



# A Reflective Guide on Transformative Mentorship

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**Training Curriculum for Mentors**



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This reflective guide was co-created by Rani Pramesti (Founder of Social Design Asia), Claire Naylor-Trein and Naw Khine Thazin Ni Win (Dah) of Wedu. 'Part 1: Introduction to Wedu' features some content from Wedu's previous Mentor Guide: Global Mentorship Programme.

## Congratulations on becoming a mentor!



### HOW TO USE THIS REFLECTIVE GUIDE

This Guide contains reflective questions, case studies, and activities to lay the foundations for an impactful and effective mentoring journey.

You do not have to complete this entire workbook. We understand that some of you already have previous mentoring experience and/or are under considerable time pressure. To start with, we recommend having a look through the **Table of Contents**.

As a bare minimum, we recommend that you complete **Part 2: You as a mentor** and **Part 3: Your mentee and you**. Within each part, the exercises build on each other, so if possible, do them in a linear sequence. Before your first mentoring session, we also recommend that you go through **Part 5: Setting up for success**. Doing all three sections should take you between 2-3 hours to complete.

Apart from this, choose sections that will develop you the most as a mentor. We have put brief descriptions of each part, below.

For a quick introduction to Wedu and our expertise in mentorship, have a read of **Part 1: Introduction to Wedu**.

Engaging with the reflective exercises in **Part 2: You as a mentor** is crucial. This part seeks to make you more conscious of your power and privilege as a mentor. This is critical for you to understand the scenarios in subsequent parts.

**Part 3: Your mentee and you: Adopting a mentee-centred and trauma-informed approach to mentoring** will give you strategies to centre your mentees' needs. There are also tools and activities that will help you to take care of both yourself and your mentee during the mentorship.

**Part 4: Cross-cultural mentoring** highlights things to consider when working with a mentee who hails from a very different background to yourself.

Prior to having your first mentoring session, we recommend that you engage with **Part 5: Setting up for success**. There is a handy table of Do's and Don'ts to consider. We also go through four common challenges in mentorships and suggest remedies for each one.

Finally, we have peppered Case Studies throughout this Guide. These case studies were written based on interviews with Wedu's mentors and mentees, who generously shared their experiences so that other mentors and mentees could learn from them. (The names have been changed to protect privacy.)

***Enjoy the journey and the learnings to come!***

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**PART 1:**

# Introduction to Wedu



## Wedu is building a world where half of all leaders are women.

We nurture and invest in women's purposeful leadership journeys and mobilise allies and communities towards alternative futures where women leaders thrive.



### Our values

#### We take purposeful action

We embrace a profound sense of responsibility to be a force for change in our contexts, systems, and home planet. We are passionate about (un)learning and we celebrate reflective practice.

#### We build collective power

We believe power is multiplied when it's shared. Our work is animated by principles of solidarity, care, and reciprocity. We centre structurally excluded women and call in diverse allies.

#### We show up with courage

Because our vision requires boldness, we cultivate resilience and transformational presence.

#### We lead by example

We strive to model the feminist future we're co-creating, even if we don't get it right 100% of the time.\*

*\*We believe feminism provides the best paradigm to imagine a different world for all. It ventures beyond gender equity to encompass joyful transformation and intersectional and healing justice.*

### Key terms

- **Women:** At Wedu, we see gender as a matter of self-determination. Our definition of women includes cis women, trans women and everyone who identifies as a woman using she/her or she/they pronouns.
- **Structurally excluded:** This term describes how formal institutions, policies, and systems - as well as social architecture - have been unjustly designed and used to prevent certain groups from enjoying their full spectrum of rights and participating in decisions.

## At Wedu, we focus our changemaking efforts at three levels:



### INDIVIDUAL CAPABILITIES & RESOURCES

Women take purposeful action to advance their leadership and pursue their goals.



### COMMUNITY

Women collectively strengthen and nurture each other as leaders.



### ALLYSHIP

Gender equity allies create opportunities for and champion women leaders.

## Our expertise in facilitating Mentorship

Wedu has over a decade of experience facilitating one-on-one, long-term mentorship that supports women to achieve their goals while strengthening their leadership capabilities and sustaining their leadership journeys. Throughout our first decade, we've seen that mentoring is the most sustainable way to support women whose ambitions extend far into the future.

Our multi-generational community of volunteer mentors has grown to over 1,600 people who represent more than 90 nationalities and work in diverse careers: from the development sector, business and law to social impact and finance.

### Why mentorship matters



We pair women with mentors using a **sophisticated matching algorithm** based on leadership traits.



We sustain mentorship progress through effective onboarding and a **bespoke curriculum** anchored on Wedu's leadership model.



We support mentors with **ongoing communications and learning spaces**, along with effectively strengthening regional networks.

In addition, we provide spaces and opportunities for women to connect, learn and collaborate to strengthen their leadership, and engage more allies of all genders and mobilise them for deeper gender equity impact.

We believe that if gender allies take action in support of women's leadership, then public and private sector organisations will create a more enabling environment for women's leadership and a more supportive working environment for women.



**RECAP**

# Your commitment

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Mentorship can mean different things to many people. We believe that the formation of a strong bond between a mentor and a mentee should be impactful and personal.

A mentor is someone to look up to and reach out to for guidance. A mentor is the navigator, providing direction, yet leaving the ultimate decision of the destination up to the driver – the mentee.

As a mentor, you are committing to being an active gender equity ally.



**PART 2:**

# You as a mentor



**PART 2:**

# You as a mentor

## THE SIX ELEMENTS OF YOU AS A MENTOR

We believe that there are six key elements that together make up who you are as a mentor. These elements are:



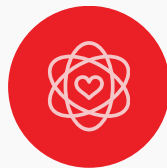
Your  
'Why'



Your  
Positionality



Your  
Core Beliefs



Your  
Core Values



Your ability to be  
power literate



Your unique  
mentoring style



### Your 'Why'

People put themselves forward to become a mentor for various reasons. At this early stage of your mentoring journey, it is crucial to understand why you are here, as this will lay the foundations for how you show up for your mentee and the experience that you co-create with your mentee.

So— first things first:

REFLECTION ACTIVITY

**Why are you here?**

**'HELPING' VS. 'LEARNING WITH' YOUR MENTEE**

**Some people who are interested in becoming mentors do so because they want to 'help' others. Does this apply to you?**

**How is wanting to 'help' your mentee, different from wanting to 'learn together', with your mentee?**

The motivations behind wanting to 'help' your mentee and wanting to 'learn with' your mentee, can significantly impact the dynamics and outcomes of your mentoring relationship.

Here are some of the **differences between the two approaches:**

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**1.** If you are driven by the motivation to 'help' your mentee, you may be driven by a desire to assist your mentee in overcoming challenges, acquiring new skills, and achieving their goals.

Whilst this may not necessarily be a bad thing, wanting to 'help' may lead to a more hierarchical dynamic, with you as a mentor positioned as a guide or advisor. The focus is primarily on your mentee's development, and you as the mentor impart knowledge and experience to support your mentee's growth.

Success is measured primarily by your mentee's progress and achievements, and you as the mentor may find fulfillment in contributing to the mentee's success and well-being.

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**2.** If you are driven by the motivation to 'learn with' your mentee, then you may be motivated by a desire for mutual learning and growth.

You recognize that mentoring is a collaborative process where both parties can benefit from each other's perspectives and experiences.

You view your mentee as a partner in the learning journey, and both of you can contribute ideas and insights to the relationship. You value the exchange of ideas and the opportunity to broaden your own knowledge through the mentoring relationship.

Success is measured not only by your mentee's development but also by your own personal and professional growth.

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**Which approach do you think has potential to lead to a more equal power dynamic? And why does this matter?**



We encourage a 'learning with' approach to your mentorship. One of the reasons for this is because it mitigates the risk of the mentor falling into the 'Saviour Complex' trap.

### THE 'SAVIOUR COMPLEX'

The 'Saviour Complex' is where you view your role as a mentor as crucial in the development and indeed, survival, of your mentee. This leaves you vulnerable to thinking that you need to 'rescue' your mentee.

We deeply care about setting up mentorships with more equal power-sharing between mentors and mentees. A 'learning with' approach (rather than a 'helping' approach) assumes that each of you has something to share and teach the other.

Therefore, you are both learners, embarking on a mentorship together. This is how you can practice a more equal power dynamic in your mentorship.

We go into more depth in the section, **'Your ability to be power literate'**.



## Your positionality

### WHAT IS POSITIONALITY?

Positionality refers to an individual's social, cultural, and personal context that influences their perspectives and biases, shaping how they perceive and engage with the world.

It recognises that one's position within society and their unique identity impact their understanding of various issues and interactions.

### Why does it matter to understand your positionality as a mentor?



## Here are some of the reasons why it is crucial to understand your positionality as a mentor:

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Your background, experiences, and identity shape your worldview. Being aware of your positionality helps you recognise potential cultural biases and assumptions that may influence your mentoring approach.

**Power Dynamics:** Mentorship inherently involves power dynamics, with the mentor typically having more experience or knowledge in a particular domain. Understanding your positionality helps you navigate these power dynamics responsibly.

