

Mentorship Modules

Mentor Module 4: Finding Common Ground

Adapted from the Washington State Bar Association “Mentorship Program Toolkit”

Common ground can be defined as the space two or more individuals are able to occupy through a shared experience. This is where we build on our similarities. Each time similarities are discovered, the common ground shared expands its space to include both participants. As this space expands, the relationship organically strengthens, and the connection deepens. This provides fertile ground for continued mutual learning and a more sustainable relationship. This module will offer an opportunity to practice seeking common ground with your mentor/mentee.

Discuss: Try to find a commonality with each other (this could be the state or town you grew up in, your family makeup, a hobby or a shared identity such as being a parent). Spend some time discussing that similarity, sharing the joys, challenges, memories and how it has impacted you.

Discover: The other side of common ground is overcoming the fear of difference. Often, individuals are afraid of cross-cultural or cross-generational conversations because they worry about making a social faux pas. Consider some of the following words or phrases and allow each other to share what they mean to you, and where (if at all) you learned about them. Challenge yourself to actively listen to your partner, and ask questions to learn more:

- Implicit bias
- Conflict resolution
- Systemic oppression
- Civil discourse
- Cultural humility/cultural competence

Develop: Reflect on the ways that your own experiences and identities are different from those around you, and how those differences could impact how you experience the world. Talk about it with each other if time allows. Throughout the next few weeks, as you notice the natural differences between yourself and others, also seek out ways to identify commonalities. Some natural differences that could pop up include (but aren’t limited to):

- Professional experience
- Cultural background
- Generation
- Racial stereotypes
- Gender perceptions
- Disability/impairment
- Economic status