



Empower Autism

Mentoring

Many children (with and without autism) really benefit from a healthy relationship with an adult who is not their parent. Sometimes, these powerful figures can reinforce lessons taught at home, avoid parent-child-type arguments, and be a confidence building force for a young person. Finding a good mentor for a child with autism is not exactly easy, but it can be done. Here are some suggestions for finding and keeping a safe and compassionate mentor for your child.

Tasks for Hiring a Mentor

Make some decisions and write them down:

- How many hours do you want someone to mentor? On which days? How much can you pay (we usually pay \$15-\$25/hour depending on the city and level of experience)? Do you want the mentoring to happen in your home? A library? Where else?
- What are some reasonable initial goals for the amount of time you can afford? What do you want your child to learn/accomplish/experience? After you decide on a few goals (3 or less), write down a description of where your child is right now on those goals. This will help you measure progress later.
- How long do you expect this mentor to work with your family? We recommend 6 mo – 1.5 years. This will be part of the contract you make for them.
- What will the mentor need to know about your child? We recommend writing a one page overview with do's and don'ts and house rules if you have them.
- What are the attributes of your ideal mentor?
- Will you have to explain the reasons for a mentor to your child? If so, plan a good one-liner that suits your purposes, such as, “we want you to have fun doing homework, instead of fighting with us”, or “we really like Karen and we think you guys are going to get along and have a lot of fun” or “we think it’s really important for you to learn more about (insert ONE word), and we think Karen knows a lot about it”.

Make a timeline:

- When do you want the mentoring to be in full swing? It takes about a month to get the interviews done and someone hired, if you are focusing.
- When will you promote the mentor position to the community?
- When/where will you interview the candidates?
- When will you train them/introduce them?

Plan your hiring process and training period

- Write a contract. You can use ours as a template.
- Plan how you will pay the person—do you want them to send email invoices? Do you want to pay them each time? Once a month? Write this into the contract
- Plan a communication system for tracking how the mentor spends their time on goals. It can be a daily log, a google document, an email chain or whatever makes sense for you. The

mentor should write down how they approached a goal, and what the response was. They can also use this to ask you questions about stuff.

- If the mentor will be doing something like homework, plan to demonstrate how homework is usually accomplished in your home (even if you don't like how it's usually accomplished). The mentor needs to know what a baseline is, so they can move forward with confidence.
- If the mentor will meet you one place and drop off your child somewhere else, plan to show them how picking up and dropping works—not just telling them, actually showing them where to go/park their car/etc.
- If you want a mentor to address certain behaviors in a specific way, write those down and plan to demonstrate what you want them to do.
- After the mentor observes and trains, plan a little debrief session with them where you cover some of the stuff that happened, and make sure they noticed what you did and why.

Execute some steps:

- Compose and post an ad for your mentor position in several locations, such as college career center websites, and professional babysitting sites. You could also look up some local psychology professors online, and see if they would circulate your ad to some promising students. You can use our ad as a template.
- Schedule your interviews. Plan a few things you might want to ask. You can use our questions.
- Select your favorite two mentors and see if your child wants to meet them and choose. It's fine if you want to choose without their input too.
- Offer the position to your mentor and set up a meeting to go over the contract. Decide when their first training shift will be, and when they will start for real. We suggest paying them for their training time too. Happy mentors stay longer at their part time mentoring gigs.
- Schedule an evaluation or a formal check-in for a month or so from when the mentor starts. This is so that you and the mentor can both decide if you are a 'good fit' for each other. You can each bail at this point.
- Write your goals down in a notebook. Keep the notebook handy to write down your thoughts on how each one is going.
- Commence with the mentoring and keep track of goal progress about every two weeks or so.

Troubleshooting:

- If you feel suspicious of a mentor, end it quickly. Stay courteous, but trust your gut. Tell them you and your child think that it might not be a really good fit, and you think you need to rethink having a mentor.
- If the mentoring "isn't working", look at your goals and see if they can be measured quantitatively. Can you track actual behaviors and when they occur? Can you change something about the location, logistics, time period, etc?
- If your child's mentor irritates you, but your child likes them, see if you can change up some details so you don't have to be around them as much. If it's a work-related behavior, like punctuality, write them an email asking for the behavior to change. If not, do a gut check to make sure you aren't picking up on something dangerous, and if not, try to let it go.
- If you feel 'out of the loop' about the mentoring, update the communication system, or set up a regular in-person check in with your mentor.

Important Tip:

- Don't count the mentor as 'one of the family' and invite them to dinner, make them lunch, give them rides, etc. This undercuts professionalism very quickly and leads to misunderstandings and resentment. Be polite, but not familial.

Sample Ad:

We are seeking a bright, compassionate mentor for our son with autism. We provide a one-year contract and training. 3-6 hours per week/\$20/hr. Must have car and provide national background check. An ideal candidate will have a little knowledge of autism, and be willing to learn. Please email resume to me@myemail.com .

The Interview:

1. Make sure you have your questions and a notebook and pen. Write down your ideal attributes for a mentor too.
2. Welcome the person, offer water or coffee if you wish.
3. Make small talk for less than 5 minutes. Then, say something like, “Ok, I have a couple of questions for you, and then I’ll tell you a little more about the position, and if you have questions, you can ask them then.”
4. Ask your questions—don’t be shy to ask follow up questions too.
5. Explain BRIEFLY about the job. Don’t talk for more than 2 minutes. Ask if they have questions. Be ready to explain what a typical shift would look like.
6. Tell them that you have several other interviews (even if you don’t), and then say when you will get back to them, and how (email, phone, etc).

Sample Interview Questions:

What kind of autism experience or kid-type experience do you have?

Can you tell me about a time when you taught someone something new? Walk me through what you did.

Have you been in a situation that required a lot of patience? How did you handle it?

Can you describe a work/school situation that was extremely hectic for you? What did you do to manage it?

Have you ever disagreed with or had a conflict with a co-worker, supervisor or professor about an issue at work/school? What happened?

Can you tell me about a time when you broke the rules at work or school in order to accomplish something?

***Always thank people and send them on their way after an interview, even if you want to hire them on the spot. Let them know that you will email them either way, by a certain date, and then stick to it.

Our sample contract is in a separate word document so you can adjust it.