**Communication and Relatability:** Your positionality influences your communication style, language, and the examples you use. Understanding it helps you tailor your communication to be more relatable and effective in building trust with your mentee.

**Avoiding Assumptions and Stereotypes:** Unconscious biases and stereotypes can influence your perceptions and actions. Understanding your positionality helps you identify and challenge these biases, fostering a more equitable mentoring relationship.

## Understanding your positionality: Let's map your privileges!

### WHAT IS PRIVILEGE?

According to Goodwill (2020:14), 'Privilege is the type of power you get from a social relation whereby you benefit due to the social group you belong to, at the expense of another social group. It is an unearned advantage given to you because of your identity. When you have privilege, it is often invisible to you. Because identity categories do not exist independently from each other (they are intersectional), it is possible to have privilege and also experience oppression at the same time.'



**Figure 2.1** Goodwill (2020:15)  
Privilege and Oppression Wheel

**Image Description:** A circle made up of 3 layers. The outer layer is populated with identities that experience different forms of oppression. The inner layer is populated with identities that experience different forms of privilege. The innermost layer contains a circle with the word, 'Privilege'.

#### REFLECTION ACTIVITY

### Circle the Privileges and Oppressions that are relevant to you.

1. Look at the different identities in the circle above. The identities in the inner circle are privileged, whereas the identities in the outer circle are more oppressed (this can vary depending on geographic context and other factors).
2. For each category (eg. class) take a marker and circle the word that corresponds to your identity (eg. middle class).
3. Add in any categories that are missing in the blank segment and colour accordingly.
4. Write down the privilege you have, and the resulting advantages that you and others may have had throughout your life, as a result.

### How do you think that the privileges and oppressions that you experience may show up in your mentorship?



## Your core values

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY

### List up to 5 of your core values.

Expand each value into a 1-sentence explanation of what they specifically mean to you. For example, for the core value, 'Service', a one sentence explanation may be: 'My work is always in service of others, and not just for my own individual gain.'

#### Resources on core values

If you want some inspiration to identify your core values, there are multiple lists available online, including:

- [James Clear's list of Core Values](#)
- [Soul Salt's list of Core Values](#)
- [Science of People's list of Core Values](#)

### Once again, identify up to 5 that resonate with you.

Core Value 1 Explanation	
Core Value 2 Explanation	
Core Value 3 Explanation	
Core Value 4 Explanation	
Core Value 5 Explanation	



#### TOP TIP!

Just because you and your mentee may identify the same core value (i.e. use the same word), does not mean that the two of you ascribe the same meaning to that core value. For example, 'Fairness', can mean very different things to two different individuals.



## CASE STUDY

## How your core values can guide your mentoring



Maria is a 50-year-old woman from Portugal who runs a successful IT business. She already had quite a lot of experience mentoring women in IT in Portugal, before deciding to mentor women in IT in other parts of the world. She joined Wedu as a mentor two years ago and has so far mentored one woman from Nepal and one from Vietnam.

For Maria, she was aware that two of her core values were: 'Challenge' and 'Vulnerability'. Her core value of 'Challenge' was one of the reasons why she signed up to be a Wedu mentor, because she wanted to challenge herself to understand the world outside of her bubble.

Maria's core value of 'Vulnerability' became evident in her mentoring sessions when she observed her mentees facing personal and professional challenges. When mentees expressed self-doubt and disparaging thoughts, such as, 'I don't do anything right!', Maria drew on her own experiences, sharing stories of her faults and fears. By revealing her vulnerabilities, Maria humanized herself to her mentees and emphasized that she was not a superhero but rather, a human being who had encountered similar struggles.

By understanding her core values, Maria was able to reflect on which core values she needed to draw on, in response to particular situations with her mentees. Her core value of 'Vulnerability', for example, helped her to connect, reassure and support her mentees through challenging experiences.

**Which of your core values would you like to be the guiding principles for this mentoring relationship? Why?**



### TOP TIP!

Be mindful when sharing about your own experiences. Experiences that may seem similar on the surface, like 'challenges with finding work', may be completely different in your mentee's environment / context. Avoid comments that don't consider the environmental factors that may be shaping your mentees' challenges in ways that do not apply in your context.



## Your core beliefs

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY

#### Reflecting on an event that has shaped a core belief.

Recall and write down a specific event or experience that has significantly influenced the way you perceive the world or yourself.

#### Write down a core belief that you hold about the world, yourself, and the role of a mentor, as a result of the above event.

Here are examples to help get you started:

- **Event:** My family fell on hard financial times when I was 9 years old. Sometimes, it was acts of kindness from complete strangers that helped us survive those years of hardship.
- **Worldview:** I believe in the impact of kindness. In a world often filled with complexities, small acts of kindness can create significant positive change.
- **Belief about myself:** I do not always have to rely solely on myself. I can lean on support from other people, too.
- **Role of a mentor:** This is why I want to be someone that another person can lean on for support, as their mentor.

<b>Event</b>	
<b>Worldview</b>	
<b>Belief about myself</b>	
<b>Role of a mentor</b>	



Identifying your core beliefs is crucial when you are a mentor for several reasons. **Here are the top 3:**

**Alignment with Mentoring Goals:** Understanding your core beliefs allows you to assess whether they support the mentorship's objectives and the growth of your mentee.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Core beliefs often reflect cultural influences and personal values. Being aware of these beliefs will help you navigate cultural differences, ensuring that your guidance is respectful of your mentee's core beliefs and cultural values.

**Personal Growth and Adaptability:** Identifying your core beliefs provides opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth. It allows you to recognise when your beliefs may need to evolve based on new experiences or insights.

**Which of your beliefs about the role of a mentor, do you want to consciously bring into the mentoring relationship?**

**Which of these beliefs / assumptions may show up unconsciously during the mentorship? (and therefore you need to be more aware of!)**

 **RESOURCE**

If you have extra time, you can listen to [this podcast on the Three Big Myths of Mentoring](#) and use it to reflect on your own beliefs about mentoring. (Duration: 22 minutes.)



## Your ability to be power literate



*My mentor gave me questions to reflect on, like keys that opened doors. I used to think that I was weak, but through my mentor's questions, I have been able to see my strengths and potential. My mentor let me choose what to do or not to do, depending on my context.'*

VeneKlasen and Miller (2007) write about **four distinct expressions of power**:

- **Power Over:** The most commonly recognised form of power. It has many negative associations for people, such as repression, force, coercion, discrimination, corruption, and abuse. Power is seen as a win-lose kind of relationship. Having power involves taking it from someone else, and then using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it.
- **Power With:** Has to do with finding common ground among different interests and building collective strength. 'Power with' is based on mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration. It multiplies individual talents and knowledge.
- **Power To:** Refers to the unique potential of every person to shape his / her / their life and world. For example, cis-gendered men are more likely to be sponsored by other cis-gendered men in furthering their career development. This significantly enhances their 'power to' shape their lives and the broader world. This is why mentorships that specifically support cis-gendered women, transwomen, and gender-diverse individuals, can be an opportunity to deliberately bolster these groups' 'power to' shape their lives and the broader world.
- **Power Within:** Has to do with a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. It includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others. 'Power within' is the capacity to imagine and have hope. It affirms the common human search for dignity and fulfillment.



## CASE STUDY

## Power between a mentor and a mentee



Ningli is a 30 year old mentee from China. Her mentor, Caroline, is a 40 year old woman of Thai descent, based in Canada. Ningli leads a full life with work, school and a young family to raise.

She signed up for the mentoring program because she wanted a clearer sense of direction with her career and to improve her leadership skills. She was excited to engage with the mentorship curriculum to expand her knowledge about leadership.

During Ningli and Caroline's first mentoring session, Caroline asked Ningli a lot of questions about the political situation in China. Ningli was slightly surprised by this, but thought that it was Caroline's way of getting to know her.

Unfortunately, in subsequent sessions, even though Ningli already came prepared with goals that she wanted to discuss, Caroline always redirected the questions back to the political situation in China.

Apart from this, the only other topic that Caroline seemed keen to discuss was 'self-care'. Caroline came from a Psychology background and she felt that imparting strategies to 'be good to oneself' and to 'take time for self-care', was the most useful knowledge that she could pass onto Ningli.

After four sessions, Ningli asked for a rematch with a different mentor. Ningli felt frustrated that she was not being supported to reach her goals.

### Which forms of power do you think Caroline was exercising in this situation?

- Power Over
- Power With
- Power To
- Power Within

**How do you think Caroline's assumptions about the role of a mentor shaped the way she used her power in this situation?**

**Have you been in a similar situation before, where someone used their 'power over' you? e.g. Have you had someone use their 'power over' you in a work context?**

The above Case Study is an example of how a mentor used her 'Power Over' their mentee, to keep prioritising topics of conversations that she was interested in. Also, by insisting on talking about 'self-care', a topic that Caroline was qualified and experienced in, she was over-exerting the 'Power Within' herself.

In Ningli's case, as a mentee, she still had not built her 'Power To' and 'Power Within' muscles to push back and/or confront her mentor and express her needs. This can be challenging for a mentee to do, especially when their needs contradict their mentor's desires and interests.



Let your mentee drive the topics of your conversations. This can be as simple as always asking your mentee what they think would be the best use of your time together.

