

# The Alberta Mentoring Partnership's **ORIENTATION FOR MENTORS**

**Name:**

**Date:**



Alberta  
**Mentoring  
Partnership**  
*Your Mentoring Resource*

[albertamentors.ca](http://albertamentors.ca)

**This is an orientation into the world of mentoring. Mentoring is a powerful approach that fosters connection between youth and their community through building positive, developmental relationship(s) with someone older. As a mentor you are building social capital and expanding meaningful connections for youth.**

**While participating in this training, you will learn what it means to be a mentor and how mentoring works.**

**We will cover the basics of mentoring, the importance of mentoring, the potential roles of a Mentor, and what kind of supports you can access as an informal Mentor and if you are part of a formal program what you can expect from one.**

**You will also be introduced to the dynamics of building a positive mentoring relationship.**



# MODULE ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Welcome to an introductory training for mentors, where you'll learn what it means to be a mentor and how mentoring works.

The following four modules will give you an overview of what you'll need to know about mentoring, starting with defining what mentoring is.

### In this training, you will:

- Learn about the importance of mentoring, the different types of mentoring, and why mentoring has become so important in supporting children and youth in Canada.
- Be introduced to the unique dynamics of building a mentoring relationship
- Understand what's expected of you as a mentor and, if you are part of a formal mentoring program, the role of program staff in supporting your mentoring relationship.

## THE ALBERTA MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP) is a network of community mentoring agencies, government and youth dedicated to the success of mentoring organizations and programming across the province.

**AMP's Vision is: Young people thrive through mentoring relationships.**

**AMP's Mission is: Working together to strengthen Alberta's capacity to support and enhance mentoring.**



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**MENTOR  
CANADA**

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership developed this training to provide mentoring programs and mentors with an accessible, evidence-based orientation to mentoring. It is the first Canadian orientation of its kind, and has provided core training to 11,000+ mentors within Alberta and across Canada. As part of its leadership role, AMP is also a founding partner of MENTOR Canada.

# MENTOR CANADA

The MENTOR Canada is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. In collaboration with diverse stakeholders, our goal is to build sector capacity to expand access to mentoring across Canada.

**Mission: Canadian Mentoring Partnership is committed to expanding access to mentoring to help every young person fulfil their potential.**

AMP and MENTOR Canada have collaborated to update and translate this training and it is now contextually relevant and accessible to mentoring programs, service providers and mentors across Canada. For the first time, mentors and service providers will have access to a consistent evidence-based orientation in both English and French as they engage in mentoring.

## WHAT IS MENTORING?

**The MENTOR Canada utilizes key sources to define mentoring:**

MENTOR (The National Mentoring Partnership in the USA) describes mentoring as a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee.

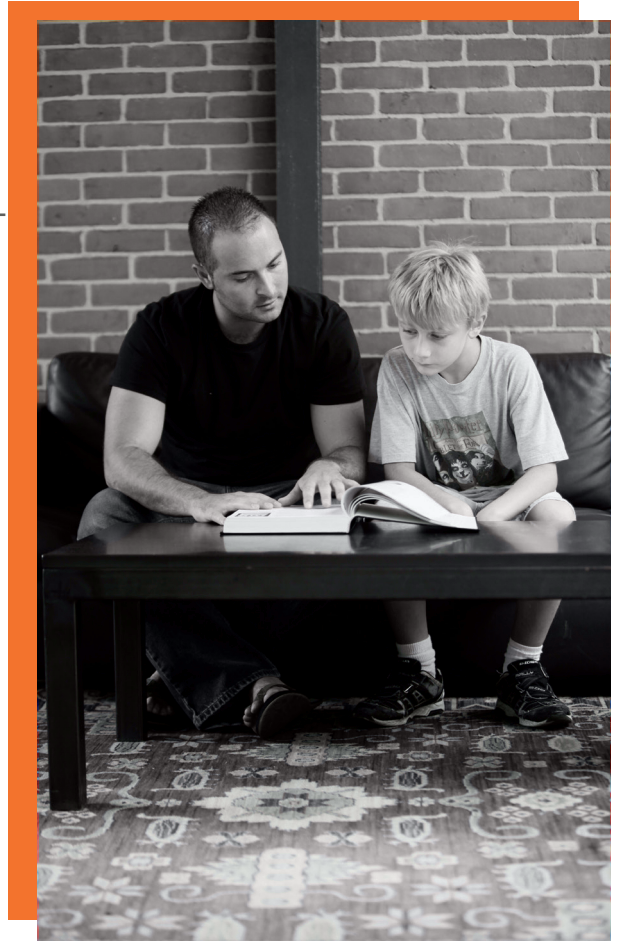
Researchers, David Dubois & Michael Karcher (2014) describe mentoring as *"a sustained, supportive relationship between a young person and a non-parental adult or older peer, either in the context of a structured, formal mentoring program or through an informal, natural relationship that develops organically."*

Mentoring is an evidence-based approach to working with children and youth.

