



Fact Sheet: Mentoring and Supporting Learners

Nurses¹ in all domains of practice have a professional and ethical responsibility to create and support positive learning environments. The [Code of Conduct for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners](#) establishes that nurses :

4.9 assess the knowledge, skill, and judgment of other members of the health care team and provide mentoring, teaching and support as required;

4.10 provide and accept constructive feedback from the health care team to support positive and therapeutic client outcomes and effective team performance.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide an overview of mentoring and preceptoring, the benefits of mentoring, as well as the roles and responsibilities of a mentor and mentee. This fact sheet also provides information on supporting learners who are not regulated by NANB. Appendix A includes FAQs on supporting learners.

Definitions

Mentoring is a supportive and collaborative relationship in which a more experienced nurse (mentor) provides guidance, counsel, and teaching to a less experienced nurse, nursing student, or other healthcare professional to facilitate professional growth and development (Mikkonen et al., 2021; Minguez Moreno et al., 2023; NANB, 2019). Mentoring can be a formal or informal relationship. It may include supporting transition to practice, such as guiding new graduate nurses and internationally educated nurses in adjusting to their new roles, responsibilities, and work environments (Devey Burry et al., 2019; Minguez Moreno et al., 2023). Mentoring can also extend beyond transition to practice and include supporting nurses who are pursuing specialization, leadership and education roles, or advanced clinical practice (Campis et al., 2024).

Preceptoring is a specific and time limited type of mentoring (Minguez Moreno et al., 2023). Preceptoring involves a formal relationship and structured program where a preceptor guides a new graduate nurse or student through a predetermined set of competencies and helps them socialize into a specific clinical setting (Minguez Moreno et al., 2023; NANB, 2019).

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring has many benefits, including its contribution to quality care and client safety. Mentors can support safe, competent, and ethical nursing care by:

- helping nurses and other health care professionals bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Jetha & House-Kokan, 2024);

¹ The term “nurse(s)” refers to graduate nurses, registered nurses, and/or nurse practitioners.

*Graduate nurses cannot supervise the provision of nursing care of registered nurses or other graduate nurses. For more information on GN scope of practice, please see [Fact Sheet: Graduate Nurse Scope of Practice](#)

- supporting learners beyond technical skills to encompass professional values and behaviours (Pramila-Savukoski et al., 2019);
- contributing to a collaborative and supportive work environment, which can foster a safe space for learners to ask questions, seek clarification, and develop confidence (Minguez Moreno et al., 2023);
- reflecting on their own knowledge, approaches, and identifying areas for personal growth (Campis et al., 2024); and,
- developing their own professional skills, such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving (Campis et al., 2024).

Roles and Responsibilities of Mentors

There are key roles and responsibilities of a mentor, including:

Guiding and supporting learning: Mentors are responsible for assessing learning needs, providing learning opportunities, and supporting learners' professional development. Mentors guide mentees in applying knowledge to real world settings, which help them to develop skills and judgment needed for safe, competent, and ethical care (Mikkonen et al., 2021; Pramila-Savukoski et al., 2019).

Providing feedback and evaluation: Mentors are responsible to provide constructive feedback to learners to help them identify strengths, as well as areas for improvement (Minguez Moreno et al., 2023). Mentors are expected to assess a mentee's progress to ensure they are meeting their learning needs and developing the necessary competencies for the role. Mentors are also expected to resolve differences in a constructive way and to refrain from any form of workplace bullying or demeaning language.

Supporting growth and development: Mentors support the learner's growth in their practice area by fostering autonomy, knowledge, skills, judgment, and confidence. Mentors provide encouragement and create a supportive environment where learners can flourish (Mikkonen et al., 2021)

Respecting diversity and facilitating inclusive learning environments: Mentors share the responsibility for creating a culture of learning that supports learners from diverse backgrounds. Mentors are expected to create inclusive learning environments where all learners feel safe, comfortable and respected in their learning journey (Johnson et al., 2023). Mentors also recognize the power differentials that may exist between mentors and mentees by accepting reciprocal feedback to lessen the hierarchy that exists in the teaching/learning relationship.