## CASE STUDY

## Leading with questions, rather than answers



Radhika is a 22 year old Wedu mentee. One summer, she went on a holiday where unfortunately, Radhika and her entire group of travelers were scammed by the tour guide. The situation escalated and the entire group ended up at the police station.

In their efforts to be taken seriously by the police officers, some of the older, male travellers pointed to Radhika (who was the youngest member of the group) and said, 'This college student, she was up crying all night, because of how upset she was at this whole situation!'

At that moment, Radhika felt angry and disrespected. This statement by the older, male traveller was a lie. Radhika had not spent all night crying. Of course, she was bothered by the situation, but to be described in this way was simply false. She was disturbed by this older, male stranger's framing of her as a vulnerable, naïve, and innocent victim, simply by virtue of her age and gender.

This depiction was in direct contrast to Radhika's experience of herself. She has many experiences of being a leader, in charge of running spaces, facilitating discussions, and navigating complex group dynamics. Nonetheless, Radhika still felt like she had to prove to others in the group that she was not the person that they assumed her to be.

Still feeling conflicted and confused, Radhika took this experience to her mentor, Buppha. She asked, 'What can I do in the future to fix this? How can I prove myself to earn the respect of other people?' In a peaceful tone, Buppha asked, 'Why do you have to prove yourself to earn other people's respect in that situation? Why do you have to do something to be worthy? Is it possible that you are already enough, just as you are?'

Radhika fell silent. Buppha's questions led her to check in with the 'power within' herself. She realized that she did not need to 'do' anything to be worthy of other people's respect, including in a situation where the group needed to solve a problem. She realized that it was unacceptable that other people would use her identity, without her consent, in their attempts to solve a problem.

In Radhika's culture, there are many people who would approach mentoring by telling people what to do. What Radhika loved most about Buppha's response was that, rather than giving Radhika a concrete answer in terms of how to 'fix' a situation, her mentor posed a series of open-ended questions for Radhika to answer herself.

### Which forms of power do you think Buppha, as a mentor, was exercising in this situation?

- Power Over       Power To  
 Power With       Power Within

Buppha was using her 'Power To' gently shift Radhika's perspective in response to a challenging situation. By doing so, she also helped to ignite the 'Power Within' Radhika. This interaction between a mentor and mentee also demonstrates how we can practice 'Power With' our mentees, by enabling them to stay grounded in themselves as a human being, who deserves respect and does not need to prove themselves in order to receive it.

### Have you ever had someone show up for you in a way that ignited the 'Power Within' you? How did they do so?

For example, was there a time when you doubted your ability to do a task and another person reminded you of all the things you had already accomplished, which ignited the 'Power Within' you to complete the said task.

### What impact did it have on you?



Keep in mind what makes powerful questions. Generally speaking, questions that begin with 'Why?' 'What?' and 'How?' are more likely to lead to useful insights. For example: asking why your mentee has a particular goal, asking what the issue is to narrow down a problem, and how your mentee might focus on what is within their control.

### RESOURCES

For more on how to craft powerful and insightful questions, check these out:

- [The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action](#)
- [A Bigger Game](#)
- [Asking insightful questions, a core mentoring practice](#)

## Why do you think it's crucial to be aware of power dynamics in your mentoring relationship?

Here are just some of the reasons **why being aware of power dynamics is crucial in a mentoring relationship:**

### **Impact of Broader Power Dynamics:**

Power dynamics in the broader world may shape the power dynamics between two people in a mentoring relationship. For example, gendered power dynamics that privileges cisgendered men over cisgendered women may play out in how a male mentor and a female mentee interact.

If you are a cisgendered man mentoring a cisgendered woman or a transwoman, being aware of the relative power that you have as a cisgendered man in society, will help you to intentionally create a safer space for your mentee.

### **Preventing Exploitation:**

Mentees seek out mentorships for a variety of reasons, including a clearer sense of direction and better leadership skills, an improved network, and wanting to improve their performance / impact in their current role. In other words, there are things that a mentee will want from their mentor.

Being a power literate mentor involves understanding that as someone who has something their mentee wants, that this act of giving needs to be done responsibly, within clearly communicated boundaries.

Setting clear boundaries can avoid situations where mentees feel like they need to do something for their mentors, which they may not be comfortable with, to get what they want from their mentors.

Setting clear boundaries can also avoid situations where mentors feel obligated to give all that mentees ask for. It's a good practice to do, all around!



### Autonomy and Ownership:

Finally, being aware of power dynamics enables mentors to encourage mentee's autonomy of thought, independence and decision-making, which can lead to mentees taking ownership of their own mentoring journey.



### TOP TIP!

Be aware of cross-cultural power dynamics. For instance, there are cultural contexts where people do not say 'no' directly. So, you need to learn what a 'no' looks like in that cultural context. We will discuss this some more in the section, **Cross-cultural mentoring**.



## Your unique mentoring style

### VIDEO RESOURCE & REFLECTION ACTIVITY



Watch this video [on different approaches to mentoring](#) by Dr. Kimberly Griffin (TEDxUMaryland 2015).

(Begin watching at 01:50.  
Duration: 12 minutes.)

**If you were a mentor figure on a reality TV show, who would you be?**

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY

## Where are you on these spectrums?



Now that you have a sense of your preferred mentoring style, consider discussing this as part of your first session with your mentee.

**As you get to know your mentee, ask yourself:**

**How might my preferred mentoring style help to meet my mentee's needs?**

**Are there ways in which my preferred mentoring style may be in conflict with my mentee's needs?**

## CASE STUDY

## Working with a neurodivergent mentee



Sophea is a 23 year old Cambodian woman who was paired with Delaram, a 37 year old Scottish-Iranian woman. During their first mentoring session, Delaram asked Sophea, 'Tell me about yourself.'

Sophea started to talk, in detail, about her day-to-day life. This included sharing about what time she woke up every day, her morning routine, what she ate for breakfast and so on.

Delaram was a bit puzzled by Sophea's response but thought to herself, 'Maybe it's because English is not her first language. So, she didn't quite understand what I meant by my question.'

After more than five minutes, Delaram interrupted Sophea with another question, 'Okay. That's enough, Sophea. Thank you. Can you tell me what your goals for the mentorship are?'

Sophea started to say, repeatedly, 'Okay. That's enough, Sophea. Thank you. Can you tell me what your goals for the mentorship are?' After a few repetitions, Sophea then said, 'I want to find a job.' At the end of their first call, Delaram sat in front of her laptop with a puzzled facial expression. Meanwhile, Sophea found the meeting so stressful that she needed to get up, pace around her room for more than 15 minutes, before her body relaxed.

Delaram decided to reach out to Wedu for a debrief. Thankfully, there was a member of the Wedu team who was neurodiverse. Upon hearing descriptions of Sophea's communication style, she pointed to the possibility that Sophea may be a person with autism.

At the mention of this, Delaram thought, 'Oh! If that was the case, that would make a lot of sense!' Delaram decided to research the communication preferences of people with autism. She also resolved to find out how supported people with autism are in Cambodia.

**How might you ask questions in a way that a person with autism can best understand?**

### What are some of your assumptions about how to communicate well?

### Why does it matter to question some of these assumptions when working with neurodiverse individuals?

Some neurodiverse individuals may find it difficult to answer open-ended questions such as, 'Tell me about yourself.' Aim instead to ask specific questions that directly ask for the details that you are interested in.

Unfortunately, dominant ways of communicating rely a lot on an individual's ability to notice, interpret and understand social and emotional cues. This can be challenging for some neurodiverse individuals.

It is important to question our dominant assumptions about communication because the consequences for neurodiverse individuals can be severe. For example, a neurodiverse person may be judged as 'not fit for the job' during the interview stage, simply because they didn't understand and respond to questions in the same way that a neurotypical candidate would.



Remember that a mentee-centred approach will require you to adapt your style to meet your mentee's needs.



**RECAP**

# The six elements of you as a mentor

Congratulations! You have been doing some deep reflection on the six key elements that make up who you are as a mentor:



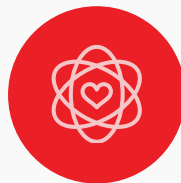
**Your  
'Why'**



**Your  
Positionality**



**Your  
Core Beliefs**



**Your  
Core Values**



**Your ability to be  
power literate**



**Your unique  
mentoring style**

Be aware of these, as we move on to think about how you can have a mentee-centred approach to mentoring!

**PART 3:**

# Your mentee and you:

Adopting a mentee-centred and trauma-informed approach to mentoring





## **Adopting a mentee-centred approach to mentoring — *Why does this matter?***

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We advocate for a mentee-centred approach to mentoring. We are committed to more equal power sharing, including in mentorships.

Mentees involved in this program may come from contexts where there are obstacles and barriers to fully exercising their power.

And so, the mentoring relationship can be one of the spaces where mentees are able to come more fully into their power. This can be in the 'power to' shape their lives, 'power with' their broader community, as well as in fostering the 'power within' themselves.



## CASE STUDY

## Adopting a mentee-centred approach



**Content Warning:** This case study discusses experiences of people in an Internally Displaced Persons' camp and experiences of living with invisible disability and chronic pain.