Mentoring is part of an active process that can support child and adolescent development.

At its core, mentoring is about building connections and developing healthy relationships.

Mentors build strong communities through the simple act of spending time with a child or youth either virtually or in person. Spending time with a young person may seem simple, but science tells us that healthy interactions with supportive adults boost brain development, mental health and well-being of children and youth.



## Question One: Who was a Mentor in your life?

Think back to your own childhood or adolescence: can you remember someone who acted as a cheerleader, advocate, advisor or role model.

What made that person so special? It probably didn't matter if they had a college degree or was someone who had all the answers.

What mattered most was that they genuinely cared about you and took an interest in you as a person.

## Question Two: What were some of your Mentors' qualities?

Many people think it takes certain accomplishments to be a mentor. Not so! Mentors come from all walks of life, have different life experiences and different things to offer. What mentors have in common is the desire to make a positive difference in the life of a child or youth.

Most of us have had someone: a teacher, relative, supervisor or coach who has been a mentor to us and made a positive difference in our lives. These mentors all had a sincere desire to be involved with a young person and shared some basic qualities:

- Reliable and consistent;
- Fun;
- Encouraging;
- Good teachers;
- Able to set boundaries and limits;
- Able to see opportunities and solutions;

Mentoring is an opportunity to grow as a person by putting these qualities into practice. Mentoring offers you the power to transform lives, bridge connection and make a difference. Above all, mentors are willing to take the time to get to know their mentee, to learn new things that are important to the young person, and even to be changed by their relationship.

# MODULE ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING

## THE MENTORING EFFECT

Research confirms that children and youth who experience or participate in a mentoring relationship experience a number of benefits!

Mentoring relationships can contribute to positive outcomes for children and youth. Choose which of the following are true.

Did you also know that:

Children or youth having a mentor provides them with the self-confidence they need to stay in school and thrive. Adults who had a mentor in their youth are more likely to succeed professionally. Mentoring provides youth with the skills necessary to reach their full potential and succeed as adults.

Our brains are built over time and need a good base to support future development. Building a strong sturdy foundation for children and youth in the developing years provides a good base for a lifetime of good mental function and overall health.

Mentoring supports developing healthy brains in young people.

### Question Three: Which of the following are benefits of mentoring for children and youth?

- ☐ Improved attitudes about staying in school
- ☐ Increased high school completion rates
- ☐ Improved social skills, attitudes, and behaviour with family and friends
- ☐ Reduced risk of involvement in drugs, alcohol, and crime
- ☐ Enhanced academic engagement and achievement
- ☐ Increased Resiliency

