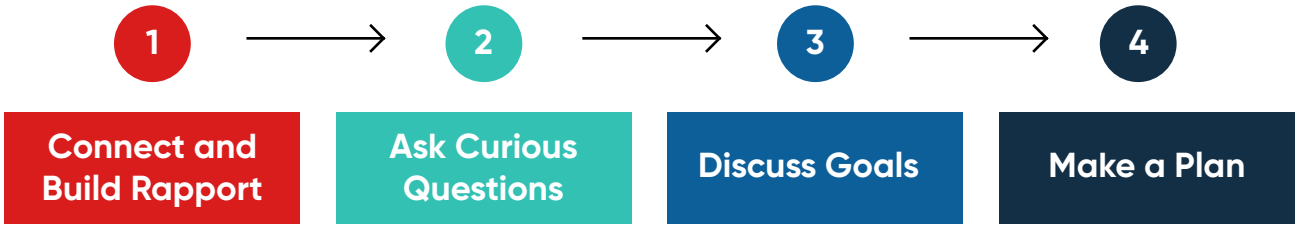
I'd really appreciate a short conversation – 15 to 30 minutes would be great. I'm happy to meet in person, by phone, or online, whatever works best for you.

No worries at all if now isn't a good time. Perhaps you could introduce me to someone else who might be willing to chat?

Thank you for your time.

Starting Off Strong: How to Structure Your First Mentoring Conversation

Whether you reached out on your own, or joined a mentoring program, first conversations usually follow the same flow:



1. **Connect and build rapport: Spend some time getting to know your mentor.**

- Learn about their path
- Share a bit about yours
- Build trust and connection before jumping straight into goals

2. **Ask curious career questions: Come prepared with a few questions for your mentor.**

- Why did you pick this field?
- What challenges or barriers exist in this field?
- What surprised you along the way?

3. **Discuss your mentoring goals: Explore and discuss your goals for the mentoring experience. Don't forget to use the GROW framework here (see the section on discovering your strengths and mentoring goals).**

- What do you want to learn?
- What support do you need?

4. **Make a plan: Write down your goal and make a plan.**

- What are your next steps to keep your momentum going?

Closing The Circle: Ending Career Mentoring Experiences in a Good Way

Mentoring experiences don't always last forever – and that's okay.

In fact, that's typically how career mentoring works.



YOU CONNECT



YOU LEARN TOGETHER



YOU MOVE FORWARD

Sometimes you stay in touch. Sometimes you don't. Both are valid.

Below are five practical steps to help you close the circle in a good way.

Closing Career Mentoring Experiences in Five Simple Steps

Step #1: Name the transition openly.

This first step is all about being honest and respectful with one another.

You don't have to "hide" from the transition or try to "sweep it under the rug." That only makes things awkward and unclear.

Instead, don't be afraid to respectfully name that a conversation, mentoring program, or relationship is coming to an end or changing.

Some things you might say here:

- "I know that this mentoring program is coming to an end, so I wanted to talk about how we can close it in a good way."
- "Can we talk for a few minutes about how we wrap things up?"
- "I feel like I've reached the goals I originally came to mentoring with, and I wanted to name that clearly. Could we talk about next steps?"

Step #2: Celebrate learning and growth.

Another important step is to highlight what you learned from your career mentor.

This shows respect and appreciation for their time, care, and effort to help you develop and grow.

It's also an opportunity for your mentor to share what they learned and gained from spending time with you.

Together, you might reflect on:

- Skills that you each developed
- Fresh insights you gained
- The actions you took, or plan to take, because of the mentoring experience

Some things you might say here:

- "One thing I'm taking away from our time together is _____ . "
- "Something I learned from you that really stuck with me is _____ . "
- "If you're open to sharing, I'd be interested in what you took away from this, too. Was there anything that you learned from me?"
- "Mentoring feels like a two-way exchange. Is there anything you'll carry forward from our time together?"

Step #3: Protect one another's trust and privacy.

Mentoring is built on trust.

During your mentoring experience, you and your mentor may have shared:

- Challenges and doubts
- Cultural teachings
- Health or disability-related experiences
- Mistakes, fears, or hopes

Talking openly about what stays private and what can be shared with others is a way of honouring one another and protecting each other's dignity.

Some things you might say here:

- "Before we wrap up, since we've both shared some personal things, I want to make sure we're on the same page about what stays private."
- "Here's what's okay to share with others. Here's what needs to stay just between us."
- "I want to make sure I respect your boundaries too. Are there things you shared that you'd like me to keep private as well?"

Step #4: Explore whether and how you'll stay in touch.

Some career mentoring experiences might end completely. Some might just change a bit and become less frequent.
Both are okay. But it's important to discuss whether and how you'll stay in touch.

Together, you might discuss:

- Whether you'd like to stay in touch or not
- What feels realistic for both of you
- Where and how often you'll meet

Some things you might say here:

- "Before we wrap up, I wanted to talk about whether and how we might stay in touch."
- "If I need guidance down the road, would it be okay to reach out?"
- "Which methods work best for you (email, text, phone, LinkedIn, in-person)?"
- "I feel grateful for what I've learned from our time together, and I think this is a good place for me to continue on my own. Thanks again for everything."

