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information for your life



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EXERCISE AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

You already know that regular physical activity is good for your body and your health. But did you know that exercise can also boost and protect your mental wellbeing? You don't need to be a marathon runner or a gym rat. Even moderate exercise such as walking or yoga a few times a week can help your body and your mind.

Key Mental Health Benefits of Physical Activity

- **Improved mood**—Exercise triggers the release of endorphins and other "feel good" chemicals in your brain. That's why people tend to feel calmer and more content after being physically active.
- **Reduced stress**—In addition to triggering the release of mood-lifting chemicals in your brain, exercise reduces the concentration of stress-related hormones in your body and helps relax muscles that have grown tight with tension.
- **Greater resilience**—With regular exercise, people tend to respond more calmly and with more resilience when faced with stressful situations.
- **Boost in self-confidence and self-esteem**—Adopting and sticking with a routine of regular physical activity can make you feel good about yourself. As your health and sense of wellbeing improve, that confidence and self-esteem will continue to grow.
- **Better sleep**—Exercise gives you a comfortable feeling of tiredness at the end of the day and helps you sleep well through the night.
- **Greater focus and concentration**—Physical activity stimulates the flow of blood to the brain and promotes the growth of new brain cells. Even a brief exercise break can sharpen your thinking.

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EXERCISE AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

- **More energy**—Exercise gives you a natural energy boost that can last for hours.
- **Reduced symptoms of depression**—Studies show that regular physical activity can be as effective as antidepressant medication in treating the symptoms of mild to moderate depression. Exercise can also help to break a cycle of negative thought patterns.
- **Relief from anxiety**—The mood-lifting and stress-reducing effects of exercise can help to relieve anxiety. This benefit can be enhanced if you pay attention to the rhythm of your exercise in a mindful way, taking your focus off your worries.

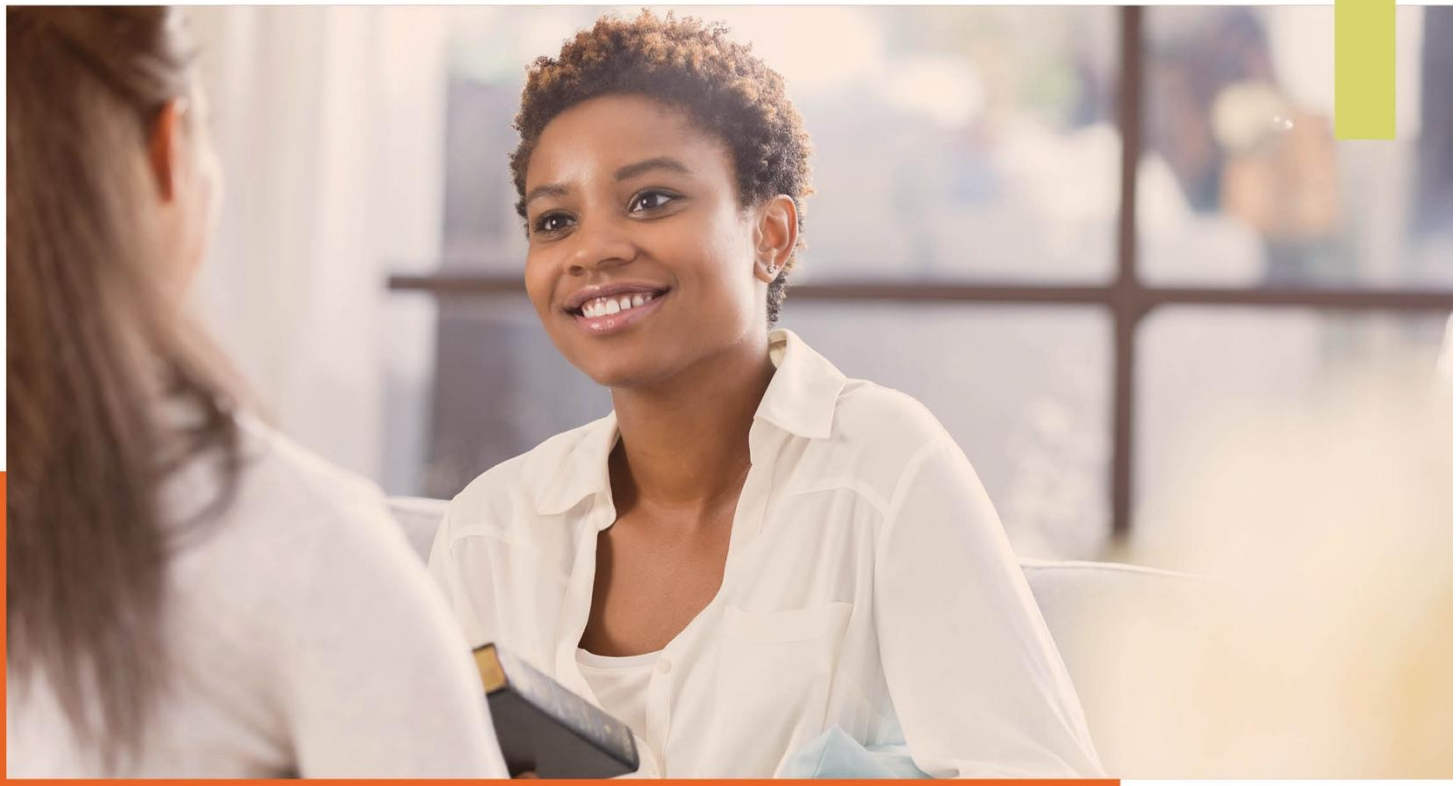
Ways to Enhance the Mental Health Benefits of Physical Activity