## WORK

17% more likely to be employed

47% hold senior leadership positions

13% higher earnings

63% have post-secondary education

## COMMUNITY

13% more likely to donate to charity

20% more money donated

87% have strong social networks

30% more time volunteering

50% more likely to volunteer

## LIFE

81% report financial literacy

98% believe they make good life choices

80% pursue healthy lifestyles

92% feel confident

96% say they're happy

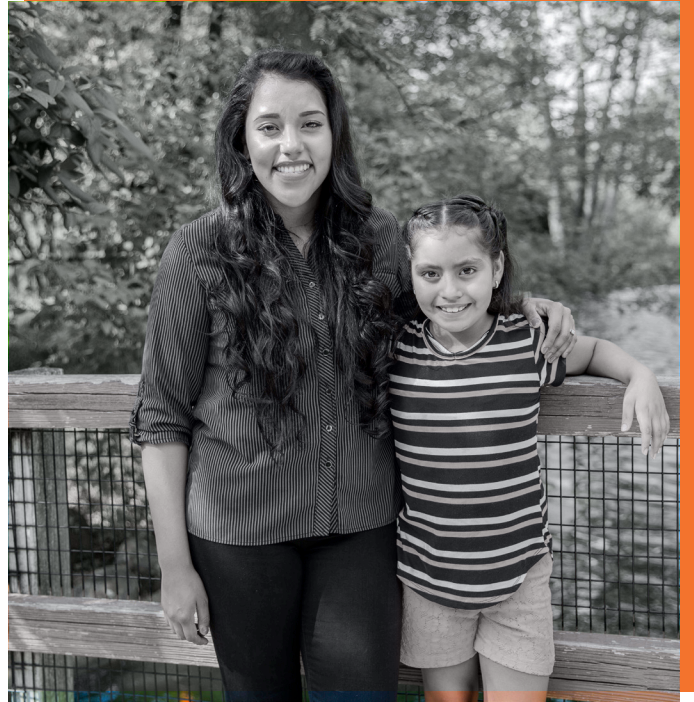


# BRAIN ARCHITECTURE

Brain architecture is a key starting place for understanding the story of early brain development and its impact on lifelong health.

Early experiences, both positive and negative, affect brain architecture and provide the foundation for future learning, behaviour and health.

Mentors have a significant role in building brain architecture.



# SERVE-AND-RETURN

The serve-and-return metaphor is one of the most important forms of interaction between a young person and a trusted adult or role model, such as a mentor.

Serve and return occurs when we are responsive to a young person's verbal cues and actions.

Remember that serve and return is like a game of tennis. The young person "serves" by reaching out for interaction, and a responsive mentor "returns the serve" by responding with eye contact, a smile, or asking a question.

**The Palix Foundation's Alberta Family Wellness Initiative states that these "back-and-forth exchanges are the building blocks of early brain development".**

# AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

Air traffic control or executive function encompasses higher order operations that help us organize information and regulate our behaviour.

Young people with good executive function find it easier to get along with others and develop adaptive responses in social settings.

This also includes prioritizing tasks, controlling impulses, remembering instructions, and focusing attention.

Mentoring supports children and youth develop the abilities they need to be productive and work well with others.

# TOXIC STRESS

Not all stress is bad. Small challenges that create positive stress can be healthy for development of the young people we are mentoring.

Some positive stress examples are:

- meeting new people,
- losing a game,
- making a mistake,
- trying something new,
- or starting the first day of school.

More serious events, known as tolerable stress, aren't good for young people and their brain development.

Examples of tolerable stress include:

- natural disaster,
- loss of a loved one,
- and divorce.

However, if supportive care-givers or community members including formal and informal mentors, are around to buffer the young person's stress response, these situations will not do lasting damage to the brain.

Toxic stress occurs when no supportive caregivers or community members are around to buffer a child's response to repeated negative experiences.

Things that cause toxic stress may include:

- neglect,
- abuse,
- addiction,
- trauma,
- and mental illness.

We cannot always prevent toxic stress before it begins, but the evidence is clear that having the support of at least one caring adult can turn experiences that would be toxic into experiences that are tolerable.

It is important to remember that the process of building healthy brains does not end in childhood; some regions of the brain continue to develop for youth into the twenties.

		Mental Illness
		Neglect
Meeting New People	Natural Disaster	Abuse
Losing a Game	Loss of a Loved One	Addiction
Making a Mistake	Divorce	Trauma
POSITIVE STRESS	TOLERABLE STRESS	TOXIC STRESS



The Palix Foundation's Alberta Family Wellness Initiative states that:

*"Activities that engage young people with peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and other supportive adults (including formal and informal mentors) help develop these healthy interests and brain connections. The more closely adolescents are connected by positive relationships to role models and peers in their communities, the more robust their positive neurological connections will become—and the more likely they are to avoid potentially harmful behaviours and addictive substances."*

Interventions, such as mentoring, that address weakened brain architecture and build cognitive, social, and emotional capacities remain an important and effective support mechanism throughout a young person's development.

### **Question Four: What are three ways you as a Mentor will build healthy brains?**

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- |  |  |
|--|--|
| A. Achieve personal growth and learn more about themselves         | E. Improve social skills and pro-social behaviours |
| B. Improve their self-esteem and feel they are making a difference | F. Enhance capacity for teamwork                   |
| C. Feel more positive about their school or workplace              | G. Improve academic achievement                    |
| D. Increase in empathy for others                                  | H. Have fun!                                       |
|  | I. All of the above                                |

# MODULE THREE: BUILDING A POSITIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

The structure around mentoring relationships and activities can range from informal to formal. There are a number of community organizations that have formal mentoring programs such as the YMCA Plus One Mentoring, Girls E-Mentoring (GEM) and Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. These organizations match volunteers with children or youth in professionally supported mentoring relationships over a period of time.

