



**back up**

transforming lives after spinal cord injury

# Mentoring Handbook

Our mentoring service is supported by:





transforming lives after spinal cord injury




**This booklet is designed to give you an overview of the Back Up mentoring service. Hopefully it will answer most of the questions you may have about how mentoring works and how it might help, but please do get in touch if you would like to ask us anything else.**

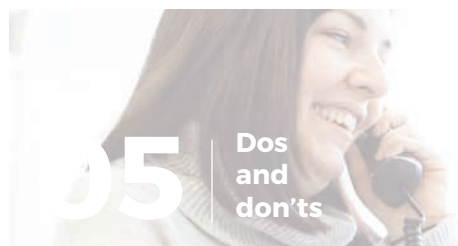
At Back Up we understand that a spinal cord injury can be devastating. But, we believe it shouldn't stop anyone from getting the most out of life. Our mentoring service connects people with spinal cord injury or their family members with a trained mentor with relevant life experiences, so they can discuss the issues that matter to them. All the Back Up services, including wheelchair skills training, mentoring and rehabilitative activity courses, are delivered by people affected by spinal cord injury themselves. They can help to rebuild people's confidence and independence after spinal cord injury, as well as their family members too.

#### Mentoring team

Back Up  
4 Knightley Walk  
London  
SW18 1GZ

Tel: 020 8875 1805  
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# About mentoring

## What is a mentor?

Sometimes it can be helpful to have someone who can listen and offer support and advice, based on their own experience. We have trained mentors who have direct experience of spinal cord injury, either personally or as a family member. They all have been trained by psychologists on our two-day training course and have at least a year's experience of living with, or having a family member with a spinal cord injury.

Mentors are volunteers, not paid staff. They come from all walks of life and give their time to support others.

## What is the purpose of the mentoring service?

The aim of the mentoring service is to provide you with an opportunity to benefit from the experience of a mentor who's 'been there and done that' and can appreciate how you might be feeling. We know that spinal cord injury can have a devastating impact, not just on the person with the injury, but on their family too.

Mentoring is a service that supports people with spinal cord injury, their parents, partners, siblings, children and wider family and friends through speaking to a trained mentor. We also have youth mentors available for anyone under 18.

## Who is mentoring for?

Anyone who has been affected by spinal cord injury can benefit from the mentoring service. Whether you have a spinal cord injury yourself or a member of your family does, whatever your experience, our mentors are here to support you.

Regardless of your age, background, injury level, or experience of spinal cord injury we can match you with someone to talk to. Whether you use a wheelchair or are able to walk, whether you're a teenage sister or an adult son, we can find you a mentor to relate to. Our volunteers all have a wide range of life experiences. Tell us about your goals and things that are important to you and we'll do our up most to find someone that you have things in common with, so you can share your experience of spinal cord injury.

Please be aware that it's not always possible to find an exact match. All spinal cord injuries differ, but many people find that speaking to someone who understands at least part of what they're going through, can make all the difference. As our mentors are not psychologists or counsellors it is important that we make an assessment of the suitability of mentees for the service. In particular circumstances Back Up will make a decision about whether mentoring is the appropriate service for an individual.

**“ Being able to talk to someone who ‘gets it’ and understands really did make a difference to me. Initially I felt quite isolated with all help directed to my partner. During those really difficult times my mentor helped me see that we could get through it because there are people that have been where we are and come out the other side. ”**

**Sarah\*, partner mentee**

\*name has been changed

# About mentoring

## How does it work?

Mentoring takes place over the phone or via video calls such as Zoom or Skype. By signing up for mentoring through the link on our website you will be creating an account with our system, Mentorloop. Once you've set up an account, we will be able to connect you to your mentor. From there you'll be able to chat to your mentor to arrange calls. Together you'll decide how frequently you'd like to speak. Others have found regular calls, either weekly or fortnightly, work best.

After each call we ask you to consider how helpful it was and if you'd like another. After the fourth call your mentor will review with you whether it would be beneficial to continue the calls. Many people get a great deal from one or two calls, so mentors can be flexible, in that sense. Mentoring relationships can have a maximum of ten calls.

We usually match people based on their/their family member's level injury, mobility and age, as well as any shared interests. For example, we'd look to match someone who uses the same mobility device, e.g., walking sticks.

You can speak to your mentor about anything, provided it is related to spinal cord injury and the effects of that.

This could include things like sex, relationships, emotions, employment, managing personal care (bladder & bowels), pain, or anything else related to spinal cord injury. Your mentor will use their experience to support you in adjusting to life following spinal cord injury.

It's important to be aware that mentoring is not a mental health service nor can it replace counselling or psychological support. However, if you do have a mental health condition, it is possible for mentoring to run alongside any other treatments.

# Dos and don'ts



**DO**

- Feel free to ask any questions you like.
- Talk about any situation that you have concerns with and ask for advice or help.
- Make the most of the time you get with your mentor and ask about their experiences. If there is anything they feel uncomfortable with sharing they will let you know, and offer advice/guidance to where you'll be able to find advice and guidance.
- Listen to and respect your mentor, as they will with you.
- Let the mentoring team know if you would like to end your mentoring calls sooner than the time period you originally agreed.
- Contact the mentoring team in the Back Up office if there is anything you find hard to speak to your mentor about, or you are unhappy with.