- **Exercise outdoors.** The positive effects of exercise are even stronger when you're active outside, especially in natural surroundings where you see plants, trees, or water. People who exercise outdoors are also more likely to sustain the activity as a beneficial habit.
- **Make it a social activity.** Take a walk with a friend, join an exercise group, or play a sport with others. Combining exercise with social connections multiplies the mental wellbeing benefit.

If You Have a Medical or Mental Health Condition or a Physical Disability

- If you have a medical condition or a disability that constrains your physical activity, talk to your doctor about the safest and healthiest ways to get regular exercise.
- If you have an eating disorder, talk with your doctor about your exercise plans and habits, and how those might affect your problems with food and body image. You may need to be careful to avoid over-exercise as a form of self-harm.
- If you experience panic attacks, understand that some of the natural and positive effects of exercise, such as increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and sweating, can feel similar to the symptoms of a panic attack. If the activity makes you feel more anxious rather than less, try a gentler activity in a more comfortable environment.
- If you feel depressed, it can be hard to muster the energy to exercise, even if you know it will be helpful to you. Start with small steps at times of day when you have the most energy. Focus on activities you enjoy. Allow yourself to feel your mind clear and your body relax as you become active. Reward yourself for progress.

Morgan, H. (2024, November 13). *Exercise and your mental health* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



PRACTICING MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

Mindful communication happens when you are truly present in the moment. It involves entering a conversation with curiosity, kindness, and compassion. You listen to your conversational partner with an open, nonjudgmental heart. You speak with intention, emotional intelligence, and honesty, and without harsh language or gossip-driven speech.

Challenges of Mindful Communication

Here are just a few things that make mindful communication difficult:

- Coming to a conversation with a predetermined outcome in mind
- Hearing what you expect to hear rather than what is actually being said
- Having difficulty expressing emotions
- Lacking attention skills
- Wanting to get your own thoughts or position expressed first, instead of listening to the other person
- Getting caught up in gossip and disruptive conversations
- Forgetting to be compassionate toward the other person
- Being preoccupied with internal chatter
- Having the tendency to want to fix other people's problems instead of just listening

Practice this.

First, understand why you want to improve your communication. Is the reason authentic and real, or a guise to make you "look better"? Mindful communication has the potential to bring harmony into relationships if it's genuine. At work, mindful