Informal mentoring relationships develop either naturally through a natural connection with a young person such as an uncle or aunt, neighbor, family friend or through connections to professionals such as a youth leader, coach, teacher or social worker. Informal mentoring relationships are critical in the lives of children and youth, and present a substantial opportunity to build meaningful relationships that are durable and influential in a young persons' life.

Research indicates a structured approach to mentoring that creates supportive opportunities for sustained relationships will have the most positive and significant impact for the mentee, mentor, school and/or community.



## AREAS OF FOCUS IN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

**Mentoring Relationships can also have different focuses including:**

### **Academic Mentoring**

Focus is on improving the academic performance of a child, youth, or group being mentored, or for teaching specific information or skills.

### **Career Mentoring**

Focus is on assisting the child or youth being mentored in identifying personal interests and strengths, building awareness of career possibilities and post-secondary opportunities, and developing skills and knowledge related to leadership, transition planning and the world of work.

### Cultural Mentoring

Focus is on sharing customs, values, and practices of a specific culture, tradition, or group.

### Social Emotional Learning

Focus is on supporting an individual or group through a critical time of development by helping them identify and build strengths and develop the skills to address issues and challenges.

## STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

The research supports a strength-based resiliency approach. The evidence indicates that practices fostering resilience are the best way to access and draw out the strengths of children and youth to help them meet the challenges they face. We know that young people are naturally resilient, but if they do not have support, they lose their resilience, the ability to “bounce back” from adverse life experiences.

Having a significant relationship with a supportive adult or community member, such as a mentor, can enhance a young person’s strengths, resources and resiliency.

As previously mentioned, one of the significant benefits of mentoring is that it builds resilience.. Resiliency is a person’s ability to cope successfully when faced with adversity. Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to cope successfully with stress related situations, overcome adversity, or adapt positively to change. It is the ability to cope with and bounce back in the face of life’s challenges and demands.

Rather than focusing on the adversity that someone may be facing, or the risk factors, we encourage you to look at the qualities within the youth, their families and their environments that empower them and build resilience. This is a strength-based approach.

A strength-based mentoring approach has as its focus the identification, exploration, and use of strengths in children and youth, and their families to foster positive mental health outcomes at school, at home and in the community.



# WHAT DOES A STRENGTH-BASED MENTOR LOOK LIKE?

It means, believing that the youth has potential and that their unique strengths and capabilities will determine their path of success.

That what we focus on becomes a youth's reality. If we focus on the deficits and the labels, those will begin to define the young person. If we focus on the strengths and capabilities, those will define the young person.

Believing that all youth want to succeed, explore the world, and to contribute something to others and to their communities. Youth embrace change when they are invited to start with what is right with them - start with and build upon successes.

## Traits of Strength-Based Mentors

Interpersonal Warmth

Self and Other Aware

Active Listening

Trustworthy and Dependable

Unconditional Positive Regard

Respectful of Values

Good Natured Humour

High Expectations/Not Perfection

## EMBRACE DIVERSITY

We all have different values and beliefs that guide the choices we make in life. It's important to be aware of our own values and to realize that not all people will share our values.

You may have different opinions and values than the young person you are mentoring, and if you interact with their family, even more differences may emerge. There may be differences in religious beliefs, cultural practices, expectations for behavior, valuing independence or types of family relationships. The young person (and their family) may have different ideas than you about education, work, or success. They may come from an entirely different historical, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual context from you. As a mentor, it's important to respect and strive to understand the young person's (and/or their family's) values and unique context and not place judgement on their choices and values or try to impose your values on them.





It's important that you demonstrate respect for the family's values and beliefs. How do you do this? Here are some ideas:

- Showing interest and asking questions about different beliefs or practices
- Educating yourself about their context, culture or faith - for example, you might attend a cultural or community event
- Being open-minded and appreciating the young person's values that may be different from yours
- Being cautious around sensitive issues
- Being respectful at all times.

Remember that each person and all families in the mentoring program are entitled to hold different values and customs than your own. Your role as a mentor is to make a connection that allows you to be a positive influence.

