

Navigating Cross-Cultural Mentoring Relationships

Building mutual understanding and success across diverse backgrounds



ISAPS is a truly global community. Mentorship between individuals of different cultures, languages, or backgrounds is **enriching - but it also requires care and awareness**. This guide supports mentors and mentees in creating respectful, culturally sensitive partnerships.

WHY CULTURAL AWARENESS MATTERS

- Builds trust and inclusion
- Reduces misunderstandings
- Encourages open and equitable exchange of ideas
- Strengthens international collaboration in aesthetic surgery

COMMON CROSS-CULTURAL MENTORING DYNAMICS:

Area	Potential Differences	Tips for Navigating
Communication Style	Some cultures value directness, others prefer indirect feedback	Ask how your partner prefers to receive feedback
Power Distance	Some mentees may be very deferential to authority, others expect collaboration	Clarify roles and create psychological safety
Time Orientation	Punctuality and scheduling expectations can differ	Be explicit about timeframes and check-ins
Learning Style	Some mentees prefer formal structure, others like open dialogue	Discuss and adapt mentoring style accordingly

BUILDING CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN MENTORSHIP

- Start with curiosity, not assumptions
- Ask about communication preferences early
- Be mindful of language differences - avoid idioms or fast speech
- Acknowledge and respect cultural norms without stereotyping

CONVERSATION STARTERS TO BUILD CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

- “What are some things I should know about how feedback is typically shared where you work?”
- “Are there any customs or norms I should be aware of in your training environment?”
- “Do you prefer a formal or casual tone when we talk about goals and progress?”

ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS:

- Builds trust and inclusion
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COMMON CROSS-CULTURAL MENTORING DYNAMICS:

Activity	Purpose	Who Leads
Cultural Exchange Conversation – Each person shares one cultural or professional value that shapes how they work	Builds mutual awareness and respect	Both
Cultural Reflection Journal – Mentee reflects on cultural differences they experience during mentorship	Encourages insight and adaptation	Mentee
Multicultural Case Discussion – Use a case where cultural context influences patient decision-making (e.g., aesthetic norms, consent process)	Discuss ethics, communication, and patient care	Mentor

Mini Glossary: Key Terms for Cross-Cultural Mentoring

- Cultural competence
 - The ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. It involves openness, learning, and respect.
- Cultural humility
 - A lifelong practice of self-reflection and learning, recognizing that we can never fully “master” another culture - but we can stay curious and respectful.
- Power distance
 - A cultural value that reflects how much people accept or expect unequal power dynamics (e.g., mentor seen as authoritative vs collaborative).
- High-context communication
 - Indirect or implicit communication, common in cultures that value politeness or nuance. Meaning is often inferred from tone or context.
- Low-context communication
 - Direct and explicit communication, common in cultures that value clarity, transparency, and efficiency.



Tip: Differences in communication aren't "wrong" - just different. Awareness helps prevent misunderstanding and encourages respect.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Cross-cultural mentorship isn't about avoiding difference - it's about **embracing it as a learning opportunity**. With openness, communication, and mutual respect, these partnerships become some of the most meaningful in the ISAPS global community.