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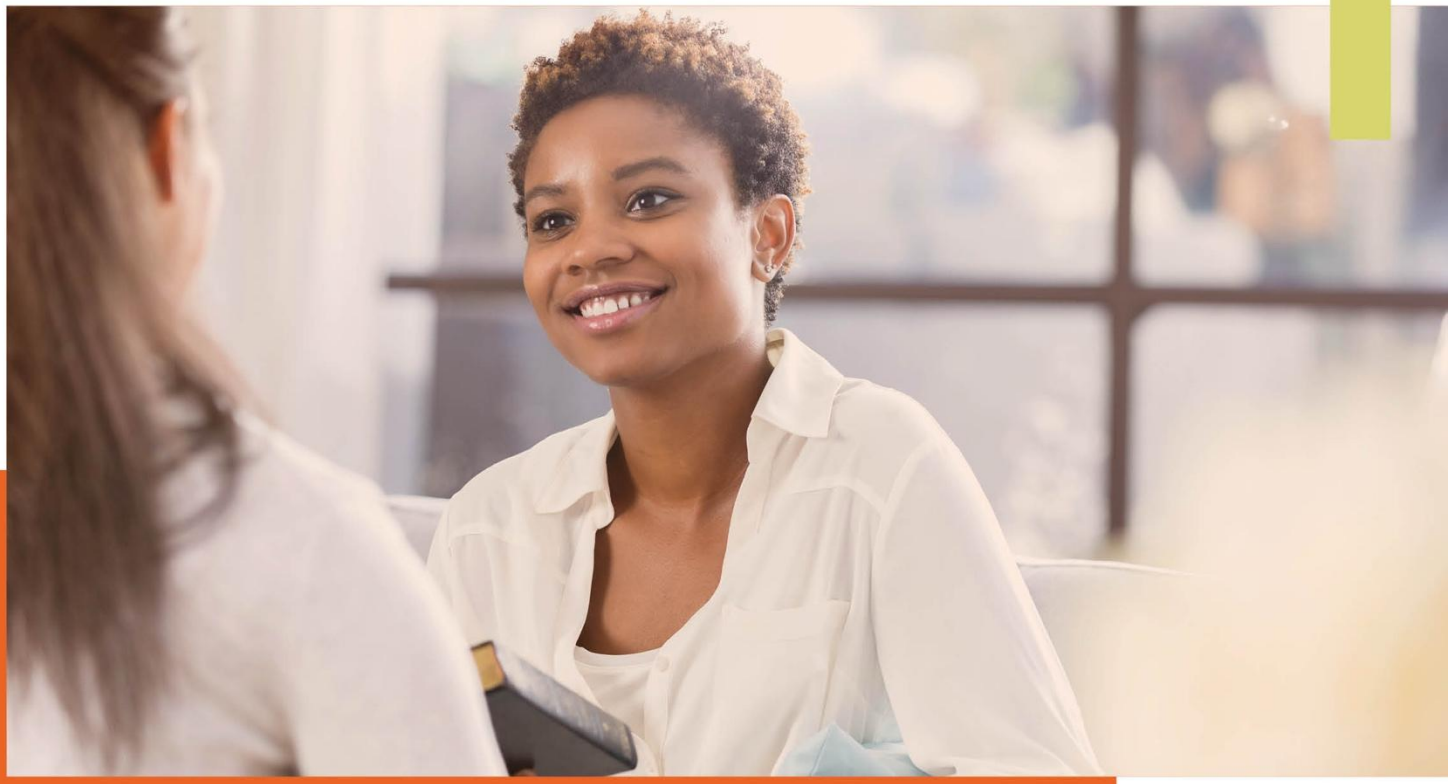

PRACTICING MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

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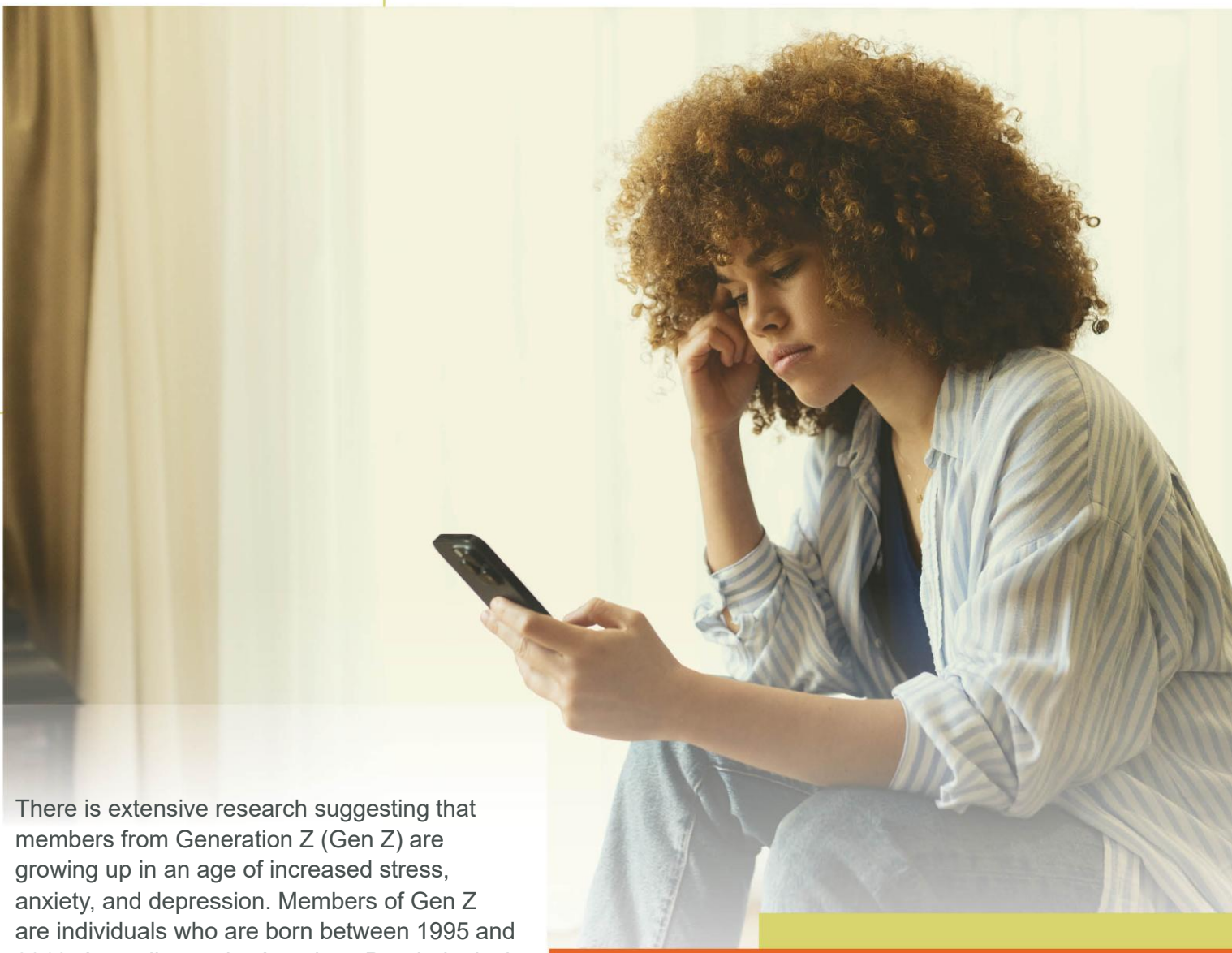
communication can help you think on your feet, seek out information in a collaborative manner, help you resolve conflict in ways that help all parties be heard, and encourage transparency about processes. All of these things will improve relationships and enhance productivity.