## **STAGES OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

Every relationship has a beginning, a middle and an end, and mentoring is no exception. There is a general progression to mentoring relationships. The stages of a mentoring relationship often follow a pattern that can be described in three stages:

### **Stage 1: Developing Rapport and Building Trust**

### **Stage 2: Demonstrating Commitment and Reaching Goals**

### **Stage 3: Closure**

#### **Stage One:**

During the first stage of the relationship, it is critical to be both predictable and consistent. If you schedule a session (virtual or in-person) to meet your mentee at a certain time, it's important to keep it. It is understandable that at times things come up and a meeting cannot be kept. However, in order to build trust, consistency is necessary, even if the young person is not as consistent as you are.

Young people generally take time to develop a trust with adults. As a result, they may use testing as a coping or defense mechanism to determine whether they can trust you. They will test to see if you really care about and are invested in them. A mentee might test the mentor by not showing up for a scheduled meeting to see how the mentor will react. It is important to reinforce you are there for them.

It's helpful while developing the mentoring relationship to take the time to set at least one achievable goal together. What do the two of you want to get out of this relationship? It's also good to help your mentee set personal goals. Young people benefit from learning how to identify goals, and this will provide them with the opportunity to set goals and work toward achieving them.



## Stage Two:

Once trust has been established, the relationship typically moves into Stage 2. During this stage, the mentor and mentee can start working toward the goals they set during the first stage of the relationship.

Generally, during the second stage the mentor and mentee can sense a genuine connection or closeness developing. As you “hit your stride” in the relationship, you can enjoy activities together, learn together, and engage in meaningful conversations. Once the relationship has reached this stage, it’s helpful to do something special or different from what the mentor and mentee did during the first stage. This helps affirm the uniqueness of the relationship. For example, you might determine a shared interest in a specific exhibit at a museum, sporting event, or food and share in this together through a virtual or in-person experience..

Keep in mind that all relationships have their ups and downs. Once the relationship has reached the second stage, there might still be some rough periods. Mentors should be prepared and not assume that something is wrong with the relationship if this happens. You can always confer with mentoring program staff for support in working through these issues.

## Stage Three:

An important step in the mentoring relationship is acknowledging that mentoring matches eventually come to an end.

Some young people have had negative experiences with relationships ending. Mentoring relationship closures should be a time for celebration for yourself, the young person and the time you shared.

This can either be intentional, where the anticipated time for the mentoring relationship has been achieved, or unintentional where a match must close due to a change in life circumstance, interest or ability to commit. This stage is just as important as the initial meetings of a mentoring relationship.

As a mentor, it’s important to consider your actions related to mentoring relationship closure. It is helpful to acknowledge the relationship and the time you have spent together.

This can be in the form of a special outing, a scrapbook capturing the time together, or a virtual card that speaks about what the mentoring relationship meant to you. Check with your mentoring program as to the appropriateness of keeping in touch following the formal mentoring match closure.



**Question Six: In your role as a mentor, how would you build positive mentoring relationships?**

# MODULE FOUR: THE ROLE OF A MENTOR

**You probably have many questions about becoming a mentor. In this module, you'll take a close look at your role as a mentor and many aspects of how to be an effective mentor.**

## BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are limits that we place on our relationships with others.

One of the qualities of an effective mentor is the ability to set boundaries when relating to a young person. How do you do this? Why is this important?

All young people need to have boundaries set. Boundaries indicate what is correct and incorrect behaviour in the context of the mentoring relationship.

Further, young people seek boundaries from adults to show them that you care.

Boundaries apply to the greater context of the world in which they live and setting boundaries will help promote resiliency in your mentee.

### Tips for Setting Boundaries

- Be an ally to the young person while still maintaining the role of the adult/mentor and role model.
- Take the opportunity to be a positive role model by demonstrating social skills and respect in relationships.
- When the child or youth acts inappropriately, acknowledge the behaviour or action and talk about why it was not appropriate.
- Say "no" to inappropriate requests and explain why.
- Be consistent by reinforcing messages regarding inappropriate behaviours and boundaries.
- Provide positive reinforcing messages when they make positive decisions and choices.
- Set realistic expectations for meetings from the very beginning of the mentoring relationship.

# SETTING BOUNDARIES

We've looked at the qualities of an effective mentor and tips for setting boundaries with your mentee. Now let's look at some roles you should not play as a mentor.

A mentor should never try to take on the role of a parent/guardian. It's not your job to be a disciplinarian or to set rules that fall under a parent/guardian's jurisdiction.

