

Guidance for Postgraduate Mentorship and Professional Support

School psychologists, regardless of their employment setting (e.g., schools, academia, clinics, or agencies) or career stage (e.g., novice, intermediate, advanced), can benefit from professional support and mentorship. Ideally, school psychologists have access to a professional support¹ relationship that supplements and is distinct from an administrative supervisory relationship. Such mentoring relationships involve guidance, coaching, or counseling provided by a more experienced person to a less experienced person (Leonard & Hilgert, 2004). These interactions can provide emotional support and serve as a protective factor against burnout (Newman, 2020) and help with time management, establishing professional boundaries, identifying or changing a career trajectory, managing relationships, and fostering professional skills and competencies, as well as creating a foundation to become supervisors or mentors in the future (Harvey & Struzziero, 2008). Provision of support benefits mentors as well through career enhancement, professional growth, and a sense of giving back to the field (Canter et al., 2012). Such efforts also qualify for continuing professional development credits toward renewal of a credential such as the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential. It is important to note that postgraduate professional support differs substantially from practicum and internship supervision (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of Pregraduate Supervision and Postgraduate Mentorship/Professional Support

Practicum or Internship Supervision	Postgraduate Professional Support
Supervisor assumes direct responsibility and liability for the supervisee’s work.	Mentee holds a credential and assumes responsibility and liability. Mentor does not assume any responsibility or liability.
Supervision is evaluative and is typically structured as a requirement by the graduate preparation program and/or the field site.	The mentor does not hold evaluative authority over the mentee.
Required average of at least 2 hours per full-time week of field-based supervision.	Recommended minimum average of 1 hour per week.
Must receive at least weekly, individual, face-to-face supervision, which may include real-time secure video conferencing (NASP, 2020).	May receive mentorship entirely in a group and/or through virtual technologies.

NASP supports access to supervision for school psychologists at all levels of career development to ensure effective practice (NASP, 2018). Although supervisors are usually responsible for their supervisees’ work and supervision is often defined by some type of formal evaluation of performance, it is important to recognize that professional support and mentoring relationships do not include a monitoring or evaluative component, and the mentor does not assume any responsibility or liability for the work of the mentee.²

Mentorship and professional support is particularly important for school psychologists who are entering the workforce, who must quickly learn to navigate increased responsibilities and expectations, typically without the supports previously provided by field-based and university supervisors. Many early career school psychologists may have limited opportunities to communicate, consult, or interact with other school psychologists. Others may avoid asking for regular support to avoid being viewed as burdensome or less competent. Having an identified, established, and collegial mentorship or supervision relationship after completing formal graduate preparation may help alleviate such barriers to accessing support and improve the transition from student to professional (Silva et al.,

¹ This guidance document uses the term mentorship interchangeably with postgraduate professional support.

² For more on professional supervision, see the NASP position statement on Supervision in School Psychology (NASP, 2018).

2014). Mentoring can be particularly important for supporting female and culturally diverse professionals, both in the early career years and beyond (Newman, 2020).

The following guidance is intended to help structure effective professional support and mentorship relationships. None of the guidance provided should be construed as requirements or enforceable regulations. Additionally, all school psychologists, regardless of setting, stage in career, or NCSP status, are encouraged to participate in professional support activities and use this guidance accordingly.

1. Effective school psychology mentors possess the appropriate qualifications and characteristics for effective mentorship.

- 1.1 Mentors have at least 3 years of professional experience in school psychology, ideally within a similar employment setting or role as the mentee.
- 1.2 Mentors maintain the credentials and/or qualifications necessary to practice or work in the setting in which they are employed.
- 1.3 Mentors demonstrate a commitment to providing professional support.
- 1.4 Mentors display and encourage exemplary professional work characteristics, consistent with NASP standards, by engaging in and promoting ethical, culturally responsive, and evidence-based practice.
- 1.5 Mentors engage in self-reflection and self-care, and they practice only within the boundaries of their competence.
- 1.6 Ideally, mentors work or practice within the same district, employment setting, or state as the mentee, although this is not necessary for effective mentorship.
- 1.7 Ideally, a mentor is not a direct supervisor and does not have formal administrative or evaluative authority over the mentee.

2. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships are organized around a mentorship agreement.

- 2.1 Together, mentors and mentees develop a written agreement prior to the onset of mentorship that clarifies expectations, outlines responsibilities, and identifies methods of support and feedback. NASP has an adaptable [mentorship agreement](#) to support these efforts.
- 2.2 Components of effective mentorship agreements may include:
 - Planned timelines and methods of communication, including use of technology, if applicable;
 - Strategies for managing canceled meetings;
 - Goals and progress monitoring strategies;
 - Boundaries and limitations of the professional support relationship; and
 - Identification of a primary mentor in cases where multiple mentors will provide professional support.

3. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships include clearly delineated roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both the mentor and mentee.