Second, limit distractions whenever possible—turn away from your computer, turn toward the speaker, turn off the television, put your book down, and so on. Set an intention to listen attentively to someone at work and at home without interrupting, asking questions, agreeing, or otherwise inserting any speech. Attempt to only listen for the first three to five minutes of the conversation before providing feedback or asking questions. Notice what happens inside you when you just listen, and notice how the other person responds.

Finally, practice pausing before you speak. Take one deep full breath, and consider what is about to come out of your mouth before you say anything. Ask before giving someone your advice. Remember, people really just want to be heard, and not everyone is looking for answers. Always bring your empathy to every conversation.

Workplace Options AWARE & Schuette, B. (Ed.). (Revised 2024). *Practicing mindful communication*. London: Author.



MENTAL HEALTH AND GEN Z

There is extensive research suggesting that members from Generation Z (Gen Z) are growing up in an age of increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Members of Gen Z are individuals who are born between 1995 and 2010. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a mere 45 percent of Gen Z report that their mental health is very good or excellent.[1] This is particularly concerning, especially when all other generations (e.g. Millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers) fare significantly better.[2] So, what is the main cause of this and what are some practical strategies to be done about it?

Impact of Social Media and The "Tech Age"

Many would argue that the impact of social media and the influence of the "tech age" is the main detriment for poor mental health. Gen Z has grown up in an age of phones, high-speed internet, and the creation of various social media platforms. Consuming too much social media has been shown to exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety. However, it could be argued the real pressure comes from unrealistic expectations and creating the ideal "persona" online. Some members of Gen Z are constantly striving to construct an idealistic version of themselves online. Celebrities and influencers constantly reinforce the "perfect" life without any shortcomings. Comparing themselves to these unrealistic expectations creates issues with self-identity, which perpetuates poor mental health.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND GEN Z

Impact of COVID-19

Another factor impacting mental health is the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 had a profound impact on all generations; however, some would argue that Gen Z was hit the heaviest. Tasked with finishing schooling during a pandemic as well as changes in learning environments (e.g. studying online) placed an enormous amount of pressure on them to achieve. Furthermore, some students found it difficult to retain information when learning online and would have preferred a more interactive and face-to-face environment. As a result, some students didn't achieve the grades they needed to get into the college or higher education of their choice. In addition to this, those who finished studying may have been tasked with finding a job during the pandemic. Limited job opportunities and entering a volatile job market after the pandemic added additional challenges to new graduates searching employment during that time. This uncertainty increased the risk of developing mental health problems, as those affected may have felt frustrated, angry, or that they weren't given a fair opportunity.

What can be done to improve mental health for Gen Z?