Leon is a human rights advocate based in Thailand, who has been a Wedu mentor for three years. Leon's third mentee, Aye, is a refugee living in an Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camp on the border of Thailand and Myanmar.

When Aye joined their first mentoring session online, she had no idea what Leon's role was nor what the meeting was about. She had been looking for online, free training programs and that was how she found Wedu's mentoring programme.

Leon took a deep breath and decided to spend their first session giving Aye the mentorship orientation himself. Suddenly, they were interrupted. Aye looked flustered, and said, 'The local authority (of the IDP camp) is doing a random inspection! I have to show them my refugee ID card.' She disappeared abruptly.

Undeterred, Leon waited online until Aye was able to reconnect. Leon managed to communicate that for the following session, he wanted Aye to set at least 3 goals for the mentoring relationship. She agreed.

After hanging up from the call, Aye felt glad. She had missed out on previous professional development opportunities because life in an IDP camp can be too unpredictable. This had caused tensions and misunderstandings in other programs she had tried to be involved in. But her first impression of Leon was that he was patient and understanding.

For their second session, Leon waited more than 10 minutes before Aye was able to join. Aye apologized and mentioned internet problems, and also that her chronic pain condition had flared up.

Leon made a mental note of Aye's chronic pain condition. He lived with an invisible disability himself. So, he had his own experience of needing more flexibility and understanding. Leon wondered what care Aye had access to and made a note to ask about this, when the timing was right.

A few minutes into their conversation about her goals, Aye had to leave again, saying, 'The food distribution team is here. I have to go and queue for my rations.' Leon understood. After all, he thought, 'Aye needs to eat! This mentoring session can wait!'

**How do you think Leon's actions and thoughts demonstrated a mentee-centred approach?**

**Why do you think it's important to understand your mentee's context?**

**What could have happened if Leon was NOT as flexible and ready to adapt to Aye's changing circumstances?**

Leon's flexible approach to circumstances beyond Aye's control, as well as Aye's attempt to continue to connect and communicate with her mentor, both contributed to establishing a strong mentorship, despite rocky beginnings.

Many mentees live in unpredictable and unsafe environments, such as conflict zones, Internally Displaced Persons' camps and refugee camps. As a mentor, it is important to keep your mentee's specific context and the relevant challenges in mind, as you establish your relationship. We have a list of questions that we recommend to you at the start of your mentorship, in ['Part 5: Setting up for success'](#).



Some mainstream assumptions around 'professionalism' can be inherently ableist. If your mentee lives with disability or chronic illness, or does not have access to basic, daily necessities, be prepared to be flexible in your approach to supporting their needs.



You can read more about [Internally Displaced Persons here](#).



## Adopting a trauma-informed approach to mentoring

Many mentees (and indeed mentors!) come from and currently live in environments and contexts where trauma may have shaped their lives in complex ways.

Recent or ongoing social, political, economic and environmental upheavals may add layers of trauma, on top of existing and intergenerational trauma.

**Content Warning:** We are about to engage with material to do with trauma.

We are doing so to understand why adopting a trauma-informed approach to mentoring is crucial. It is important to centre the wellbeing and priorities of your mentee, whilst also taking care of yourself.

It is very likely that you have also experienced trauma at some point in your life. To minimize the risk of getting triggered by this material, in an unmanageable way, let's pause to do a grounding exercise.

### VIDEO / AUDIO RESOURCE

#### Watch / Listen to this video on Breath Work



Watch or listen to this 5-minute video on [Breath Work and Mindfulness](#) by [Capacitar International](#) [here](#). You can return to this simple exercise, to reground yourself, whenever you need to.

### ✓ RESOURCE

This exercise was taken from [Capacitar International](#), an international resource for body-based healing work. You can access their free [Capacitar Emergency Kits \(available in over 32 languages\)](#), for more [body-based healing and well-being exercises, here](#).

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'TRAUMA'?

Here is a definition of trauma from the [National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence](#) (NAPIESV 2015:20):

'The word 'trauma' is used to describe experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless.

Trauma has sometimes been defined in reference to circumstances that are outside the realm of normal human experience. Unfortunately, this definition doesn't always hold true. For some groups of people, trauma can occur frequently and become part of the common human experience...

Trauma is different for each person. An individual's reaction depends on: personality, family history, emotional makeup, age, personal relations, culture, support system and resiliency...

Most theories and interventions are made to address trauma, not the context...'



### RESOURCE

Here is a [video about trauma featuring psychiatrist, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk](#), author of 'The Body Keeps The Score'.

What are the **different forms of trauma** to be aware of as a mentor?

**Burnout:** A profound state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion. Burnout is different from stress in that burnout is the result of unrelenting stress, not just too much stress.

**Compassion Fatigue:** The cost of caring for others who suffer from emotional distress. It happens when our ability to feel compassion, empathy and care lessens. We begin to feel tired of 'helping' and the way in which we perceive others is affected.

**Vicarious Trauma:** The transformation of your inner experience as a result of empathic engagement with people who have survived / are surviving traumatic events. Anyone working with survivors of trauma and violence is at risk of being negatively impacted by the varied effects of vicarious trauma.

**Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS):** This is the reaction you may have when you see or learn of a traumatic event that has happened to someone else despite not experiencing or being involved in the event directly. We can be affected by the trauma others encounter, even if we haven't directly experienced it.

**Historical Trauma:** The accumulative emotional and psychological pain over an individual's lifespan and across generations as the result of massive group trauma (Brave Heart-Jordan 1995). Historical trauma can have varied effects on individuals and populations that may include: unsettled trauma or grief, depression, high mortality, increase alcohol abuse, child abuse and domestic violence.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** May develop following exposure to an extremely threatening or horrific event or series of events. It is characterised by all of the following: 1) re-experiencing the traumatic event or events in the present in the form of vivid intrusive memories, flashbacks, or nightmares.; 2) avoidance of thoughts and memories of the event or events, or avoidance of activities, situations, or people reminiscent of the event(s); and 3) persistent perceptions of heightened current threat.

(The above list was sourced from a presentation by Foundation House: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.)

What are the **common signs and symptoms of trauma** that you need to be aware of?

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS		
<p><b>Burnout</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Negative reaction towards others</li> <li>• Cynicism</li> <li>• Negativity</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> </ul>	<p><b>Compassion Fatigue</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sadness &amp; Grief</li> <li>• Avoidance or dread of working with certain people</li> <li>• Reduced ability to feel empathy towards others</li> <li>• Somatic complaints</li> <li>• Addiction</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Frequent use of sick days</li> <li>• Increased psychological arousal</li> <li>• Changes in beliefs, expectations, assumptions</li> <li>• Detachment</li> <li>• Decreased intimacy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Vicarious Trauma</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Apathy</li> <li>• Intrusive imagery</li> <li>• Loss of control, trust, and independence</li> <li>• Somatic complaints</li> <li>• Relational disturbance</li> </ul>
<p><b>Secondary Traumatic Stress</b></p> <p><b>Emotional Distress:</b> Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or anxiety. Emotional numbness or detachment.</p>	<p><b>Historical Trauma</b></p> <p><b>Repetition of Trauma Patterns:</b> The transmission of trauma-related beliefs, behaviors, and coping mechanisms across generations, impacting the mental and emotional well-being of descendants.</p>	<p><b>Post traumatic stress disorder</b></p> <p><b>Flashbacks:</b> Intense, recurring memories, or vivid images of the traumatic event that can feel as if the person is reliving the experience.</p>

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS		
Secondary Traumatic Stress	Historical Trauma	Post traumatic stress disorder
<p><b>Intrusive Thoughts:</b> Repeated, distressing images or memories related to the trauma experiences of others. Nightmares or difficulty sleeping.</p> <p><b>Avoidance:</b> Avoidance of situations, conversations, or topics associated with trauma. Withdrawal from social interactions.</p>	<p><b>Cultural Disconnection:</b> A sense of cultural disconnection or loss, as historical trauma can disrupt the transmission of cultural practices, traditions, and values.</p> <p><b>Persistent Grief:</b> A collective sense of grief and loss related to historical injustices.</p> <p><b>Internalized Oppression:</b> The Internalisation of negative societal attitudes and stereotypes, leading to self-blame, low self-esteem, and a sense of powerlessness within the community.</p>	<p><b>Nightmares:</b> Disturbing dreams related to the traumatic event, which may lead to disrupted sleep patterns.</p> <p><b>Avoidance:</b> Persistent efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or reminders associated with the trauma, including avoiding people, places, or activities.</p> <p><b>Emotional Numbing:</b> Feeling emotionally detached, experiencing a restricted range of emotions, and finding it challenging to connect.</p> <p><b>Hypervigilance:</b> An exaggerated state of alertness, constant scanning of the environment for potential threats, and being easily startled.</p>

**Figure 3.1 Image Description:** A table detailing the signs and symptoms of Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Traumatisation, Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), Historical Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

This table was adapted from a presentation by Foundation House: The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

# BURNOUT AND VICARIOUS TRAUMA

**BURNOUT**

is a slow DEPLETION OF MENTAL & PHYSICAL RESOURCES

burnout happens **SLOWLY** WHICH MAKES US THINK \*WE\* HAVE CHANGED instead of realizing we are sick.

**SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT**

- Procrastination
- Chronic Fatigue
- Cynicism
- Chronic Lateness
- Pessimism
- Loss of imagination for the future
- Reduced happy moments
- Job dissatisfaction
- Doubting core beliefs

**TRAUMA IS CONTAGIOUS**

↓ SUFFERING TRAUMA SYMPTOMS without first hand trauma is often vicarious trauma.

via LISTENING (therapists) & SEEING (first responders) & CONSUMING MEDIA (example: excessive seeking out of raw coverage of a violent crime or disaster)

GUILT IS OFTEN AT PLAY ↓

TYPES OF GUILT:

**WHAT TO DO?**

- RELAXATION
- SOCIAL SUPPORT
- SPEND TIME CELEBRATING WINS
- TRUST THE PROCESS\*  
\*YOU CAN'T FIX IT, BUT YOU CAN DO YOUR PART

**VISUALLY TRANSLATED BY:**  
**@LINDSAYBRAMAN**

Adapted from Johns Hopkin's psychological first aid online training

- 1 For doing something **BAD**
- 2 For NOT doing something **GOOD**
- 3 For being OK when others are not OK\* [AKA SURVIVOR GUILT]

---

**SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA**

- depression
- insomnia
- hyper-vigilance
- nightmares
- anxiety
- obsessive thinking @ the trauma
- PTSD symptoms

**SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY TRAUMA**

- depression
- insomnia
- hyper-vigilance
- nightmares
- anxiety
- obsessive thinking @ the trauma
- PTSD symptoms

**Figure 3.2 Image Description:** A visual graphic image containing information about Burnout and Vicarious Trauma. This image was created by @LindsayBraman (2023).



## CASE STUDY

## A trauma-informed approach to mentoring



**Content Warning:** This case study discusses experiences of transphobia, homophobia, and homelessness.

Bhavisana is a transwoman living in Kathmandu, Nepal. She was paired with her mentor, Ferdinand, a cisgendered, gay Filipino man, who worked as a researcher on LGBTIQA+ health issues and was currently completing his PhD in the United States. Bhavisana wanted to apply for a scholarship to do a bachelor's degree in the United States and Ferdinand was ready to assist her.

One month into the mentorship, Bhavisana had a falling out with her family, who disagreed with her gender identity as a transwoman. Bhavisana ended up homeless overnight. She called Ferdinand out of the blue, incredibly distressed and crying uncontrollably.

As Ferdinand was listening to Bhavisana, he felt his heart start to race and his stomach begin to clench. Listening to Bhavisana's stories was triggering his own memories of having been homeless himself, when his family disowned him, out of shame for his sexual orientation.

Fortunately, Ferdinand was able to recall exercises he had learned during a Mental Health First Aid course. Firstly, he centred himself by pressing his feet into the ground and breathing slowly through his nose and out through his mouth. Slowly, his heart slowed and his stomach relaxed.

Meanwhile, Bhavisana moved on to talking about how she will not be able to apply for a scholarship now, given her situation. Ferdinand listened until she finished everything that she needed to say.

It was at this point that Ferdinand said, 'I am here for you. You are not alone. This mentorship is not just about your goals. It's about you as a whole person.' Ferdinand then suggested that they worked together to address some of Bhavisana's immediate needs first, mainly, for safe accommodation and emergency financial support.

Fortunately, Ferdinand knew of an NGO who provided emergency relief for LGBTIQA+ community in Kathmandu. Ferdinand asked Bhavisana if she would like to contact these organizations together. Bhavisana felt relieved that she was not navigating this situation alone.

After this particularly charged video call, Ferdinand organized to have a debrief with a trusted peer.

**What are the types of trauma that Ferdinand needed to be aware of in this situation?**

- Compassion fatigue
- Burnout
- Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
- Vicarious Trauma
- Historical Trauma
- PTSD
- Other type(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**What are some of the actions that Ferdinand did to take care of himself in this situation?**

**What are some of the actions that Ferdinand did to respond to Bhavisana’s situation in a trauma-informed way?**

**Why does adopting a trauma-informed approach matter, for both the mentor and the mentee?**



You may not be aware of resources that are available to your mentee locally. You do not have to know everything nor be everything for your mentee.

If you do not feel equipped to support your mentee through a particular situation or feel unsure how to do so, please reach out to the mentoring program team for support.

## What to do **if your mentee is triggered** during a mentoring session?

Different people have different 'triggers', which may cause them to go into 'fight', 'flight', 'freeze' or 'fawn' responses. These are the common responses that our bodies can go into, if it thinks that it is under threat.

For some people, their version of 'feeling distressed' may not be that visible or obvious. For example, a person's eyes may glaze over or they may experience 'brain fog' or an inability to focus on being in the room and/or being present. Speaking or verbalizing their experience may become difficult.

You are *not* expected to be your mentee's counsellor or therapist.

However, there are relatively simple exercises that you can do, to help your mentee to re-ground or re-centre themselves, which may be useful in such times.

**To be clear:** More severe episodes of mental ill-health or ongoing experiences of mental ill-health may require professional help and are beyond the scope of your role as a mentor.

### Here are 3 grounding exercises that you can do together with your mentee:

- Ask your mentee to feel their feet on the ground. You can ask them to push a little so they get feedback from the earth. (If they cannot feel through their feet, then ask them to press a part of their body that they can feel, against a wall / table / chair.) Spend a few minutes exploring how different parts of their feet / body are touching the surface.
- Ask your mentee to use one hand to gently tap different parts of their body, e.g. tap across your chest, around your face, down your arms, and down your legs.
- Ask your mentee to name 5 things, 5 colours, and 5 smells that they notice in the room.

The above exercises are intended to calm a person's sympathetic nervous system (the system that becomes activated when a person goes into 'survival mode').

### Active Listening

If your mentee is able, willing and wanting to speak about what is going on for them, here are **some suggestions for how to hold space for your mentee:**

- Ask open-ended questions to give your mentee an opportunity to say what they want to, e.g. 'How are you feeling?'
- Use minimal prompts when necessary to keep the conversation going, e.g. 'I see' or 'Mmm...' (or whatever 'sound' you or your mentee normally makes to show that you are listening).

## Active Listening (continued)

- Be okay with pauses and silences. While they may feel uncomfortable, your mentee may need time to think or find the right words.
- Acknowledge what they are saying, by saying things like, 'Mm. That sounds really tough' or 'What you are going through must be difficult.'
- Do not interrupt your mentee when they are speaking.
- Reflect back what your mentee has said to you to demonstrate that you are hearing and understanding them.
- Summarize facts and feelings.
- Use the same terminology that your mentee uses when discussing their experience, except if they used stigmatizing or disrespectful language.
- Respect your mentee's feelings, personal values, and experiences as valid, even if they are different from your own, or you disagree with them.
- Continue to listen non-judgmentally until you notice a 'just noticeable difference' in your mentee's state, e.g. your mentee has shifted from a flat, expressionless state, to a slightly more emotionally expressive but still calm state.

The above list has been adapted from guidelines on the [Mental Health First Aid International](#) website.



Ask for your mentee's consent, if you want to reach out to other people to explore more ways that your mentee can be better supported in their situation.



[Mental Health First Aid International](#) have some [very useful guidelines](#) and [training programs](#), including on how to provide an initial response to mental health crises.

Here are a couple more resources on Active Listening: [Tips to be a better listener](#) and [Mindful Listening](#) as a mentor and mentee.

## MENTORSHIP ACTIVITY

## Your Safety Plan

One way to practise a trauma-informed approach to mentoring is to think about your triggers and how you will take care of yourself, before the mentoring even starts!

Print out this one-page Safety Plan. Make sure you have access to it for every mentoring session.

### What emotions do you find most difficult to cope with?

### What does stress feel like in your body?

### What situations trigger these emotions?

### What processes will you put in place before and after mentoring sessions to take care of yourself?

### Who can you go to for support if you are feeling stressed about this mentorship and the stories you hear? This can be professional service providers or personal contacts.

## Resources to learn more about trauma

Resources on trauma commonly experienced by refugees: [Foundation House](#)

Resources specific to Asian and Pacific Islander populations: [National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence \(NAPIESV\)](#).

[Mental Health First Aid International's useful guidelines and training programs](#), including on how to provide an initial response to mental health crises.

A [video about trauma](#) featuring psychiatrist, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, author of 'The Body Keeps The Score'.

A [video featuring a conversation](#) between Resmaa Menakem, a psychotherapist specialising in the effects of trauma on the human body and Dr. Gabor Maté, an expert on addiction, trauma, childhood development, and the relationship of stress and illness.

### RECAP

## You and your mentee

We advocate for a **mentee-centred approach** to mentoring so that mentees can come more fully into their power. Your mentee may come from contexts where there are obstacles and barriers to fully exercising their power.

In addition, it is crucial to have a **trauma-informed approach** to mentoring, because many mentees and mentors may come from and currently live in environments and contexts where trauma may have shaped their lives in complex ways.

It is important to **keep both your mentee and yourself as safe as possible during the mentorship**. Learning about different types of trauma symptoms and preparing a Safety Plan are two actions that you can do to help keep yourself and your mentee as safe as possible.



