



Peer Mentorship Program

Caregiver Peer Mentor Manual



Stronger Together

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Welcome

Thank you for being willing to serve as a **Caregiver Peer Mentor** with the Brain Injury Association of Nebraska (BIA-NE).

Being a caregiver peer mentor means showing up as yourself. You are not expected to be an expert, a counselor, or a professional. What matters most is that you bring your **lived experience as a caregiver to someone with a brain injury** and your willingness to walk alongside someone else.

This program is built on the idea that healing and growth happen through connection. At its heart, peer mentorship is about **walking the journey together**.

About This Manual

This manual outlines the process of becoming a peer mentor, what to expect once you are a mentor, and guidance on how to problem-solve challenges that may arise. It is intended to be a reference guide rather than a comprehensive manual. This is also meant to complement PowerPoint slides that are sent and reviewed as part of the orientation. A manual is also available for those who are becoming Peer Mentees.

What It Means To Be A Caregiver Peer Mentor

A caregiver peer mentor is someone with lived experience of being a caregiver to someone with a brain injury who is willing to support another person through shared understanding.

As a mentor, you help your mentee feel understood, supported, and less alone. You do this by listening with care, respecting their pace, and sharing parts of your own journey when it feels helpful.

Remember: *You are a peer, not a professional. You don't need to have answers to be helpful.*



What Peer Mentorship Is (And Is Not)

Peer mentorship is a **peer-centered relationship** between two people who have both experienced being a caregiver to an individual with brain injury. The mentor is able to offer insight, support, and practical help based on their own experience. It is a space for listening, understanding, and support.

Peer mentorship is **not**:

- Therapy
- Case Management
- Resource Facilitation
- Crisis support or intervention
- Clinical treatment or medical care
- Advocacy or systems navigation

Your role is to support, not to fix or solve problems.

The Peer Mentor Coordinator can assist if at any point you feel like your match is seeking those types of support from you.

Communication That Builds Trust

Good communication helps you and your mentee feel safe and heard. For the mentor, this often means listening more than talking and allowing space for pauses.

Reflecting back what you hear can be powerful.

Example – Listening Without Fixing:

Mentee: “I just feel helpless, like there is not enough I can do to help my spouse.”

Mentor: “I understand, it is hard to watch them struggle”.

What NOT to Say (Gently):

- “You just need to be more patient.”
- “At least they’re alive.”
- “Everyone feels that way sometimes.”

These responses can feel minimizing, even when meant kindly.



Learning From Shared Experience

Your lived experience matters. Many mentees find it helpful to hear what worked for you and what you learned along the way.

Try to share from your own experience instead of giving advice.

Helpful language includes:

- “What worked for me was...”
- “One thing I learned over time...”

Example – Sharing, Not Advising:

Mentee: “I can’t keep up on all that needs being done and keeping track of all the appointments.”

Mentor: “That’s something I struggled with too. What helped me was using reminders on my phone. Everyone is different, but that worked for me.”

Boundaries and Privacy

Healthy boundaries protect both you and your mentee.

As a mentor, you agree to keep what your mentee shares private and to maintain healthy boundaries at all times. Mentoring is supportive, not therapy or crisis care.

Example – Setting A Boundary:

Mentee: “Can you come over to my house late tonight?”

Mentor: “I really want to support you, but meeting late at night or at home isn’t something I can do. Let’s find another time or meet in a public place.”

Knowing When to Ask for Help

You are not expected to handle everything on your own.

Reach out to the Peer Mentor Coordinator if:

- A conversation feels overwhelming
- You are worried about safety (for yourself or your mentee)
- Your mentee talks about harming themselves or others
- The match no longer feels like a good fit



Examples: When a Mentee's Words May Be a Concern

Sometimes it's not always clear when to reach out. If you hear things like the examples below, it's important to check in with the Program Coordinator.

Examples of concerning language:

- "I don't see the point anymore."
- "I feel like giving up."
- "Nothing is getting better."
- "I'm just really tired of everything."
- "Sometimes I wish I could just disappear."
- "People would be better off without me."
- "I don't want to be here anymore."

You may also notice:

- Big changes in mood or behavior
- Your mentee becoming very withdrawn
- Conversations that feel more intense than usual

Remember: You are not expected to figure this out on your own, and you are not responsible for fixing the situation. If something feels off, that alone is enough reason to reach out.

Program Basics & Housekeeping

Mentors are expected to meet regularly with their mentee, be on time, and communicate if plans need to change. When possible, give at least 24-hour notice.

Meetings that are in person should take place in public spaces. Mentors should not drive mentees or accept rides. Each person pays their own way during outings.

Peer mentoring meetings are safe spaces free from alcohol, drugs, and firearms.

In an emergency, call 911 first, then contact the Peer Mentor Coordinator.

How Long Mentoring Relationships Last

Mentoring matches may last a few months or up to one year. A match may end when someone feels ready to move on, or the match has run its course.

Once a match officially closes, future contact is outside the program and should only continue if both people agree.



Example – Talking About Ending the Match

Mentor: “Our formal mentor pairing is coming to an end. I’ve really appreciated getting to know you.”

Mentee: “Yeah, I’ve appreciated this too.”

Example – If One Person Is Unsure

Mentor: “Our formal mentor pairing is coming to an end. Are you comfortable still staying in touch outside of the program?”

Mentee: “I’m not sure yet.”