Step #5: Talk about your next steps.

Before the mentoring experience ends or becomes less frequent, invite your mentor to help you take your next step.

This helps you carry your learning and momentum forward.

Examples

- Review your resume
- Suggesting a resource or contact
- Offering one final piece of advice
- Helping you reflect on your next goals

Some things you might say here:

- "Based on what we've talked about, what do you think would be a good next step for me?"
- "Would you be willing to suggest one or two resources I should focus on next?"
- "Could you point me toward a program, opportunity, or community space?"
- "Is there someone you think I should talk to next – and would you be open to connecting us?"

Closing a mentoring experience in a good way honours the learning you shared and prepares you for what comes next.

***Remember:** What you've learned doesn't end there. You carry it forward. The next section will show you how to do this.*



Transitioning from Mentee to Mentor: Passing Your Teachings Along

This guide is not only about helping you find and connect with career mentors – it's also about helping you become one.

In many Indigenous communities, teachings carry responsibility.

Even before your career mentoring experience – you already held knowledge, skills, and lived experience that others could learn from.

Below are four practical ways to begin the transition from mentee to mentor – at your own pace.

Four Ways to Transition from Mentee to Mentor

Step #1: Learning from your career mentoring experience.
Your experience as a mentee is a powerful teaching tool.

Take some time to reflect on:

- What helped you most as a mentee?
- What made you feel supported, respected, or safe?
- What didn't work for you, or felt uncomfortable?

Ask yourself:

- What kind of mentor do I want to be?
- What lessons do I want to carry forward?
- What mentoring behaviours do I want to repeat?
- What behaviours would I avoid or adapt?

You don't have to mentor the same way you were mentored. You get to shape your own approach.

Step #2: Learn about quality mentoring strategies.
As we learned in the first part of this resource, there are five consistent elements of quality mentoring.

Refer back to this section to ensure your mentoring includes all five elements.

This will help you develop safe, effective, and respectful mentoring relationships with mentees.

If you're curious to learn even more about quality mentoring, you can visit Mentor Canada's free resources here.

Step #3: Explore your mentoring constellation
Remember that mentoring is a constellation. You can become a mentor through mentoring moments, informal mentoring, or formal programs.

Mentoring Moments – These are brief interactions that still make a big impact.
How you might mentor others:

- Sharing a quick piece of career advice with someone in your community.
- Explaining accommodations at school or work to a younger peer and what worked for you.
- Letting someone shadow you briefly or see what your work looks like.

These moments might be small, but they can spark ideas, open doors, or help others take their next step.

Informal Mentoring – These connections grow naturally in spaces you're already part of.
How you might mentor others:

- Helping a friend or family member prepare for an interview by practicing questions together.
- Regularly checking in with a younger cousin or co-worker who's navigating school, work, or disability supports.
- Helping someone understand a confusing application, form, or system you've already navigated.

These connections happen because you already know each other – it's mentorship that shows up in your everyday life.

Formal Mentoring – These relationships happen through a structured program that matches you with a mentee.
How you might mentor others:

- Signing up as a mentor through a school, work, or community mentoring program.
- Supporting new employees or trainees at your workplace as a formal buddy or guide.
- Participating in a formal, structured program or community event focused on intergenerational knowledge sharing.

Step #4: Continue growing and learning as a mentor

Mentoring is a lifelong learning process. Strong mentors reflect, adjust, and keep learning.

You can grow by:

- Inviting feedback from your mentee(s)
- Noticing what worked and what didn't after mentoring conversations
- Adapting your approach over time

You might also ask those you mentor:

- **"Was there anything I could have done differently?"**
- **"What was most helpful? What could have been better?"**

A helpful reminder: Becoming a mentor doesn't mean you stop being a mentee! Mentoring is a living cycle. Sometimes you receive guidance. Sometimes you offer it. Often, you do both at the same time. What matters most is not the role you're in but moving forward together in a good way.

CONCLUSION

Congratulations on completing this guide!

Taking the time to:

- Learn about career mentoring,
- Explore Indigenous approaches to mentoring and disability,
- Reflect on your strengths, and
- Identify your mentoring goals … shows care and commitment to yourself and your future.

This kind of work is an important step in shaping a career path that fits who you are and what matters to you.

Where to go for more support and learning

- Visit Mentor Canada's website to explore additional mentoring resources, tools, and training opportunities.
- Visit MentorAbility's website to learn about career mentoring opportunities specifically designed for youth with disabilities.

Three possible next steps

1. **Connect a friend** – If you found this guide helpful, consider sharing it with someone you know who might also benefit.

2. **Reach out to a potential mentor** – Use what you've learned in this guide to connect with someone whose experiences, values, or lived experiences you respect – whether that knowledge comes from work, culture, community, or disability experience.

3. **Explore career mentoring programs** – Take some time to look into career mentoring programs in your community or region that align with your interests, identity, and access needs.

Closing Reflection

There is no single timeline or "right" way to build a career.

Take what you need from this guide, return to it when useful, and trust yourself to move forward in ways that feel right for you.



Mentor Canada

QUESTIONS?
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