**PART 4:**

# Cross- Cultural Mentoring



## Cross-Cultural Mentoring



“ What I liked most about my mentor was their impactful listening and understanding of cultural similarities and differences.

We match mentors and mentees across diverse cultural backgrounds. Our intention is to foster transnational solidarity through collaborative, intergenerational, intragenerational, and intersectional, human-to-human connections.

Of course, doing so comes with many sensitive considerations.

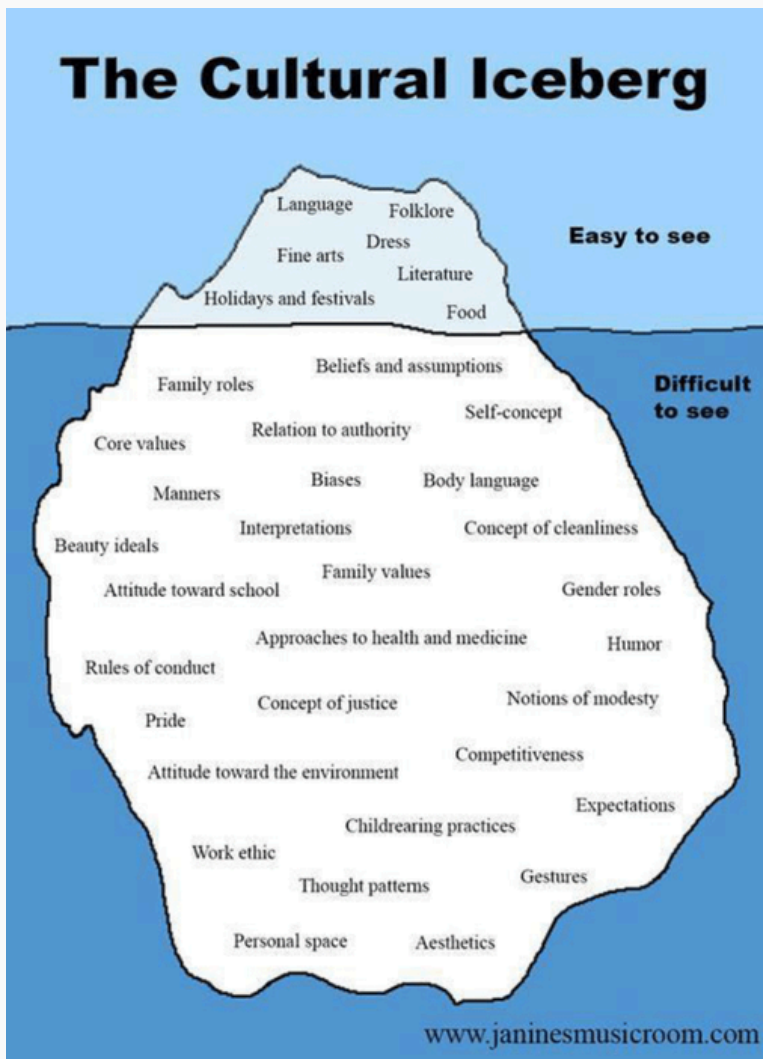
For example, many of our mentees come from Southeast Asia and South Asia, which has its own histories of having been shaped by colonialism for centuries, but also wars and ongoing tensions between the now independent nations. In addition, some mentees are stateless within countries that do not afford them citizenship, let alone rights.

Another layer of complexity may be involved, when we match mentees living in the Global South, with mentors who are diaspora living in the Global North. With such pairings, it is crucial to be aware of potentially Westernized worldviews, which may not be as relevant for a mentee living in a Global South context.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CULTURE'??

When we say 'culture', this can encompass many different parts of an individual's worldview and experience.

The image of The Cultural Iceberg, inspired by Hall (1976), is just one example of a visual way to start thinking about 'culture'. The part that is above water contains examples of big 'C', 'Culture', such as Language, Food and Dress. The part that is below water contains examples of small 'c', 'culture', such as work ethic, biases, gender roles.



**Figure 4.2**  
Image from Upton JZ (2020).

**Image Description:** An iceberg floating in water. The parts above the water are marked as 'Easy to see'. The parts below the water are marked 'Difficult to see'.

## PATRIARCHY AS A FORM OF CULTURE

Patriarchy is also a cultural system ingrained in societal structures, perpetuating male dominance and reinforcing gender roles, especially along gender binary lines.

Patriarchal culture shapes norms, values, and behaviors, influencing interpersonal relationships, institutions, and expectations. This cultural framework assigns authority to men while often subordinating women, impacting family, work, and political spheres.

Patriarchy as a culture manifests through language, rituals, and social norms, solidifying its presence in daily life.

## CASE STUDY

## Patriarchal beliefs held by women



Maryam is a 36-year-old Afghani woman who was matched with Dian, a 45-year-old Indonesian woman. Over more than 15 years, Dian had forged a career as one of the few female partners at an international consulting firm. To do this, she had to learn to conform to the male-dominated culture of her firm.

During one of their mentoring sessions, Maryam brought up a work-related challenge that she wanted to discuss with Dian. Upon describing the bullying behaviour of her direct line manager, Maryam started to cry.

At this point, Dian said curtly, 'Crying won't get you anywhere. It will only make you a soft target for bullies.' Maryam was so startled by this response that she abruptly stopped crying. She left the call feeling full of shame for her emotional responses.

**What kind of beliefs about emotions and crying do you think Dian holds?**

**How was Dian's response an example of patriarchal culture showing up in a mentorship?**

**Why does it matter to be aware of the patriarchal beliefs that we may hold?**

One of the common myths of patriarchal culture is that showing certain emotions (including through crying) makes us weak. This can lead to instances of shaming people for simply feeling and expressing emotions. This shaming can affect men, women as well as people of all genders.

As a mentor, it is important to be aware of the patriarchal beliefs we may have internalised. We need to resist such beliefs actively and consciously, to be in solidarity with our mentees. Otherwise, we risk passing on patriarchal beliefs to the next generation of women leaders.

### How might you challenge patriarchal culture, as a mentor?

## DISABILITY AND NEURODIVERSITY AS CULTURES

In a predominantly non-Disabled and neurotypical world, 'Disability' as a cultural expression and cultural group, can often be ignored.

Disability as a culture refers to the shared experiences, identity, and community formed by individuals with disabilities. In addition, neurodiverse people, such as those with autism, ADHD, or dyslexia, can have their own distinct culture characterized by unique communication styles, social norms, and perspectives.

Understanding experiences of Disability through a cultural lens acknowledges the long history of advocacy and culture-making led by Disabled individuals and communities.

It also requires us to learn about **different models of disability**.



The more dominant **models of disability** include:

The **medical model of disability** views disability primarily as a physical or mental impairment that requires medical intervention.

The **charity model of disability** sees disability as a tragedy, and disabled people as victims who need to be pitied and rescued.

The **religious model** views disability as a punishment inflicted upon the individual or family by an external force.

These models do not recognise the agency and creativity of Disabled individuals and communities as an integral part of human diversity, enriching society with different perspectives and contributions.

#### VIDEO RESOURCE

### Watch [this video](#) by the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit

Learn about the medical model of disability, the charitable model, the social model and the human rights model of disability.



#### TOP TIP!

Do your own research about the realities facing people with disability in your mentee's context.



## Friction from differences in cultural norms

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Friction within the mentoring relationship can come from differences in cultural norms. For example, different cultures have different expectations around what is considered 'timely' or 'punctual'. In some cultures, it may be entirely acceptable for someone to come half an hour or even hours 'late' to a meeting, because their conception of time is not based on capitalist, 24-hour conceptions of time. In other words, what is considered 'late' is culturally specific.

In certain rural settings, meeting times may be treated more flexibly because there are other more pressing obligations to meet, such as the need to harvest during certain seasons.

Of course, this can pose practical challenges when trying to match mentors and mentees' availability across time zones and people's busy lives. So, it is important to have a conversation early on in the mentoring relationship around your expectations around time.

### What other differences in cultural norms may cause friction in a mentorship?

## Cultural x Political x Historical tensions

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Mentors also need to be aware of intra- and inter-regional tensions that may be the result of decades long or more political tensions.

For example, The Partition of India in 1947 continues to manifest in modern-day tensions between India and Pakistan. Inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions may also be present within the one country. For example, between the predominantly Muslim Rohingya and the more dominant Buddhist populations of Myanmar.

These intra- and inter-regional tensions may shape a mentor and mentee's beliefs and assumptions about specific nationalities, ethnic and religious groups.

### How might a mentor and mentee navigate differences in nationalities, ethnicities and religions respectfully?

**TOP TIP!**

Ask your mentee if they would be willing to have a conversation in response to the above question, i.e. 'How might we navigate the differences in our nationalities, ethnicities and religions respectfully?'

**Cross-cultural considerations including Indigenous worldviews**

People who hail from Indigenous cultural backgrounds will have their own unique traditions, protocols and worldviews. As a mentor, it is important to take the time to learn about your mentee's cultural practices, if your mentee invites you to do so and/or is open to you doing so.

A note of caution - some Indigenous cultural groups may be 'overly studied' and 'objectified'. Anthropology as a discipline that has concerned itself the most with 'studying' Indigenous peoples, has its roots deep in colonialism and colonial practices. Unfortunately, this can be reflected in the literature available on certain Indigenous groups.

