



Maximizing Mentorship: A Girl Scout Guide

As a Girl Scout, you've embraced your G.I.R.L. (Go-getter, Innovator, Risk-taker, Leader)[™] spirit and been part of an incredible Movement of girls who know how to take action to bring their dreams to life. As you prepare to apply to college or for a first job, you undoubtedly have the courage, confidence, and character you'll need to succeed, but you may find the guidance of a mentor invaluable.

Mentors can help inform your choices—including about which schools to apply to, how to dress for an interview, and how to network at a social event. These individuals can expose you to unique opportunities and share relevant experiences of their own, opening doors to new-to-you environments and even potential jobs by making introductions and otherwise supporting you in your areas of interest.

WHAT IS A MENTOR AND WHAT IS THEIR VALUE?

men•tor *noun*: a person who gives a younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period of time, especially at work or at school.

A mentor provides guidance at any number of points in a person's life, be it personal, academic, or professional in nature. They can help you, in effect, make sense of the world and your place in it. Drawing from their own experiences, an effective mentor shares insight and offers support and encouragement. **They are...**

- **Often knowledgeable in areas that you are not.** They may be a professional in a field or discipline new to you. Often they've been through experiences you hope to pursue (or maybe avoid!).
- **In essence, a cheerleader!** Having encountered similar challenges to those along your path, they know when to step in and show their support, sharing their own relevant experiences and guidance to help you stay positive and on track. A mentor can also offer constructive criticism and insight into why you might want to consider a different approach.
- **Able to provide fresh perspective.** Your mentor isn't your parent or your boss; they see you and your experiences from a different and uniquely valuable perspective.
- **Often eager to invite you into their network.** Mentors are often fairly established in their disciplines and welcome the opportunity to connect their contacts.
- **FREE!** But keep in mind that this doesn't mean there's not significant work involved. Being accountable to a mentor is a commitment—so don't pursue it if you aren't interested in upholding it in support of this [important relationship](#).

HOW CAN I FIND A MENTOR?

In pursuing a mentor, ask yourself:

- **Where would I like support?** Are you...applying to an internship? Developing your Gold Award project? Preparing for college? Pursuing a potential career interest?
- **What kind of support am I looking for?** You may not know exactly what you need off the bat, but you can start by listing the components of the undertaking that are unfamiliar or intimidate you—that's a great start.
- **How frequently do I want to connect with a mentor?** Daily is probably too often, yearly not enough. Would weekly or twice a month work?
- **What's the end goal of the mentorship?** Completing your Gold Award project? Landing a job? Ongoing support?
- **Who that I know has had the experience I want** or could potentially hook me up? Consider:
 - Teachers, professors, and/or guidance counselors—as potential mentors themselves, or as potential connections to other people they know who might be willing to mentor you.
 - Coworkers of your family members or friends' families—does your best friend's mom work somewhere of interest to you? Does she know any potential mentors?
 - Professionals in your area of interest—research prospects online, and if you find someone who seems like a good fit, try to locate their email address and request an informational interview. If that doesn't pan out, maybe the person knows of someone in your area who can be a resource.
- **Does my mentor need to be local?** Do you need to meet in person? Is email, online chat, or phone okay?

WHAT SHOULD I ASK A POTENTIAL MENTOR?

In connecting with a potential mentor, you'll want to be clear about your interests. Write in full sentences and provide adequate detail; remember, this isn't a text! After introducing yourself, let the person know that you've done your homework and are familiar with their expertise, and point out the connection between their work and your current focus. Feel free to adapt the sample email below.

Dear Ms. Lowe,

I recently read the article in The Daily Record about your research on the environmental threats facing our local ecosystem. I found your focus on the relationship between bees and flowers very interesting, as it's something that I too am interested in.

I'm a 17-year-old Girl Scout Ambassador presently working toward earning my Gold Award, the highest award in Girl Scouts. For my Gold Award project, I'm looking to increase the pollinators in our state by providing hives, curriculum, and training sessions. Based on our common interests, I wonder if you might have some time to

connect with me and provide feedback on my approach. Additionally, I'm interested in finding a mentor to support my project over the next few months and wonder if you have the time or could suggest someone who might be interested in helping me out.

I can be reached at 555-555-5555 or janedoe@janedoe.com. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your time!

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

...AND WHAT SHOULD I THINK TWICE ABOUT ASKING?

It's important to be as specific as you can when engaging a mentor for the first time. Learn about her and her work in advance so that you can ask focused questions, rather than things like "can you tell me about your work?" or "can I pick your brain on X topic?"—not the best way to begin a dialogue with a potential mentor.

Also, keep in mind that although mentors share their time and knowledge, they may not be willing or able to edit essays, provide hands-on project help, or take time off work to join mentees at events—so it's best to wait until you've connected with a mentor a few times and become more familiar with their interests and availability before requesting this kind of involvement.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CHECK IN WITH MY MENTOR?

Once you've found your mentor, she'll likely appreciate your initiating a check-in schedule. Depending on the type of mentorship, it may make sense to meet once a week—or just once a month.

Ask your mentor how she'd like to connect with you—over email? By phone? In person? If in person, remember to always have another adult with you (for example, hanging in the same coffee shop) so you aren't meeting with your mentor alone. Safety first!

And be sure to set reminders so you don't forget! If a mentor is making time to meet with you, it usually means she's taking time away from her own work, so it's important to respect her time and keep your appointments. If your mentor forgets to meet at an agreed-upon time, it's completely fair to call or email to remind her that you were scheduled to meet and ask to reschedule.

HOW CAN I GET MY TROOP INVOLVED?

A great (and fun!) first step to exploring mentorship is at a troop meeting. You can review this guide with your Girl Scout sisters and discuss strategies for finding the best mentor for you.

You might also consider inviting an older Girl Scout to a meeting to speak about mentorship and her experience as a mentor or mentee. Questions to ask:

- How did you find your mentor, or how did they find you?
- Was she/he in, or interested in, the field you pursued or would like to pursue?
- How did you engage with the mentor/mentee and how often?
- How long did your relationship with your mentor/mentee last?
- What surprised you about your relationship with your mentor/mentee?
- What about your mentorship experience would you do differently next time?

WHAT ARE SOME KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER AS I GET STARTED?

- Be a persistent and patient communicator. Try to reach a potential mentor during general office hours if that's an option. It may take them a few days to respond; hold tight.
- If you attend a mentoring event, be sure to follow up after via email or phone (depending on expressed preference) with the people you connect with!
- Be clear and intentional about your expectations of your mentor. State your interests.
- Be safe. Don't meet your mentor alone.
- You drive your relationship with your mentor, so don't expect the mentor to set the meetings, lead the discussion, or follow up with you. Those are *your* responsibilities.
- Anticipate a rich and impactful mentorship—which, with thoughtful preparation and action, is within your reach!