Role modeling professional behaviour: Mentors are expected to exemplify professional behaviours and attitudes, which includes demonstrating compassion, ethical decision-making, client-centred care, and a commitment to fostering a culture of learning (Mikkonen et al., 2021). This includes practicing in accordance with the [Code of Conduct for Registered Nurses and Nurse](#)



Practitioners. Nurses are responsible for practicing in accordance with relevant legislation, standards, regulatory requirements, and employer policies.

Roles and Responsibilities of Mentees

There are also key roles and responsibilities of the mentee. The following responsibilities are the expectations of nurse mentees who are registered with NANB (i.e. new graduate nurses, nurses on the temporary register such as internationally educated nurses, or registered nurses and nurse practitioners in new roles):

Actively engaging in the learning process: Mentees should actively participate in the learning process. This includes being aware of their learning needs, being receptive to feedback, asking questions, seeking clarification, and actively participating in discussions. Mentees should seek opportunities to apply new knowledge and skills (Mikkonen et al., 2021; Minguez Moreno et al., 2023).

Open communication and feedback: Mentees are expected to express their learning needs, share their experiences, and seek advice from mentors. They should be open to receiving feedback, both positive and constructive, and use it as an opportunity for growth and development (Mathew et al., 2024).

Self-awareness and reflection: Mentees should reflect on their practice to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvements. This self-awareness should enable mentees to articulate their learning needs and goals effectively. Mentees should also set realistic goals and strive for continuous improvement (Mikkonen et al., 2021).

Openness to diverse perspective and experiences: Mentees are expected to be open to learning from mentors and peers from diverse backgrounds. This includes actively listening to different viewpoints, respecting cultural differences, and being receptive to feedback that may challenge their existing beliefs (Pramila-Savukoski et al., 2019).

Professionalism and accountability: Mentees are expected to take responsibility for their actions. They are expected to accept accountability for their learning and development and demonstrate a willingness to learn from their experiences. This includes practicing in accordance with the [Code of Conduct for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners](#), as well as relevant legislation, standards, regulatory requirements, and employer policies.

Supporting Learners not Regulated by NANB

Learners are not limited to other nurses regulated by NANB. A learner may also be a nursing student, a student from another healthcare profession, an unregulated care provider, or another regulated healthcare professional (CNO, n.d.). The following information pertains to the responsibilities of the nurse while also working with and supporting learners.



In any practice setting, the primary responsibility of the nurse is to the client. Nurses are responsible for assessing their clients to effectively establish, execute, and evaluate the plan of care. However, when working with learners, client care is shared. Nurses working with any learner are expected to:

- assign nursing activities based on the provider's competencies and in accordance with client needs;
- develop a care plan and evaluate its effectiveness;
- collaborate on the care plan and ensure there are clear expectations between the nurse and learner;
- understand and take into consideration the clinical experience objectives and competence level of the learner (i.e. 1st year nursing student versus a 3rd year nursing student) and contribute to their learning;
- openly communicate with learners, clinical instructors, and other healthcare professionals as necessary to minimize the risk of errors and omissions;
- uphold nursing standards by being available to learners and clinical instructors for assistance and consultation; and
- supervise learners as necessary and intervene if needed.

Role of Employers and Organizations

NANB recognizes that employers and organizations also have responsibility to provide supportive environments for mentorship and preceptorship, including dedicated time and resources. Mentoring is most effective when organizations emphasize the importance of a collaborative environment that values mentorship and professional development. As an integral part of any healthcare organization, individual nurses are expected to advocate for practice environments that have the organizational and human supports, and resource allocations necessary for safe, competent, and ethical nursing care. The [Code of Conduct for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners](#) states that nurses:

6.5 advocate for and participate in improving the quality of their practice setting to support safe nursing practice;

Resources

Additional information on supporting learners can be found in the following documents:

[Managing Legal Risks in Preceptorships \(CNPS\)](#)

[InfoLAW: Supervision \(CNPS\)](#)

[Ethical Considerations in Relationships with Nursing Students \(CNA\)](#) p. 41-42

Practice Guideline: A Collaborative Approach to Assigning, Delegating and Teaching in Healthcare

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Appendix A: FAQs

I am a novice nurse and am being asked to support a new learner. Do I have the competencies to fulfill this role?