Wherever possible, try to learn from resources that were created by and led by Indigenous scholars and knowledge makers themselves.

**TOP TIP!**

**Be open to getting to know your mentee as a unique person**, in addition to doing your own research on their Indigenous traditions, protocols and worldviews.

One consideration specific to Indigenous groups may be the cultural obligations and rituals that your mentee needs to fulfill. This will look different for each cultural group.

For example, there may be rituals that women need to carry out, which follow a different calendar to the Gregorian calendar. There may be leadership roles that only women of a certain caste or who have completed certain initiation rituals, have the right to carry out.

**TOP TIP!**

**Be open to learning about which cultural rituals your mentee needs to participate in.** Be flexible with your mentee if she needs to take some 'time out' of the mentorship to carry out these rituals.

Additionally, engaging with a mentee that lives life to a different rhythm compared to your own, may shine a light on the rhythm and pace of your own life. This may provide you with some interesting reflections on how you are living your life. Remain open to this!



**Be open to questioning your assumptions around life / work rhythm, balance and pace.**

In addition, Indigenous communities may have distinct communication styles that differ from mainstream Western norms. Some individuals may prefer indirect communication or storytelling as a means of conveying information.

It's important to listen actively, and be open to alternative ways of expressing thoughts and ideas. Non-verbal cues and body language may also play a significant role, so paying attention to these aspects can enhance communication.

## Solidarity with Indigenous people

Finally, the extraction of resources from Indigenous lands, seas and rivers is ongoing. The dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, seas and rivers is something that continues to happen at a global scale, including in the countries that the mentees come from.

It is important to be aware of the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous people continue to be subjected to as a result of this and also to act in solidarity with the ongoing resistance by Indigenous people in the face of such systemic violence on their right to exist.

## RESOURCES

[Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara \(AMAN\)](#) - Indonesia

[The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs \(IWGIA\)](#) is a global human rights organisation dedicated to promoting and defending Indigenous Peoples' rights.<https://iwgia.org/en/>

Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) explores how colonialism attempted to destroy Indigenous ways of knowing in the Global South and continue to be present as 'coloniality' in our present-day lives.

[Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogues.](#)

## CASE STUDY

## 'Culture'-based assumptions in Mentoring



**Content Warning:** This case study discusses racist and sexist assumptions.

Kiran is a 24 year old woman from India who was matched with Salvi as her mentor, a 30 year old man of Italian background from the United Kingdom.

Unfortunately, during their mentorship, there were a few instances when Kiran felt that she was being looked down upon. Salvi once mentioned that he is 'very direct' and asked Kiran to 'not get offended', because in his view, 'people from South Asia can get offended very easily'. He then continued to say, 'I am sharing my views in this way for your own best interest.' And also added, 'Besides, women feel more than men do, so I thought I'd be this direct, in case your feelings get in the way of our conversation.'

After a few interactions like this, Kiran asked to be rematched with another mentor- one who was more sensitive and thoughtful about differences in cultural background and gender.

### How is Salvi's positionality showing up in this mentoring relationship?

(You may want to refer back to [the section on positionality](#).)

### How might assumptions about 'culture' be shaping the dynamic between Kiran and Salvi?

### Which forms of power do you think Salvi was exercising in this situation?

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Power Over | <input type="checkbox"/> Power To     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Power With | <input type="checkbox"/> Power Within |

### What do you think the impact has been of Salvi's behaviour and words, on Kiran?



Sometimes, the word 'culture' can be used to mask prejudiced assumptions that are actually based on someone's perceived 'race'.

**DON'T** assume cultural superiority. This is where a person unconsciously assumes that Western practices or approaches are inherently superior to practices in the Global South.

**DON'T** impose Western norms and values without considering the cultural nuances of your mentee.

**DON'T** tokenise or exoticise the cultural differences of your mentee.

## Embracing Opportunities in Cross Cultural Mentoring

Whilst there may be challenges that come with cultural differences, there are also many opportunities for mutual learning and growth.

One of the reasons why we match mentors and mentees cross-culturally and globally is to expand mentors and mentees' worldviews. Sometimes, something can be so normalized in your culture that you are not aware of it, let alone question it.

In some cases, your cultural norm is something to be proud of, and something that you can draw on to give roots to your life, or strength and guidance during challenging times.

Other times, your cultural norms may not actually be serving you that well, and you have never had the opportunity to examine this particular 'cultural norm' before.

Mentoring cross-culturally can provide you and your mentee the opportunity to critically examine your own cultures. You can hold a mirror up to one another's cultures.

Ideally, the mentorship can be a container for both the mentor and mentee to explore questions and reflections outside of your own cultural contexts, norms and assumptions.



### TOP TIP!

Active listening will serve you well as you explore your and your mentee's cultural backgrounds.

**In addition to expanding worldviews, what are some other opportunities for mutual learning and growth that can come from cross-cultural mentoring?**



*'There was more than two decades of age difference between us and we came from different countries. It was easier to relate by focusing on shared commonalities. We talked about our families, festivals and cultural things that were common across both countries, even if they were not exactly the same.'*



## Values as a way into Cross-Cultural Mentoring



Earlier in this reflective tool, we asked you to identify your core values.

By being aware of your own core values as a mentor, our hope is that you can hold with grace any contradictions between your core values and those of your mentee.

Additionally, our hope is that you as a mentor, will be able to **hold space for your mentee**, should any of their values contradict one another's.

**For example**, for many mentees from Asia, the core value of 'filial piety' is a common one. This may involve deferring decisions to your Elders and honouring your Elders. At times, this core value of 'filial piety' may come into conflict with other values that your mentee holds.

**For example**, when making a career choice, your mentee may want to choose X discipline, whilst their parents / caregivers may want them to do Y instead. Filial piety may be one of the reasons why mentees can find it much more difficult to 'break' from what their family wants from them, compared to mentees that live in a more individualized society.

A mentor that comes from a more individualized society may advise their mentee, 'You need to prioritize yourself.' But this assumes an ability to prioritize the individual over the collective.

As a mentor, how can you make space for your mentee, through non-judgmental listening, as they grapple with the conflict between what they want and what their parents / caregivers want? Is the core value of 'filial piety' able to sit alongside other values? How can you support your mentee to sit with at times contradictory values? How can you support your mentee to make decisions that align with their at times contradictory values?

Part of the worldview-expanding experience that we want mentors and mentees to have comes from practising making space for contradictory worldviews. Sometimes, it is through contradictions that we gain deeper insights into ourselves and one another.



*A lot of trust building happens through non-verbal cues. So, I try to listen in an active way. I try to be completely open and non-judgmental, wishing the best for the mentee and for myself in the process.'*

## RECAP

# Cross-cultural mentoring

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Matching mentors and mentees across diverse cultural backgrounds come with many sensitive considerations. When working with a mentee who hails from a very different cultural background to your own, it is crucial to **be aware of your positionality**.

**When we say 'culture', this can encompass many different parts of an individual's worldview and experience.** Patriarchy is a form of culture. Disability-led communities and Neurodiverse communities will also have their own cultural practices. People who hail from Indigenous cultural backgrounds will have their own unique traditions, protocols and worldviews.

As a mentor, it is important to take the time to **learn about your mentee's cultural practices**, if your mentee invites you to do so and/or is open to you doing so. When it comes to Indigenous resources, wherever possible, try to learn from resources that were created by and led by Indigenous scholars and knowledge makers themselves.

**PART 5:**

# Setting up for success:

Preparing for  
an effective first  
mentoring session



## Designing and Redesigning your mentorship

You and your mentee will be co-designing and co-creating your mentorship together.

Prior to your first meeting, ask for any information that you would like from the mentee. For example, do you want to read their CV / bio ahead of the meeting?

Here are some guiding questions for you to consider at the start, middle and end of your mentorship, to keep centring your mentee's needs in this relationship.

### MENTORSHIP ACTIVITY

#### Guiding questions for the start

- Why are you in this mentoring program?
- What's important for me to know about your life right now? e.g. Do they live in a conflict zone? Does this mean we need a contingency plan in case there are obstacles to communication?
- What is affecting you in your leadership journey?
- What other mentors do you have?
- What expectations do you have of me as your mentor?
- How do you want these meetings to be conducted? Who sets the agenda? Who facilitates? Will there be questions sent in advance?



#### TOP TIP!

It may help your mentee if you tell them what skills, networks and experiences you can bring into the mentorship. Have a few of these ready to share with your mentee during your first session.

## Guiding questions for the middle

Approximately 2-4 months into your mentorship, ask for a 'check-in' session with your mentee.

- Do you feel like you are making progress on what you want to do in this mentorship?
- Does anything need to change in our sessions to better meet your needs?
- Is there anything else that you think is important for me to know, at this stage in our mentorship?



There may be sessions where you and your mentee had a certain topic planned, but then something happens and it seems like your mentee's priorities have changed. In such cases, it's okay to ask, 'It sounds like this is important to you. Is this what you want to focus on during this session?'