Mentor: “That’s completely okay. We don’t have to decide right now. We can leave things here and see how you feel later.”

Example – Asking About Staying in Touch

Mentor: “Our formal mentor pairing is coming to an end. Are you comfortable still staying in touch outside of the program?”

Mentee: “Yes, I’d like that.”

Mentor: “Great. We can stay in touch in a way that feels comfortable for both of us.”

Example – If Someone Prefers Not to Stay in Touch

Mentor: “Our formal mentor pairing is coming to an end. Are you comfortable still staying in touch outside of the program?”

Mentee: “I think I’d rather not stay in touch after the program ends.”

Mentor: “I understand. I’m really glad we had this time together, and I wish you the best moving forward.”

Remember

It is okay if:

- Both people want to stay in touch
- Only one person wants to stay in touch
- Neither person wants to stay in touch

There is **no right or wrong choice**—the goal is to end the relationship in a way that feels respectful and comfortable for both people.

Your Journey as a Caregiver Peer Mentor

What to expect, step by step

This section walks you through what the caregiver peer mentor process looks like—from deciding to apply, to being matched, to staying supported along the way.

Step 1:

Deciding If Mentoring Is Right for You

Before becoming a peer mentor you can complete the optional **Caregiver Mentor Readiness Checklist**. The form is available here: biane.org/fcgmentor_readiness_checklist/

This checklist is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. It is simply a tool to help you reflect on your time, energy, and readiness.

Readiness can change over time. It is okay if now is not the right time. BIA-NE staff are always available to talk things through with you.


 Step
2:

Sharing Your Interest

If you decide you would like to become a peer mentor:

- You will complete a **Caregiver Mentor Interest and Matching Form** available here: biane.org/fcgmentor_interest_form/
- A BIA-NE staff member will reach out to connect with you
- Help is available if forms or technology feel challenging by contacting the program coordinator at: [402-423-2463](tel:402-423-2463) or peer@biane.org.

Need Support?

You do not have to figure this out on your own. Staff are happy to walk through the process with you.


 Step
3:

Conversation and Orientation

Before being matched, you will have:

- A one-on-one conversation with the Peer Mentor Coordinator
- A short orientation (about 30 minutes)

During orientation, you will talk about:

- What caregiver peer mentorship is and is not
- Boundaries and confidentiality
- Safety and support
- What mentoring relationships usually look like

This is also your time to ask questions and share what you are hoping for as a mentor. This helps the Peer Mentor Coordinator learn more about you and find the right match.


 Step
4:

Paperwork and Background Check

To keep everyone safe and supported, you will complete a few required forms. The Program Mentor Coordinator will send you the following forms:

- Abuse and Molestation Policy
- Mentor Agreement & Consent
- Release of Information

A background check is required for all mentors. This is done through the DHHS central registry website. Mentors will receive an email once the request has been submitted by the BIA-NE.

Note: *Having something show up on the background check would not necessarily prevent someone from being able to be a mentor. It may just impact how you are matched.*

Important To Know:

You will not be matched with a mentee until this step is complete.

Step 5:**Being Matched With a Caregiver Mentee**

When you are approved as a mentor:

- BIA-NE staff will thoughtfully match you with a mentee
- Matches are based on comfort, readiness, availability, and communication style
- You will receive information about your match and next steps from the Peer Mentor Coordinator to connect you to your mentee

You Always Have A Choice

If a match does not feel right, you can say no. Your comfort and wellbeing matter.

Step 6:**Check-Ins and Ongoing Support**

BIA-NE stays connected with mentors throughout the match to make sure you feel supported.

You can expect the following check-ins:

About 3 Weeks After the Match Begins

- The Peer Mentor Coordinator checks in to see how things are going
- A chance to ask questions or talk through early concerns
- You will receive an initial survey to complete online to provide feedback on the orientation process

About 4 Months Into the Match

- A check-in for you to discuss with the Peer Mentor Coordinator what is working well and any challenges that may have come up.
- You will receive a short survey to complete online

Around 10 Months (If the Match Continues)

- A conversation about whether the match feels ready to end
- You will receive another survey to complete online
- Support with planning a healthy and respectful closure

Between Check-Ins

You can reach out at any time. You do not need to wait for a scheduled check-in to ask for help.


Step 7:

During the Mentoring Relationship

As a peer mentor, you can expect:

- Regular contact with your mentee at a pace that works for both of you
- Support from the Peer Mentor Coordinator
- Optional opportunities to connect with other mentors will be coordinated by the Peer Mentor Coordinator as needed

Remember

You are not expected to have all the answers.
Listening and showing up matter most.


Step 8:

Ending a Match

Mentoring relationships may last a few months or up to about one year.

- Matches may end when needs are met or readiness changes with input from the mentee
- Endings are a normal and healthy part of mentoring
- BIA-NE staff will help support a respectful and thoughtful close

You may choose to mentor again in the future if and when it feels right. A full application may not be required unless there are substantive changes, but updated signatures on forms may be required.

Your Choice Matters

At every stage of the process:

- Participation is always voluntary
- You can pause, step back, or ask for changes
- Your well-being matters just as much as your mentee's

Questions or Support?

If you ever have questions or concerns, contact the Peer Mentor Coordinator.

Brain Injury Association of Nebraska (BIA-NE)

Website: www.biane.org

Email: peer@biane.org

Phone: [402-423-2463](tel:402-423-2463)