It's also likely that if you try to be a parent/guardian, you could compromise your mentoring relationship with the child or youth.

It may be appropriate for you to meet the child's parents or guardian, depending on the age of your mentee, family dynamics, whether or not your mentee would like this and if it fits with your mentoring program.

As with many aspects of mentoring, it's important to use your best judgment and to ask program staff if you have doubts or questions.

Sometimes issues arise that require more than you can provide as a mentor.

If this is the case, talk to the program staff, who can decide on the best course of action.

Research indicates that the greatest impact in mentoring occurs when the relationship lasts for one year or longer.

However, what is most important is that you are consistent and committed to a positive relationship and fulfill whatever length of commitment you agreed to.

Research has shown that leaving the mentoring relationship early can do harm to the mentee and cause disappointment.

The longer the mentoring relationship, the greater the likelihood that it will result in significant benefits for the young person.

**Many programs ask for a 3-12 month commitment to ensure the greatest benefits occur.**

**In other words, fulfilling your mentoring commitment is very important to the well-being and benefits of the mentee.**

**HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIPS ARE:  
HONEST  
SAFE  
RESPECTFUL  
FAIR  
SUPPORTIVE**

# HOW LONG FOR EACH VISIT? HOW OFTEN?

In many formal mentoring programs, meetings between mentors and mentees range from once a week to 2-3 times a month and can last one to two hours. It is important that you clarify the frequency and duration of mentoring meetings expected by your program.

Consistent, frequent contact between a mentor and mentee has proven to be more important than the duration of any single contact.

Make sure you, your mentee, their parent/guardian (if applicable) and program staff all have a clear understanding about how much time you plan to spend during each meeting and the frequency of each session.

Making this clear at the outset helps avoid miscommunication and makes it clear to the young person, parents/guardians (if applicable) and program staff.

In whatever format (virtual or in-person) you spend your time together, the relationship should center on the mentee. The purpose of mentoring is to build a relationship and for the mentor to serve as a support, role model, and trusted guide.

One way you can keep things centered on the young person is to give them a strong voice in establishing goals for your relationship, context for the meeting and choosing activities (some mentoring programs will provide structured and unstructured activities). The idea is for your mentee to feel that the focus is on them. This type of attention is often just what's needed in their life.

Once you have chosen a goal or activity, it's a good idea to think through how you'll use your time together.

It's also important to be flexible if it seems the mentee has something else in mind.

It's not how elaborate the sessions or meetings are; it's about being able to enjoy spending time together.

Give your mentee options to choose from and remember to keep the focus on their needs and wants.



## WHEN TO GET ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

Although this training session provides you with a solid foundation for what is involved in becoming a mentor.



Your mentoring program or school contact is there to give you additional information as you begin and move through your journey as a mentor.

Mentoring program staff are there to help you navigate your experience.

For example, expectations of your program, guidelines, specific activities, program events as well as policies.

Remember, mentoring programs want to ensure that the experience is positive for both the mentor and the mentee.

Don't hesitate to talk to your program contacts at any point if you have questions or concerns, or if you need ideas or support.

**Use this as a rule of thumb: "If you think you should contact your mentoring program, do it!"**

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Although you are not your mentee's parent or counselor, you may become a trusted ally over time. That means your mentee may talk to you about important issues in their life.

### Are these conversations confidential?

Most formal mentoring programs or schools have a policy saying that communication between mentor and mentee is confidential with certain important exceptions such as disclosure of abuse or neglect.

### Are there exceptions to confidentiality?

Absolutely, whenever you believe the young person's safety or the safety of anyone else is in jeopardy.