All nurses in Canada are prepared to practice safely, competently, and ethically. You can support a new learner at any stage as a nurse if you practice within your scope and seek guidance as needed.

What if I feel I cannot support a learner?

In circumstances where a nurse does not feel they have the capacity to support a learner, they are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their employer and/or broader healthcare team to plan other ways to support the learner. For example:

- Working with the employer around the possibility of having a dedicated mentor or resource nurse to provide guidance while supporting a new learner, or
- Advocating for additional training or education to support learners

If the learner makes a mistake, am I accountable?

When a learner makes a mistake, nurses need to consider the context of the mistake. For example, nurses are not accountable for the decisions of others when the actions are unknown or unexpected.

Learners are accountable for their own actions and client outcomes. Nurses act in situations that may compromise client safety and well-being. Nurses also take responsibility for errors when they occur. For example, nurses provide constructive feedback to learners in the interest of client safety.

- Performance concerns of new graduate nurses or nurses transitioning to a new work environment should be reported to the employer. In situations of incompetence, professional misconduct, conduct unbecoming the profession and/or incapacity, nurses also have a [Duty to Report](#) to NANB.
- Performance concerns of unregulated care providers should be reported to the employer.
- Performance concerns of students should be discussed with academic institution and/or clinical instructor the learner is affiliated with.
- Performance concerns of other regulated healthcare professionals should be reported to the employer and potentially their regulatory body.

Who are learners accountable to?

- Registrants of NANB, such as new graduate nurses, internationally educated nurses on the temporary register, and nurses transitioning to a new work environment are accountable to their employers and to NANB.
- Nursing students are accountable to their educational institutions and placement organization.
- Unregulated care providers are accountable to their employers.
- Other regulated healthcare professionals are accountable to their employers and to their regulatory body.

What are the responsibilities of a clinical instructor?

A clinical instructor is responsible for the overall learning plan of the student. The nursing student and clinical instructor should have the opportunity to discuss with the RN the learning plan which will promote understanding and provide an opportunity for any clarifications of responsibilities. The clinical instructor cannot be expected to be with all students at all times, so communication between the RN, the clinical instructor, and the nursing student is key in order to provide a meaningful and positive learning experience.

What questions should I consider when supporting learners?

When supporting learners, it is important to consider the following:

- How am I making myself available to the learner to support their learning?
- How am I ensuring the learner's supervision is appropriate?
- Am I setting clear goals that align with the learner's learning plan and providing timely feedback?
- How am I adapting my approach to teaching to meet the learner's needs?
- What educational resources and opportunities can I provide the learner to acquire new knowledge and skills?

What questions should I consider when assessing learners?

When assessing learners, it is important to consider the following:

- What is the learner's knowledge, skill and judgment related to the practice setting?
- What is the learner's scope of responsibilities, practice limitations and legislated authority (including employer policies)?
- Have I reviewed and discussed the learning plan with the learner (if applicable)?
- Have I identified any knowledge needs that may prevent the learner from practicing safely and competently?



What questions should I consider when assessing the learning environment?

When considering the workplace or learning environment, it is important to consider the following:

- Does the practice setting support learning?
- How am I advocating for an appropriate learning environment?
- Have I clarified the learner's and nurse's responsibilities?
- Is the learner's assignment appropriate for the learner's goals and objectives?
- What necessary systems and resources are in place to support the learner in an unfamiliar environment (e.g., organizational policies, human resources, environmental resources)?

Content of these FAQs have been adapted from the College of Nurses of Ontario's [Supporting Learners](#)