So, what can be done about it? Well, there are a few things…

- First, it is important to open up to someone close to you when you are struggling. This may be a teacher, parent, or good friend who can support you to seek out the help and support you need.
- Secondly, it is important to identify simple self-care strategies. Often, when you feel low or anxious, you avoid activities that you once found pleasure in. Forcing yourself to go for that walk, meditate, or journal is very important. Think about these things as an obligation for your own mental health and wellbeing.
- Thirdly, consult with a mental health specialist. It is important that if you are feeling anxious or depressed that you seek support as soon as possible. Having someone explore your situation from an objective point of view as well as guide you through evidence-based strategies is very important.

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BE A GREAT MENTOR



If you've mastered skills in your career, gained maturity in your dealings with coworkers or as a manager, and experienced the joys of professional accomplishment, chances are you've had some help along the way from generous friends and associates. If you're lucky, you've been given a boost at some point by a mentor.

Now that you're in a position to help others by sharing your knowledge and insights, why not be a mentor yourself? Mentorship is a way of paying it forward: acknowledging those who've helped you in the past—not by repaying them, but by extending that same sort of generous support and guidance to others.

What is a mentor?

A mentor is a trusted advisor, often someone with expertise in a professional field who helps a less experienced colleague navigate work, learn new skills, and take on greater responsibility. A mentor can also provide support and guidance outside of work—to a child or teenager, for example, a younger friend, or a new immigrant.

Why be a mentor?

The benefits of mentorship to the mentee are obvious. Having a knowledgeable ally can help in focusing efforts on learning and skill development, choosing among new challenges to gain valuable experience, gaining maturity in dealing with other people, and making important life decisions.

The benefits to the mentor are real, too. Mentorship is a way to leave a legacy. As a mentor, you share hard-won lessons so they can be passed on. That's good for your organization, your professional field, and your community. On an emotional level, it feels good to help another person succeed. That's probably the biggest benefit of all.

How to Be a Great Mentor

- **Treat your mentee with respect.** Each mentorship is a different relationship, built around the unique personality, strengths, and goals of your mentee and the experience and expertise you have to offer. If it's a good match, you have something to share that your mentee will find valuable. However, don't assume it's what you want to share or that the path the mentee chooses will be the path you would choose for them. Spend time up front talking about the mentee's hopes and aspirations, ways you might help, and how you'd like to work together. Once you agree on

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BE A GREAT MENTOR

time commitments for the relationship, honor them, no matter how busy you are. Be fully present whenever you meet with your mentee—no checking emails or messages and no interruptions.

- **Listen and ask questions.** As the mentor, you may be the expert, but you're not the boss in this relationship. You're in a supporting role, and you need to let your mentee take the lead. Ask questions to get to know your mentee as a person and to understand the challenges and obstacles they are facing and the areas in which they would like to grow. Then listen, without interrupting. Use active listening skills, repeating back what you have heard to confirm that you've understood. Take notes so that you remember the key points your mentee is sharing. Only when you've heard and understood should you begin to offer guidance.
- **Take a genuine interest in your mentee as a person.** A good mentor is a confidant and guide in life, not just in work. Build a caring and trusting relationship with your mentee, one in which it feels safe to talk about emotions, fears, and setbacks, not just accomplishments and successes. Show that you care when your mentee is struggling and that you're happy for and proud of them when things are going well.
- **Give honest feedback in a caring way.** If you think your mentee has taken a misstep or has a gap in their skill set, let them know. People can't learn from their mistakes or shore up their weaknesses if they aren't aware of them. One way to do this kindly is to share a story from your own experience, where you took a similar misstep and felt the consequences or when you became aware of a self-improvement need and found ways to address it. Balance constructive criticism with encouraging praise for your mentee's strengths and positive actions.
- **Guide; don't steer.** Don't solve every problem for your mentee. Instead, help guide them to their own solutions by asking questions and drawing out their thoughts. If you over-help, you can actually get in the way of your mentee's learning and growth. Let your mentee make the decisions, too, especially about important life and career choices. What seems right to you might not suit the personality and ambitions of your mentee. A good mentor helps a mentee find and follow their own path—even if that path takes them to another organization or into a different field.
- **Lead by example.** Be a positive role model for your mentee. Show how to handle conflict in productive ways, how to overcome obstacles and handle setbacks, how to communicate to understand and be understood, and how to maintain high ethical standards in everything you do. Know that your mentee is learning more from what you do and how you act than from what you say. Pass your wisdom on through your behavior.

Being a great mentor takes practice and patience, but the rewards can be huge. You'll have the satisfaction of helping another person succeed in life, and you may become a better person in the process.

Morgan, H. (Reviewed 2025 [Ed.]). *Be a great mentor* (B. Schuette & Z. Meeker, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.