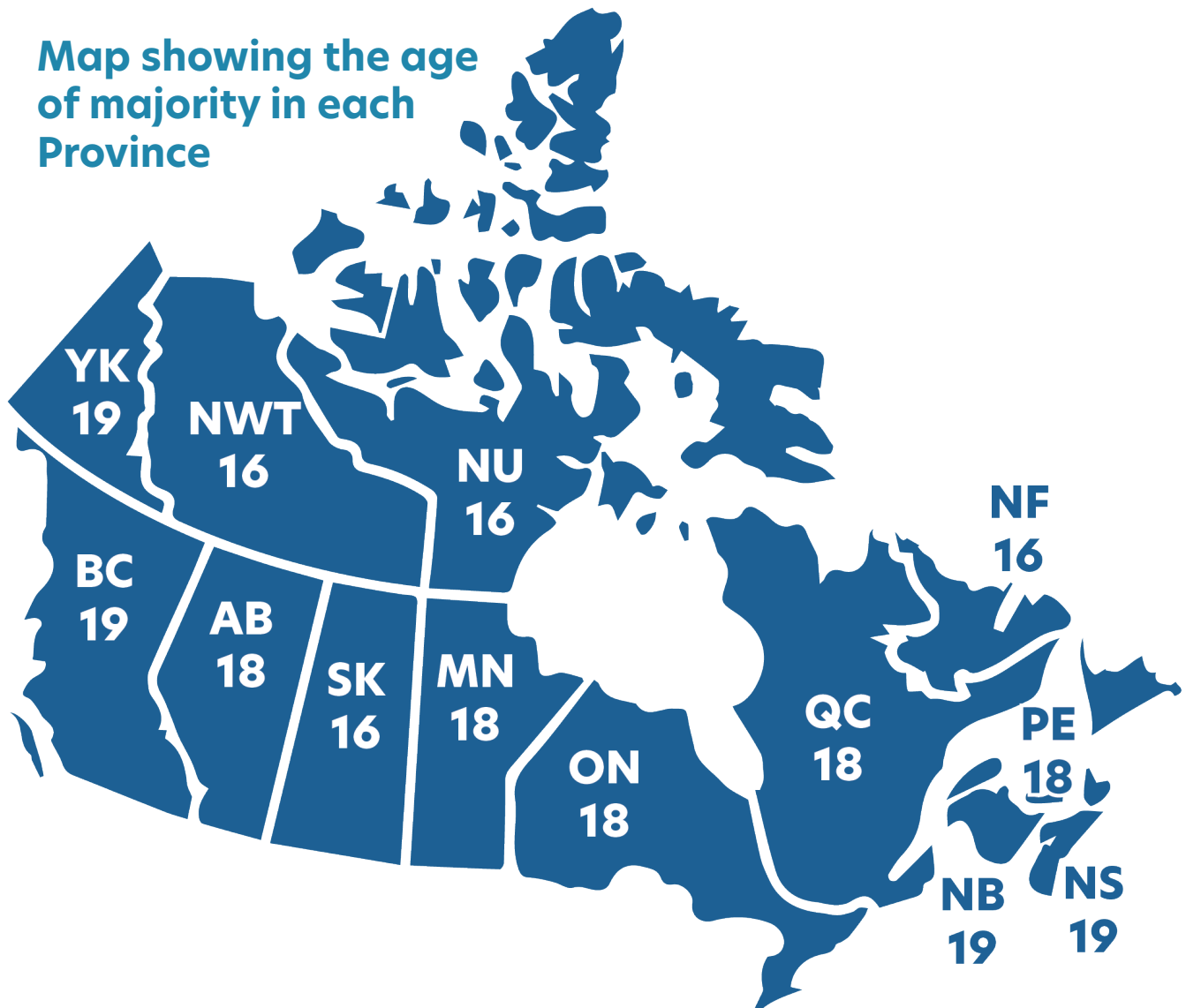
If you believe this to be the case, you must contact your mentoring program staff.

Reporting your concerns is the responsible thing to do.

In fact, when you work with children or youth under the age of majority in your province or territory, the reporting of abuse, neglect, or endangerment is required by law.



**Map showing the age  
of majority in each  
Province**



**Question Seven: . What would be an example of when you would reach out to the staff who are supporting your mentoring relationship?**

# MODULE FOUR: CLOSING

This completes your orientation training to mentoring. Through this training you received:

- an introduction and overview to mentoring
- the importance of mentoring
- provincial duty to report legislation requirements
- the unique dynamics of building a positive mentoring relationship

Learning about being a mentor is ongoing. Not only will the mentoring program have more to teach you, but you will learn from your mentee and yourself throughout the mentoring journey.

Enjoy this opportunity to have fun with a young person and experience the role of being a mentor.

**Question Eight: Something new I learned was ...**

**Question Nine: What are you most looking forward to in your mentoring relationship?**

**Question Ten: What is one thing you are still wondering about?**

# **Congratulations!**

**You have completed the  
orientation!**

**We hope you have learned what you need  
to know to get started on the journey of  
mentoring.**

**Thank you for your interest in mentoring  
and happy mentoring**

**From the Alberta Mentoring Partnership  
and MENTOR Canada.**

**albertamentors.ca**



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