

# Mentoring can reduce anxiety, study finds

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Mentoring of junior colleagues can reduce anxiety and improve the mental health of the mentors themselves, finds a new study.

The mentoring of junior colleagues can reduce [anxiety](#) and improve the [mental health](#) of the mentors themselves in high-pressure occupations, concludes a new study co-authored at Cambridge Judge Business School involving an English police force.

While previous research had indicated that the anxiety of mentees can be reduced through the guidance of more senior mentors, the new study finds that imparting knowledge and experience can also help mentors by making their jobs more rewarding.

"We found that mentoring relationships provide a unique context for mentors to discuss and normalise their concerns, to share ideas for managing anxieties, and to find more meaning in their work," concludes the study, published in the Journal of Vocational Behavior.

"Mentoring relationships appeared to provide an organisational mechanism to prompt supervisor and colleague interactions, which in turn facilitated a reduction in the mentors' anxiety."

In England alone, mental illness accounts for annual expenditure on healthcare of £14 billion and a reduction in [gross domestic product](#) of £52 billion owing to people unable to work to their full capacity.

Policing was chosen as an appropriate setting to study how mentoring can reduce anxiety in occupations that play important social roles, including the medical profession and the military – roles that require mental strength in challenging situations coupled with political pressure to become more efficient. The study follows a mentoring programme that was rolled out at one of 43 territory-based police forces in England and Wales since 2013.

Despite the pressures of their roles – including threats, abuse, snap decisions and the risk of death – police officers tend not to seek support from other officers, including more senior colleagues, to avoid "negative stigma" associated with [mental health disorders](#). Mentoring can help fill this void, the study says.

"The study suggests that a relatively inexpensive practice such as

mentoring can help reduce anxiety among both senior and junior staff, and this could help organisations address the serious and costly workplace issues of anxiety and mental health," says study co-author Dr. Thomas Roulet, University Senior Lecturer in Organisation Theory at Cambridge Judge Business School. "While the study focused on high-stress roles in the public eye, we believe that the findings may also apply to other occupations that also have anxiety-provoking pressures."

The study is co-authored by Dr. Michael Gill of Said Business School at Oxford University and Chief Inspector Stephen Kerridge of the Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Excerpts of interviews with mentors and mentees indicated that it was beneficial for people in such busy and often frantic jobs as policing to have an opportunity to be "listened to" and to take note of the fact that "we've all gone through" certain work experiences.

"Mentoring provided reassurance to the [mentors](#) by illuminating how other, often junior officers also experience anxiety thereby normalising their own experiences," the study says. "By acknowledging that anxieties are common, both the mentees and [mentors](#) in this study appeared to be more comfortable discussing such issues and therefore in developing different coping mechanisms."

**More information:** Michael J. Gill et al. Mentoring for mental health: A mixed-method study of the benefits of formal mentoring programmes in the English police force, *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2018.08.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.08.005)

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