

Life After SCA

Presented by the HeartRescue Project



Tips for creating a mentor program

When someone survives an event like sudden cardiac arrest, they face many questions and fears. A mentor provides emotional support and helps a recent survivor cope with these new doubts and emotions. A mentor listens to a survivor's concerns and questions and shares her own story. A mentor can tell a survivor what to expect and talk about his own fears and how he overcame them.

Mentors can offer understanding, support and hope because they themselves have survived SCA. They are the only ones who truly understand how a survivor feels.

A mentor program can be as simple as asking a current member to reach out and welcome a newer survivor or it can have a more formal framework. Below are some guidelines for creating a more structured program. Whatever your program looks like, the goal is the same: to offer caring and support to those navigating this life-changing experience of having survived sudden cardiac arrest.

Determine the group's interest.

- Solicit mentors by asking your members who would like to offer support; focus initially on those whose SCA events were not as recent and who have shown a commitment to helping others. Create a small intake form to collect some information from the mentee, such as:
 - Contact information
 - Age
 - Preferred method of communication (email, phone, etc.)

- Date of SCA
- Whether they have an ICD or other medical device
- How often they would like to speak to their mentor
- Any specific issues or questions they might be looking for support with
- Offer the service to new members, and remind current members that a mentor is available.
- Try to match people with mentors who have the same vision of the mentoring relationship.

Create awareness of your mentor program.

- Establish an environment that supports a mentor program by mentioning it often, setting aside time in your meetings to allow for connections, and featuring some of the mentor relationships in your communications. Creating the opportunity for those who would like to reach out and assist new survivors will be an important first step.

Facilitate the introductions.

- In this application, a structured mentor framework may not be feasible. You may not be able to direct how often your participants communicate and in what way.
- Based on the requests of those wanting a mentor, try to pair compatible participants. Look at age, gender, if ICD is present, as well as their specific desires.
- Explain that each relationship will be individualized based on the pairing. Exchange information with both parties, but ask the mentor to make first contact.

Provide ongoing support.

- Again, creating an environment that supports a mentor program will contribute to its success. Mention it often in various forums. Make it easy to access as people often have difficulty asking for help. If possible, allocate meeting time, or encourage meeting before or after a specific event.

Remember, a mentorship program is not in lieu of professional assistance for either medical or mental health issues, and both mentors and their mentees should be reminded of that. A mentor provides the support of someone who has made the same journey, experienced similar physical and emotional reactions, and asked the same questions, and who can speak from direct experience of all that you may be experiencing. A successful mentoring relationship helps ease the transition into a life after SCA and is rewarding for both parties, often leading to a lifelong friendship.

You may also want to check for a Mended Hearts chapter in your area. They are another great resource. You can find a link to Mended Hearts at LifeAfterSCA.org/resources.

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LifeAfterSCA.org provides resources to help survivors of sudden cardiac arrest and their families. **Because every SCA survivor who gets a second chance at life also deserves a second shot at living.**