**DON'T**

- Let your mentor down. If you need to change your arrangements use the link you were sent with plenty of notice, or please contact a member of the mentoring team in the Back Up office on 020 8875 1805 so they can let your mentor know well in advance.
- Don't use your mentor to chat about things that aren't related to spinal cord injury.
- Don't use the system chat for anything other than scheduling calls with your mentor.





# Frequently asked questions

## Is everything I say kept private between the mentor and myself?

Mentors will report back a general summary of your conversations to the mentoring team. Conversations are confidential within Back Up (you, your mentor, and staff at Back Up) except where there is a safeguarding concern about serious harm to you or someone else. In this case we may need to involve other services, such as your GP.

## Can I have my mentor's telephone number?

No. We ask all mentors not to give out their personal contact details to mentees. To get in contact with your mentor please reach out to the over Mentorloop. Alternatively, please call the mentoring team on 020 8875 1805. They will get in touch with your mentor and pass on any message or schedule a call for you both.

## Can my mentor and I meet in person?

Mentoring primarily takes place over the phone so that we can ensure we can make the most suitable match. It may be possible to meet in person during the relationship in a public place provided both parties agree and we are made aware.

## What happens at the end of the sessions with my mentor?

At the end of a mentoring relationship, you'll be asked to score yourself on the questions you were asked in the beginning and whether you've achieved what you set out to. There may be mixed feelings when you've completed all your sessions with your mentor.

You and your mentor might feel sad that the relationship is ending, which is quite normal. It may be that there are still problems or difficulties that you're facing. We hope the sessions that you have with your mentor will allow you to feel more confident about dealing with those situations when the mentor is not there but we hope that the end of mentoring will not be the end of your relationship with Back Up. There are other opportunities to get involved which can offer you further support to help you meet your aspirations and reach your goals such as courses or volunteering.

Please refer to our FAQ page on our website for more frequently asked questions.



# Testimonials



“ I feel 100% able to move on with my life in a whole new light and take on my challenges with much brighter thoughts and objectives, in the knowledge that I am absolutely not alone with my experiences and daily emotional and physical challenges. ”

**Geoff, partner mentee**

# Testimonials



**Amanda, parent mentee**

“ Things have changed for me beyond anything imaginable. I was so ready to make changes in my life, but I had absolutely no idea where to start as there was so much I needed to change - my head was a confused jumbled mess. To be heard, understood, believed, and my thoughts and feelings valued by Jenny made me feel that my life really was worth living. ”

“ She's been wonderful. She's given me hope and made me look at things in a more practical way. And she gave me some solutions to our foreseeable problems and helped me plan for the future. ”

**Rakhi, spinal cord injured mentee**



“ Chris was an excellent mentor - open, honest and willing to talk about anything! We hit it off straight away and he supported me going through the changes/adaptations I had to make due to my injury. He didn't sugar coat it, so I knew what to expect, but he helped me deal with it all face on. I gained so much more confidence and felt positive to face things when I knew Chris had already been there and done that. ”

**Paul, spinal cord injured mentee**

We always want to listen, learn and improve. If you have any compliments, comments or complaints about the mentoring service, please contact our Services Manager.

**020 8875 1805**



# About our sponsor

“ Following my injury, I spoke with a number of law firms about a possible claim. Aspire Law were knowledgeable, straightforward and concise. In the early stages they obtained interim payments for me and my family, which gave us

space to breath. They also arranged private rehabilitation, accommodation and instructed a case manager. They managed all aspects of my claim whilst continuing to support me and my family on the ground. Sustaining a spinal cord injury changed my life forever but with the support of Aspire Law I look forward not backwards. ”

Back Up Mentoring is offered as a free service to anyone who needs it. The costs are covered by general donations and generous sponsorship from Aspire Law. Aspire Law is the only UK law firm working exclusively on spinal cord injury claims. Additionally, Aspire Law is the only UK law firm to donate 50% of its profit to charitable causes through its partner charity, Aspire.



“ We are delighted to be working with and sponsoring Back Up's Mentoring Service. Ensuring support for the SCI community is a central tenet to what we do at Aspire Law. Being able to extend support for people with SCI beyond the hospital and into the community is fantastic and we are very pleased to support Back Up with this invaluable service. ”

Damian Horan, Legal Director Aspire Law



# What happens next?

If you would like to take up mentoring or want more information, please contact:

E: [mentoring@backuptrust.org.uk](mailto:mentoring@backuptrust.org.uk)  
T: 020 8875 1805  
W: [www.backuptrust.org.uk/mentoring](http://www.backuptrust.org.uk/mentoring)

Back Up  
4 Knightley Walk  
London  
SW18 1GZ

If you would like to become a mentor yourself please contact a member of the mentoring team as indicated, or go to our website and click on 'support for you.'




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