DO-IT Mentors

This publication shares guidelines for mentors in the DO-IT programs.

What is a *DO-IT Mentor*?

Most of us can think of people in our lives, more experienced than ourselves, who taught us something new, offered advice, presented a challenge, initiated friendship, or simply expressed an interest in our development as a person. They helped us negotiate an uphill path or find an entirely new path to a goal in our academic, career, or personal lives. They showed us a world larger than our neighborhood. They pointed out talents that we hadn't noticed in ourselves and stimulated ideas about what we might be able to accomplish. They nudged us when we needed a nudge.

Adult mentors are an important part of the DO-IT team. *DO-IT Mentors* are college students, faculty, and professionals in a wide variety of career fields, many with disabilities themselves. Protégés are participants in the *DO-IT Scholars* or *Pals* programs. Most mentoring in DO-IT takes place on the Internet. Electronic communication eliminates the challenges imposed by time, distance, and disability that are characteristic of in-person mentoring. Frequent electronic communications and personal contacts bring DO-IT participants together with *Mentors* to facilitate academic, career, and personal achievements.

As a *Mentor* you offer:
- Information. *Mentors* share their knowledge, experiences, and wisdom.
- Contacts. *Mentors* provide valuable opportunities by facilitating academic, career, and personal contacts.
- Challenges. *Mentors* stimulate curiosity and build confidence by presenting new ideas, opportunities, and challenges.
- Support. *Mentors* encourage growth and achievement by providing an open and supportive environment.
- Goal Setting. *Mentors* help *Scholars* discover talents and interests and define and attain their goals.
- Advice. *Mentors* guide *Scholars* in reaching academic, career, and personal goals.
- Role Models. By sharing stories of achievement with *Scholars*, *Mentors* can become role models.

How to be a *Mentor*

DO-IT facilitates communication in small groups through the use of electronic discussion lists. For example, one group includes both *Mentors* and protégés who are blind. They discuss common interests and concerns such as independent living, speech, and Braille output systems for computers, and options for displaying images and mathematical expressions. Introducing protégés to *Mentors* with similar disabilities is a strength of the DO-IT program.

As a *Mentor*, you are a valuable resource to your protégés. As a guide, counselor, and friend, you inspire and facilitate academic, career, and personal achievements. The developmental transitions faced by *DO-IT Scholars* and *Pals* in each of these areas are enriched by your experience, wisdom, and guidance.

Your role as a *Mentor* is a mix of friend and teacher. Relationships developed with your protégés become channels for the passage of information, advice, challenges, opportunities, and support with the ultimate goals of facilitating achievement and having fun.

How is this accomplished? There are probably as many mentoring styles as there are personality types and no one can be everything to one person. Each DO-IT protégé benefits from contact with several *Mentors*. The challenge and fun of mentoring is developing your own personal style for sharing the special strengths and skills you have to offer.

Following are a few suggestions for getting started and staying active as a *DO-IT Mentor*. DO-IT staff welcome your ideas for suggestions to pass on to future *Mentors*. Happy Mentoring!

Getting Started
- Introduce yourself and get to know each of your protégés. Mention personal, career, and education interests, disability and involvement with science, technology, engineering, and math.
- Explore interests with protégés by asking questions, promoting discussion, and providing resources (especially those accessible on the Internet).
- Facilitate contact between students and people with shared interests or resources (e.g., professors, professionals, personal).

- Encourage participation in DO-IT events, and try to attend when possible. *Mentor-*protégé relationships benefit from face-to-face contact!
- Remember that developing meaningful relationships takes time. Give yourself and your protégé a chance to get to know one another by actively participating in each other's lives.

Staying Active
All *Mentors* are volunteers, and we know that it takes a lot of time. The following are some guidelines to follow when considering whether you have the time and the willingness to be a *DO-IT Mentor*.
- Log on at least once per week and read and respond to email messages.
- Respond to every personal message sent to you by DO-IT participants or staff.
- Send email messages to the entire doitchat or doitsem lists at least once every four weeks.
- Send a greeting to new DO-IT participants.
- Communicate with other *Mentors*; act as a resource when possible.
- Attend DO-IT events whenever possible and encourage other DO-IT participants to attend events.

Keeping Our Young People Safe
The Internet is a sea filled with adventure. By sailing the waters we can explore the world, unlock mysteries, and meet new people. But like any sea it has dangerous elements as well. Safety is an important issue for anyone using the Internet but even more so for minors. It is important that we teach our young people how to identify potential danger and avoid it.

DO-IT promotes group mentoring, where groups of *Mentors* and protégés discuss ideas and a DO-IT staff member is always part of the discussion. Participants are told not to give out personal information to people they do not already know and not to respond to electronic messages that they receive from anyone if they are not comfortable with the content. They should immediately report offensive or troubling email messages to their parents and DO-IT staff.

For more information about the safety of minors on the Internet we suggest you read the publication *Child Safety on the Information Highway* by Lawrence J. Magid, 1998, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at *www.safekids.com/child_safety.htm*.

Key Electronic Resources
- To contact staff, request electronic copies of *DO-IT NEWS*, request publications, or ask questions about the program, send email to *doit@uw.edu*.
- *DO-IT Mentors* can communicate with each other by sending a message to *mentors@uw.edu*.
- The entire group of *DO-IT Mentors*, *Pals*, and *Scholars* can be reached by sending a message to *doitchat@uw.edu*.
- To discuss issues pertaining to individuals with disabilities and their pursuit of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) academic programs and careers, send messages to *doitsem@uw.edu*.

Remember Your Netiquette
- Be respectful of your protégé and their communication and personality style. Ask if there is a way to accommodate them in the way you communicate.
- Avoid covering several topics in one message. Instead, send several messages so the receiver can respond to each topic separately.
- Use mixed upper and lower case letters. Avoid using control characters or special keys.
- Begin text with the real name of the person to whom you're writing and end the text of your message with your real name.
- Include all pertinent parts of the email message to which you are replying.
- Do not use words others might find offensive and avoid personal attacks or name-calling.
- Do not participate in conversations that would not be acceptable to the parents of your protégé or DO-IT staff. Remember that *DO-IT Scholars* and *Pals* are minors!
- Do not engage in conversations that you are not comfortable with. Immediately report offensive or troubling email messages that you receive to the DO-IT Director.
- Remember that an email message is easy for recipients to forward to others and, therefore, is not appropriate for very personal messages—it's more like a postcard than a sealed letter.
- Take advantage of the spell check feature.
- Review what you've written BEFORE you send it.

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

For more information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, request materials in an alternate format, or to make comments or suggestions about DO-IT publications or web pages, contact:

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Burgstahler, S. (1997). Peer support: What role can the Internet play? *Journal of Information Technology and Disabilities, 4*(4). *easi.cc/itd/volume4/number4/article2.html*.

Burgstahler, S., & Cronheim, D. (1999). Opening doors through mentoring: One program's experiences using the Internet. *Journal of Information Technology and Disabilities, 6*(1-2). *easi.cc/itd/volume6/number1/article7.html*.

Burgstahler, S., & Cronheim, D. (2001). Supporting peer-peer and mentor-protege relationships on the Internet. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 34*(1), pp. 59-74.

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