

Effective Communication Strategies in Mentorship



ISAPS® Mentor Program

This resource is designed to help mentors and mentees build strong communication skills for an effective, respectful, and supportive mentoring relationship. Communication is the foundation of mentorship - when done well, it promotes trust, clarity, learning, and professional growth.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN MENTORSHIP

In aesthetic plastic surgery, clear and thoughtful communication can mean the difference between confidence and confusion, safety and risk. In mentorship, it's essential for:

- Setting clear expectations
- Sharing complex clinical knowledge
- Providing and receiving feedback
- Addressing misunderstandings
- Encouraging reflection and growth

ACTIVE LISTENING: THE FIRST STEP TO UNDERSTANDING

Active listening is more than just hearing - it's about fully engaging with your mentoring partner to understand their perspective.

Key Techniques:

- Be Present
 - Eliminate distractions (mute phone, close laptop)
- Use Encouraging Body Language
 - Nod, maintain eye contact, stay open
- Don't Interrupt
 - Let the speaker finish before responding
- Summarize and Reflect Back
 - "So what I hear you saying is..."
- Ask Open-Ended Questions:
 - "What were you hoping would happen in that situation?"



Mentor Tip: Ask your mentee, "How did you feel after that consultation?" Then simply listen. This helps them process and builds trust.

PROVIDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback is vital for growth but must be given with care - especially in high-pressure surgical training environments.

Effective Feedback is:

- Specific - “Your explanation of the risks was clear,” not “You were good.”
- Balanced – Start with a strength, then a suggestion for improvement
- Actionable – Focus on what can be changed (“Try using visuals when explaining procedure options.”)
- Timely – Give feedback soon after the event
- Respectful – Focus on the action, not the person



Mentee Tip: Ask your mentor: “Could you give me feedback on how I handled that patient concern? What would you have done differently?”

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Sometimes the mentor or mentee will need to raise a concern - maybe about reliability, a misunderstanding, or misaligned expectations.

How to Approach Sensitive Topics:

- Use “I” Statements – “I felt unsure when...” rather than “You didn’t...”
- Stick to Facts – Avoid assumptions or emotional exaggeration
- Stay Calm – Delay the conversation if emotions are high
- Focus on Solutions – “How can we move forward from this?”

Example: If a mentor feels the mentee isn’t following through: “I’ve noticed some of our agreed follow-ups haven’t been completed. Is there something getting in the way that I can help with?”

ADAPTING ACROSS CULTURES AND STYLES

The ISAPS community is global, and mentors/mentees may differ in communication norms.

Cultural Sensitivity Tips:

- Be aware of language barriers - ask for clarification
- Understand that directness vs. politeness varies by culture
- Avoid idioms or jargon that may not translate
- Clarify expectations around tone, timing, and decision-making



Tip: Discuss communication preferences in your initial meeting (e.g., frequency, formality, feedback style).

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Assuming understanding without checking
- Overloading meetings with too many topics
- Avoiding conflict altogether
- Being overly critical without encouragement

PRACTICAL TOOLS TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

Use these ISAPS Mentor Program resources to stay on track:

- [Mentorship Agreement Template](#)
 - To align expectations from the beginning
- [Meeting Agenda & Notes Template](#) –
 - To plan and reflect
- [Progress Tracking Log](#) –
 - To guide follow-up and check-ins

Activities to Develop Effective Communication Strategies in Mentorship:

Activity	Purpose	Who Leads
Role-Reversal Scenario – Mentor and mentee switch roles to simulate a difficult conversation (e.g., delivering critical feedback, responding to a complaint)	Build empathy and refine communication skills	Both
Feedback Roundtable – After a mentoring session or observation, mentor gives feedback, then mentee gives feedback on the mentor's mentoring style	Promote two-way communication and trust	Both
Check-In Routine – Begin each session with a structured check-in: “How are you? What’s one thing you learned this week? One thing you found challenging?”	Encourage open communication and emotional intelligence	Mentee
Tone & Language Reflection – Review an email, case note, or presentation and discuss how tone, word choice, and structure affect communication	Raise awareness of subtle communication elements	Mentor
Communication Goal-Setting – Set a communication improvement goal for the next meeting (e.g., “I want to work on concise case summaries” or “I want to practise pausing before answering questions”)	Support deliberate communication practice	Mentee

FINAL THOUGHTS

Communication is a skill, not a trait - it improves with practice and reflection. In mentorship, the way you speak, listen, and engage is just as important as what you teach or learn.

Both mentors and mentees should aim to:

- Be curious - not judgmental
- Be kind - not passive
- Be clear - not vague

By focusing on communication, you build a stronger, more successful mentoring relationship - and become a better surgeon and professional in the process.