# MENTORING AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

**THE SELF-EFFICACY TOOL KIT[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Self-Efficacy**

Belief in one’s ability to achieve a specific goal or task. Self-efficacy is situation-specific self-confidence. Simply put, *“I believe I can do this.”*

When a mentee’s research self-efficacy falters, you can support them in four ways:

**Mastery Experience**

Ask yourself:

* What are your mentees doing?
* Are they doing well, but still lack self-efficacy for research?
* Are they taking on projects that might be too complex for them at this stage in their career?

What you can do:

* Reinforce your mentees’ past successes (have them recall and highlight a personal “significant research moment”, or other specific successes in other domains, to understand what contributed to their success in the past and recreate that in the present).
* Encourage mentees to reference past successes during the research experience or past successes in academics (e.g., “you did it before, and you can do it now”). Help mentees adopt success strategies (match strategies to situation—e.g., reinforce effective behaviors that contributed to their past success).
* Confirm that department made a good decision in hiring mentee.

**Social Modeling (Vicarious Experiences)**

Ask yourself:

* What are mentees observing?
* Do they have any role models in the department, university, or in their network of peers?
* Can they see themselves reflected in the students, faculty, staff, and policies in your research programs?
* Are mentees from historically underrepresented groups able to see themselves at your institution? Why or why not?

What you can do:

* Talk about your own research and professional experience: How do you know when you are doing a good job as a researcher? How do you know when you are doing well in your department? What are the things that increase your confidence in your field?
* Consider who your mentees’ role models are and what research skills (and attitudes) are being modeled for them by you and others.
* Be aware of what skills and behavior mentees are observing about coping with research and professional challenges and setbacks; share strategies for what you do when you hit a wall and how you encourage yourself to get over challenges/setbacks.
* Offer time to practice skills that are strong as well as ones that need more development.
* Encourage your department to run a session where advanced mentees or faculty talk about setbacks, challenges, and how they overcame them.

**Social (Verbal) Persuasion**

Ask yourself:

* What are they hearing?
* Are they hearing that they have what it takes?
* Are they receiving specific feedback relating to their effort or capabilities?
* Is that feedback constructive?
* Is the message that you are sending the same as what is being received by the mentee?

What you can do:

* Foster a “you can do it” attitude.
* Be attuned to ways that you can acknowledge mentees’ current successes.
* Reinforce mentee’s research and professional abilities by giving specific, credible feedback and less evaluation of the outcome or general feedback.
* Let them know that they belong in research, the department, and the university.
* Be aware of signs that mentees may feel that they do not fit in research program or department (“I don’t belong here”; withdrawing from discussions and conversations).
* Talk about both the positive things mentees are doing while giving clear steps for how they can improve in areas that are challenging to them.

**Emotional/Physiological State[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Ask yourself:

* What are they feeling?
* How can you help mentees feel welcome in your lab/department/university?
* What can you do regarding the environment (e.g., department meetings, program policies, etc.) that can help reduce mentees’ stress and anxiety relating to research and professional success?

What you can do:

* Be aware of positive (enjoyment) or negative moods (anxiety) mentees may have related to research and/or the department.
* Attend to negative, anxiety-related feelings (e.g., negative self-talk, concern about “fit,” anxiety about positive perception by colleagues).
* Acknowledge and normalize when things are difficult (e.g., “It’s supposed to be hard, new things usually are”).
* Give examples of mentees who struggled but made it (successful in research).

1. Adapted from *W.H. Freeman Entering Mentoring Series*, 2017. Originally developed from Byars-Winston et al., 2013. Revised by Dr. Susan Girdler and Dr. Clare Counihan (TEAM ADVANCE). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from Cherry, K. (2019) “Self Efficacy and Why Believing in Yourself Matters.” *Very Well Mind*. Available online at <http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/self_efficacy.htm?p=1>. Revised by Dr. Susan Girdler and Dr. Clare Counihan (TEAM ADVANCE). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)