Mentee roles and responsibilities

- 3.1 Mentees recognize the supportive, as opposed to authoritative and evaluative, nature of the arrangement.
- 3.2 Mentees maintain responsibility for their own actions; they seek professional support and feedback from the mentor, yet remain autonomous in their professional functions and decision making.
- 3.3 Mentees engage in self-reflection, actively seeking understanding of their professional needs and seeking out appropriate resources to meet those needs.
- 3.4 Mentees act as critical consumers during the course of the mentorship experience; they ask questions and seek clarification, pursue professional development, and ultimately work to promote a mutually beneficial relationship.

Mentor roles and responsibilities

- 3.5 Mentors agree to provide professional support to the mentee and recognize the supportive, as opposed to authoritative and evaluative, nature of the relationship.
- 3.6 Mentors encourage adherence to ethical principles in complex situations, promote ethical development of the mentee, and ensure the relationship remains non-exploitative.

- 3.7 Mentors promote a strong relationship with the mentee by demonstrating a commitment to professional growth and emotional support of mentee, engaging in collaborative problem-solving, and working to establish mutual trust.
- 3.8 Mentors promote a safe environment for discussion by using nonjudgmental and supportive feedback.
- 3.9 Mentors solicit feedback from mentees on their performance as mentors.
- 4. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships are guided by clearly articulated goals.**
 - 4.1 Mentors and mentees work collaboratively to set both short- and long-term goals for the development of the mentee's knowledge and skills.
 - 4.2 Mentors and mentees document goals in writing at the start of the mentorship experience.
 - 4.3 Mentors and mentees periodically review progress toward goals throughout the mentorship experience, and they revise goals as needed to reflect mentee development.
- 5. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships include documentation of the content of meetings and progress toward goals.**
 - 5.1 Mentors regularly provide constructive feedback to the mentee.
 - 5.2 Mentors and mentees maintain appropriate notes regarding the content of mentoring sessions and the mentoring process to facilitate the assessment of mentee growth over time.
 - 5.3 Summative feedback (i.e., mid- and end-of-year feedback) is provided to the mentee to allow for self-reflection and ongoing assessment of progress and professional development.
 - 5.4 Summative feedback should be separate and exclusive from any performance evaluation of the mentee from direct supervisors or administrators.
- 6. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships are maintained through regularly, yet flexibly, scheduled contact.**
 - 6.1 At the outset of the relationship, mentors and mentees jointly determine a mutually acceptable schedule for mentoring meetings and address the extent to which contact between scheduled meetings is expected.
 - 6.2 Technology (e.g., phone, e-mail, videoconference) is used ethically and appropriately to facilitate regular contact between mentors and mentees (see Sections 9 and 10).
- 7. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships can occur individually or in a group setting.**
 - 7.1 At the outset of the relationship, mentors and mentees agree on whether an individual or group format, or a combination of the two, will provide the best setting for professional support.
 - 7.2 When mentoring multiple mentees in a group setting, mentors take steps to ensure they have the available time and resources to provide sufficient professional support and constructive feedback to all mentees.
 - 7.3 When participating in professional support within a group setting, mentors and mentees attend to all ethical obligations, including respect for clients' and mentees' rights to privacy and confidentiality (see Section VIII).
- 8. Effective and high-quality school psychology mentorship relationships respect both ethical principles and legal regulations.**
 - 8.1 Mentors and mentees are familiar with legal and ethical obligations regarding confidentiality, and mentors take steps to support mentees' ongoing development and understanding of challenges with respect to the protection of confidentiality rights.
 - 8.2 Mentors and mentees are familiar with relevant privacy laws applicable in the jurisdiction in which the mentee is practicing, and to the best of their ability, mentors support mentees in developing their understanding and application of such laws.
 - 8.3 When using technology to facilitate professional support, both mentors and mentees engage in best practices to ensure the protection of the confidentiality and privacy rights of all parties involved (see Section X).
 - 8.4 Mentees maintain client confidentiality unless the mentee or mentor can establish a legitimate need to know within the context of the mentorship relationship.

- 8.5 Mentors provide professional support and feedback, yet remain free from any liability for the mentee's actions. Signing of case documentation or reports does not occur during mentorship, as mentees remain autonomous in and responsible for their professional functions.

9. Remote or virtual postgraduate mentorship considers both familiarity with and effectiveness of various technologies.

- 9.1 A mentorship agreement should address whether technology will be used for remote mentorship, and how the mentor can be reliably contacted by the mentee.
- 9.2 Any telecommunications software and/or hardware used should be up to date and current.
- 9.3 Audio-visual communications, such as in videoconferencing, is preferred over audio or written communication, because it can more accurately convey nonverbal communication.
- 9.4 Written communication, such as e-mail and texting, should only be used as a supplement to audio-visual communication.

10. Remote or virtual postgraduate mentorship considers relevant legal and ethical principles when using technology.

- 10.1 All remote communication methods used to discuss individual students or families should comply with state and national laws. Particular focus should be on the federal laws of FERPA and HIPAA.
- 10.2 Any confidential or personally identifiable information, including notes and summative evaluations of the mentorship, is properly encrypted when stored, sent, or received.
- 10.3 Mentors and mentees meet from locations where any communication cannot be seen or overheard by people outside of the mentorship arrangement.

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