

VIRTUAL MENTORING GUIDELINES

A GUIDE TO SCIENCE OLYMPIAD MENTORING

Mentorship is an important part of the Science Olympiad experience. However, like many elements of the Science Olympiad this year, mentorship will look different in a remote or virtual environment. The following guidelines from the National Office are offered to help make virtual mentoring safer for all involved.

Establishing a Virtual Mentoring Program

Science Olympiad mentorship typically occurs when mentors work with students at their schools. In this environment, teachers are present and aware that there are outside volunteers interacting with their students. These same principles apply to virtual mentoring.

Virtual Mentors who want to mentor Science Olympiad students are required to first contact the Science Olympiad Coach affiliated with the students' school. Once this contact has been made, the Virtual Mentor should develop a plan with the Coach to determine what format works best for the Coach (platform, time of day, number of students) and also meets the school's volunteer guidelines. The format and guidelines will look different based on each school. Some schools will require background checks, parent/guardian permission slips, and/or teacher presence while mentoring. Schools will likely also have rules about recording mentoring sessions. **Virtual Mentors must follow the school's volunteer guidelines for remote or virtual interactions with all students.** If the coach is not able to provide guidance, please contact the Science Olympiad National Office. When talking to the team Coach, please ask about typical student access to technology, as there are some families and some areas of the country that have limited access to the internet and devices.

More on Youth Protection

Science Olympiad is committed to ensuring that **everyone is safe** - the students Virtual Mentors are working with, as well as you, the Virtual Mentor volunteer. Virtual Mentors should avoid any situations where the Virtual Mentor is alone with a student - even if this is during an online or virtual mentoring session - even if the school's policy allows this type of interaction. Virtual Mentors do not want to be put in a situation that could potentially expose a Virtual Mentor to allegations from a student of misconduct (e.g., inappropriate behavior, harassment, bullying, or any type of sexual misconduct, etc.).

In some situations, Virtual Mentors may be considered a mandated reporter*. In general, a mandated report means that a Virtual Mentor is legally obligated to report suspected harm (e.g., suspected abuse in the home, student disclosure of self-harm, etc.). Please speak with the Coach or another school representative regarding whether you, as a Virtual Mentor are a mandated reporter, and any other reporting guidance.

Please remember that when working with young people, Virtual Mentors are in a position of power. As such, the Virtual Mentor is responsible to ensure that the entities that you represent, including yourself, your school, employer, or organization, put **youth protection and safety above everything else.**

Examples of what Virtual Mentoring Could Look Like

- **Large group format:** You visit an online team session led by the team coach (ex. Zoom meeting)
 - Examples: guest speaker on event study/preparation tips, panelist on a discussion on making college decisions, create a Kahoot quiz that the whole team takes together to review science concepts.
- **Small group format:** You work with more than one student on a specific topic, along with the team coach or a school staff member
 - Examples: Create a Kahoot quiz or other practice test on a particular Science Olympiad event and discuss answers, lead a small group training or discussion on an SO event in a Zoom room, Slack group (maintained by the coach), or similar discussion platform
- **Pre-recorded support session:** You use video, audio, or PowerPoint to explain a topic
 - Examples: students could submit topics or questions that they'd like you to address, you record your answers, and the team coach reviews the content before sharing out to the group

Tips for Virtual Mentoring

- Be aware of the effect of the pandemic on the lives of your mentees. Effects may be different in different communities and different families. Be patient.
- Maintain a professional demeanor, including a neutral wardrobe and background. Use a blank virtual background, if possible, and encourage your mentees to do the same to maintain privacy.
- Be consistent - show up on time, stay focused on the task, end on time.
- Use a variety of tools to help students: select videos to screen together, virtual whiteboards, shared documents, interesting "homework" assignments, and/or games.

Lastly, Science Olympiad would like to thank you for your dedication and tenacity during this time. Your commitment to our Science Olympiad students represents a core value of the organization. We are grateful.

Resources

***Mandated reporters** are legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the relevant authorities. As a volunteer in an education setting, you might be a mandated reporter. These laws are in place to prevent children from being abused and to end any possible abuse or neglect at the earliest possible stage.

Additional reading:

- [Mentoring Remotely During Disruption](https://gradschool.cornell.edu/mentoring-remotely-during-disruption) (gradschool.cornell.edu)
- [Coronavirus Tips and Resources for Mentoring](https://mentoring.org/coronavirus-tips-and-resources-for-mentoring) (mentoring.org)
- [State Statutes Search for Mandated Reporting Laws](https://childwelfare.gov/statutes/) (childwelfare.gov)