## Guiding questions for the end

We deeply care about how power is shared between a mentor and a mentee. As such, we believe that feedback should be a two-way process. We recommend asking your mentee for feedback about their experience of the mentorship. Here are some guiding questions that you may wish to ask / adapt.

- As our mentorship comes to a close, I'd love to hear your overall thoughts and reflections on our time together. What aspects of our mentoring relationship do you think worked well, and are there areas where you think I could improve as a mentor?
- Can you share specific examples of how our mentorship has influenced your professional or personal development? Were there particular moments or pieces of advice that stood out, positively or negatively, in shaping your growth during our time together?
- When did you feel the most supported by me as your mentor?



*'It can be overwhelming for the mentee to schedule a session with someone we don't know at all, in a different country and time zone. It can be very scary!'*

Here are some **Do's and Don'ts for your first mentoring session:**

DO'S	DONT'S
Ask what your mentee's expectations / goals / needs are from the mentoring relationship.	Don't impose your own agenda on the mentoring relationship.
Get to know your mentee's Why.	Don't perpetuate the 'Saviour Complex', where you view your involvement as crucial in the development and indeed, survival, of your mentee.
Be flexible with when / if / how you use the Wedu curriculum.	Don't forget that you have your own resources that you can introduce to your mentee.
Set clear expectations around when you want to schedule meetings and how long for.	Don't be too rigid with time expectations, especially if unexpected things happen for your mentee.
Active listening - Show that you care and are empathetic towards your mentee.	Don't interrupt or talk over your mentee.
Honour the time commitment required for this mentoring relationship.	Don't cancel on your mentee last minute.
Be aware of some key things about your mentee's context.	Don't make assumptions about your mentee based on stereotypes.
Be aware of <u>your preferred mentoring style</u> and negotiate what is appropriate to meet your mentee's needs.	Don't force your mentee into a way of being / relating that they don't want to be in.



*You never get a second chance to make a first impression.*





It is not up to your mentee to educate you about the broader social, political, economic, and cultural context they live in. However, there are key questions you can ask to better understand your mentee's individual context, such as:

- What's important for me to know about your life right now?
- What is affecting you in your leadership journey? (This is how you may learn about cultural, political, family, climate, and other environmental factors affecting them.)

## RESOURCE

Mentorship pairs can greatly benefit from utilizing various goal tracker templates to monitor and evaluate the progress of mentee goals. The GROW (Grow - Reality - Options - Way Forward) framework may be useful in articulating and then keeping track of your mentee's goals.

We recommend completing the 'Goals' and 'Reality' parts of this framework in your first and second meetings. Then, schedule a check-in about your mentee's goals halfway through your mentorship. And finally, revisit this document at the very end of your mentorship.

## Common challenges and their remedies

Despite the best intentions and investment from both yourself and your mentee, you may still come up against challenges!

These are the common challenges that we have found:

1. Scheduling challenges
2. A mismatch between expectations
3. Communication challenges
4. Unanticipated events

We touch on each one and suggest remedies for each challenge.

## Common Challenge 1: **Scheduling challenges**

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*'I was unable to speak with my mentor due to her constant unavailability. The mentorship programme was not a priority for her. I want to be paired with someone who can commit to taking time out for this mentorship and to make the most of it.*



**REMEDY:** Discuss and agree on when and how often you will meet, during your first mentoring session. If any unexpected changes occur, it is also important that you communicate this with each other and reschedule as soon as possible.

Effective mentor / mentee pairings are able to find the ideal day and time to meet regularly. They then commit to the scheduled day and time, for the duration of the mentorship.



*We had a 12-hour time difference. Because of this, we decided to meet on weekends and found a time when neither of us was rushing from / to work. With my previous mentee, communication was an issue. Whereas with my current mentee, even though she had things happening, she still stayed in touch. When people are invested, they find a way.*

## Common Challenge 2: **A mismatch between expectations**

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*It was not clear to me what my mentee wanted to get out of the mentoring. I sat in several sessions that were not going anywhere. I had no idea where she wanted to go. She kept rescheduling sessions and eventually I opted out.*



Sometimes, the mentor and mentee may have different expectations of *why* they are in the mentorship, *what* they want to get out of it and *how* they can achieve this.

**REMEDY:** Align expectations during your first mentoring session. Refer to [this Do's and Don'ts list](#).

## Common Challenge 3: **Communication**

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Another common challenge is communication. Internet connectivity may be an issue. Language barriers may be another one. You and your mentee may have very different accents and this can also pose a challenge in understanding each other.



*She makes me feel comfortable to reach out and text her when I need support or advice or just someone who I can share my success and great news with.*

## Here are some remedies for effective communication:

- Avoid jargon and buzzwords.
- Do not assume that your mentee's level of English is the same as yours. That being said, do not assume that their level of English is necessarily lower than yours, either!
- If unsure, ask your mentee to explain what they understood from your conversation
- Similarly, if you're uncertain about your own understanding, repeat what you understood to your mentee.
- Be willing to express your ideas or ask questions using different wording to reach mutual understanding.

## RESOURCES

For accessible communication: the [Hemingway App](#) is a useful tool to gauge what Grade of English you are using in how you communicate.

For free and AI assisted translation: [DeepL](#) provides accurate and nuanced translation in over 30 languages.

### Common Challenge 4: **Unanticipated events**

Sometimes, entirely unexpected events may derail the focus of your mentorship. This may range from events at the individual level, such as the death of a loved one and/or large scale events, such as a major natural disaster or a significant change in your or your mentee's political / social / economic context.

**REMEDY:** In such times, we recommend revisiting your initial agreement with your mentee. Discuss whether your mentee's previous expectations, intentions, goals and needs are still relevant, or whether the focus of the mentorship needs to shift in response to recent events.

## CASE STUDY

## Different roles of a mentor



**Content Warning:** This case study discusses experiences of illness in the family and a major climate related disaster.

Sita is a 32 year old woman from India, who is currently mentoring Balwant, a 22 year old nonbinary person from Bangladesh. Balwant uses they / them pronouns. Balwant's goal for the mentorship was to improve their professional networks, in order to access more senior leadership roles.

As Balwant's mentor, Sita assisted Balwant to develop their LinkedIn profile and introduced them to some of her connections. Sita also facilitated role plays with Balwant, to help Balwant solve some of the challenges they were encountering with their supervisor at work. Sita even prepared mock interview scenarios for the types of senior leadership roles that Balwant was aiming for.

Unfortunately, only 2-months into the mentorship, Balwant's parents became severely ill and their mother had to undergo emergency surgery. Then Balwant's family home was seriously damaged during a major cyclone in Bangladesh.

When they were able to reconnect again, Balwant was unable to think beyond their plans for the next 24-hours. Sita took into account both recent family as well as major events that had affected Balwant's life. She suggested that they paused the focus on Balwant's professional goals for now, but that they should continue to meet, so that Sita could be there to listen to Balwant more as a supportive friend or sibling.

Through tears in their eyes, Balwant agreed. They felt glad that there was someone supportive they could talk to, whilst living through some of the most challenging times in their life.

**What were the different roles that Sita was able to play for Balwant in the above situation?**

**How did Sita model a mentee-centred approach to mentoring?**

We recommend that you, as the mentor, **stay open to responding to a mentee's changing needs**. As such, you may find that you play different 'roles' for your mentee, throughout your mentoring journey.

Some of the **common roles that mentors can play for their mentees**, include:

**A supportive friend:** Creating a safe space and providing a sounding board for your mentee.

**A career counsellor:** Helping your mentee to reach their professional goals.

**An accountability partner:** Holding your mentees accountable to their stated goals.

**A connector:** Introducing your mentee to new people, opportunities and resources.

Equally, it is important to name which roles **fall outside of the scope of mentorship**:

**Therapist:** It is outside of the scope of mentorship for you to be your mentee's therapist, even if you are a trained and licensed Mental Health professional. (Refer to [the section on Trauma Informed mentoring](#), for the risks that this poses on you as a mentor.)

**Financial and/or legal adviser:** It is outside of the scope of mentorship for you to be your mentee's financial and/or legal adviser, even if you are licensed to provide such advice.

**Employer:** If you are going to employ your mentee, you need to end the mentoring relationship formally, prior to doing so. Becoming your mentee's employer could create an additional power imbalance and we recommend that you consult with Wedu before engaging in a new professional relationship.

The roles above fall outside of the scope of Wedu's mentorships, because Wedu's mentorships are focused on the leadership development of emerging women leaders and changemakers in Asia.



You can say no. Set clear boundaries about what is within and what is outside of the scope of the mentorship, from the very start.

**RECAP**

## Setting up for success: Preparing for an effective first mentoring session

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You and your mentee will be **co-designing and co-creating your mentorship** together. Make use of the guiding questions we have suggested above to check in with your mentee at the start, middle and end of the mentorship.

In order to avoid some of the common challenges that can happen with mentorship, we recommend that during your first mentoring session, you **discuss and agree on when and how often you will meet**.

We also recommend that you **align your expectations** about why you are here and what you both want to get out of the mentorship, as well as how you can achieve this.

In order to communicate effectively with your mentee, be willing to **express your ideas or ask questions using different wording** to reach mutual understanding.

Finally, we recommend that you, as the mentor, **stay open** to responding to a mentee's changing needs.



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