



Seedling Mentoring and Healthy Closure

As a mentor, your primary focus is getting to know the wonderful young person for whom you have created a space in your heart. Your attention is in the present moment. As your relationship progresses, most likely the farthest thing from your mind is the thought of saying goodbye. You may even decide you will mentor this young person until his/her high school graduation! We hope that you can, and there are certainly Seedling relationships where this happens. However, more often than not, the reality is that mentoring ends at different times, for all sorts of reasons.

The most common reason is *life happens*. You find out it is no longer possible for you to leave the office to mentor, or your mentee's poor school attendance makes it difficult to continue. Sometimes the mentor or mentee realizes that it just isn't what they imagined, and the relationship is cut short due to dissatisfaction. Sometimes without warning, your mentee is withdrawn from school and has moved away. Even though these things happen, being able to say goodbye, or having closure, is an important stage in the relationship and cannot be skipped over. The children that we serve have already experienced painful goodbyes. Mentors must do everything we can to not be another unexplained farewell. How your relationship ends can color the way your mentee thinks about the entire mentoring experience.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding your closure, mentors can plan ahead for healthy closure by implementing these best practices:

- Make a firm resolution that you will try to make the relationship last as long as you can when it is to the benefit of your mentee. Research is clear that longer is better, and that a relationship that ends in fewer than three months is more damaging than if there had never been a relationship at all.
- Plan a "mini-closure" at the end of the school year, even if you have plans to return next year. Tell your mentee that you are hopeful that the two of you will be together again, but if it does not work out, you treasure the time you have spent together.
- Practice caution when assuming your mentee no longer needs you. Mentors do not know what is in their mentee's head or even the child's life outside of you. For example, we have no evidence that a parent's release means that the mentor is no longer needed. A child under stress can be hard to deal with, but it may be when you're needed most. Your Mentor Director can help you process whether it's time to close.
- Good closure happens over several (at least two) meetings with your mentee. Take the time to allow for the reality to set in. Share memories and what you are proud of regarding your mentee's growth, and share wishes for his/her future. It's critical to arrange closure in such a way that the child does not feel at fault. In the absence of a story, the child will fill in his own, and it usually includes self-blame.

- In the event you do not get to have an in-person goodbye, ask your Mentor Director about writing a closure letter. Seedling makes every effort to locate mentees in their new school.

Sometimes when a relationship closes for good, a mentor promises to stay in touch. Please resist this urge as it can only prolong the goodbye and leave the child with unfulfilled expectations. Being clear about goodbye and practicing healthy closure is a gift you are giving to your mentee. You are modeling healthy relationships. The magic of Seedling mentoring is not in what the mentee learns from you. It's what the child learns about relationships by interacting with you.

And finally, please remember, closure is something that happens inside you, too. Your Mentor Director is there to support you, to listen and to guide, and if needed, to help you process your feelings. Uncertain about how to say goodbye in a meaningful way? For ideas on how to make a mini-closure for the summer or a final goodbye meaningful click [here](#)