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# EmpowHer Camp Best Practices



Members of Our Camp Community Reflect on  
Successful Mentorship Experiences from  
EmpowHer Camp

# EmpowHer Camp Best Practices



## HANNAH GALLIVAN

EmpowHer Camp Graduate  
Class of 2022

### Best practices from a mentee aspect:

- Find out what mode of communication works best for you and your mentor, it will be a lot easier to keep in touch.
- Actually set aside time every month to do some work on your project bit by bit. Don't leave it all til the end!
- Talk with your mentor about things besides your project as well. They're there to help you with your project, but they also want to support you in general! Get to know each other.
- When your project ideas shift, don't panic! It's okay to reassess and reconsider. Talk with your mentor about next steps.

### Best practices for camping

- **BUG SPRAY.** There are so many bugs out in the summer, especially at night. Bug spray is a must!
- Be open to new things! A lot of things you do at EmpowHer camp are probably new to you, and might feel a little scary. Lean into that feeling, it's good! And remember that other people are experiencing it with you, you're not alone!
- Soak in the new friendships. Some of my very favorite people now are folks I met through this program, and are the best sounding boards for talking about anything and everything. Also, you can relate so much to all being disabled, and that's a really lovely community to have when you need to vent.
- Pack smart. Bring extra layers, raincoats, and things to cover your chair if it gets wet. (My year of EmpowHer camp, it rained every day!) Make sure you have essentials to get what you need, but it is camping, so don't overpack.



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# ABBY RITTER

EmpowHer Camp Mentor  
Class of 2022 & Class of 2023



## Best practices from a mentor aspect:

- Go with your gut – if something feels like it’s working, it probably is, and vice versa. If something feels wrong, do your best to get ahead of it before it goes fully off the rails. This can be regarding how the project is going, the way your communication is or isn’t happening, or even if something seems to be going on in your mentee’s home life that needs to be addressed.
- Don’t be afraid to ask for help – This is rule number 1 of EmpowHer Camp, and it applies to mentoring as well. If something isn’t working, or if you don’t know what to do, reach out to a fellow mentor, EmpowHer staff, or both. We are all here to support each other.
- Set boundaries – My first year of mentoring, I did not set appropriate boundaries around communication time/frequency with my mentee, and while we developed a really close relationship, I often struggled to feel like I could say “no” to her if I needed. Being clear about where, when, and how you want to communicate is important, especially if your mentee is someone who might have difficulties with boundaries in general.
- Use the communication types that work for you AND your mentee – If you both hate Zoom calls, why force yourselves to use Zoom? Text, FaceTime, phone calls, Discord, whatever works. It doesn’t HAVE to be one way or the highway.
- Accountability is key – if you say you’re going to be there, be there. If you and your mentee are working on something together, make sure that you’re both doing the work. A solid partnership comes from being able to trust one another, and to rely on each other.

## Best Practices for working on & completing the yearlong project:

- The goal of the project is to FINISH THE PROJECT – You’re looking for a “baby bear” project: not too big, not too small, juuuuuust right. If it’s too big, your mentee won’t finish and will become discouraged. If it’s too small, your mentee will likely not feel fulfilled in the work that they completed. If you need help figuring out what’s achievable, reach out to EmpowHer staff and/or previous mentors.
- Be a cheerleader – As a mentor, you’re guiding a teenager through something that is probably very new to them. It might even be new to you. Things are likely going to have to shift as they progress through the year. Your job is to cheer them on, and to encourage them to not give up, even if it’s difficult. A project shifting isn’t a failure, it’s success in a new way. Maybe you didn’t pass a law this year, but you ARE going to make a change that can lead to bigger things in the future.





## ABBY CONT.

### Best Practices for working on & completing the yearlong project (cont.):

- Find your mentee's passion – Setting goals and working on a project becomes a lot easier when the topic is something they feel passionate about. Working on flood evacuation procedures might not make sense if your mentee lives in New Mexico or Arizona. More likely than not, your mentee has unfortunately experienced some kind of emergency situation, and they are much more likely to be successful when working on a project that feels real and tangible to them.



### Best practices for camping

- You probably didn't pack enough – If you thought you brought enough socks and underwear, you probably didn't. If it rains every single day, there is NOTHING worse than having to wear wet socks or underwear because you didn't have enough. Do you have all your meds? Like, ALL of them? Extras? PRN meds you don't usually need but take sometimes? If not, bring them.
- Your body will need different things – Tasks that feel doable at home may not be as doable when you're in the woods. Camp is a lot of long days full of physical, mental, and emotional labor, and you might need help in different ways than you typically need at home. That's okay! Interdependence is incredible, and there's no better way to learn how to ask, receive, and give help than to spend a week in the woods with a bunch of disabled folks.
- Step away – Teenagers will test your patience. They are learning their boundaries and figuring out how to be people away from their parents. They WILL say and do things that make you feel frustrated, upset, confused, or even angry. These are the moments that you step away for a minute, regulate yourself, and rely on the folks around you for support in that moment.
- Be flexible – We make plans and a very tight schedule every single year, and no matter what, some or all of that schedule may end up getting thrown out the window due to weather, bodies and brains that don't want to cooperate with us, or other outside factors that we don't have control over. Be prepared to change the plan if needed.

# JILL MOORE

EmpowHer Camp Mentor  
Class of 2022

## Best practices from a mentor aspect:

- Practices to form and maintain relationships.
  - I connected with both of them as a friend first. We found similar veins of humor and topics that interest us. We laughed a lot about goofy stuff before we needed to connect on big stuff. That made the big stuff seem a lot easier. I think when building that connection, if something comes up that you have in common, take the additional time to explore that. Even if you find you don't enjoy some of the same stuff, you'll at least have taken the time to show you care about their thoughts.
- Ways of communication
  - It's finding middle ground. They both tell me I'm an old facebook mom, so I connect with them via Insta. But if they tweet something at me, that's going into the ether. We share memes and random connections which makes it a whole lot easier when we need to call or Zoom to connect on something more serious.
- Practices for setting and working towards goals
  - Taking time to celebrate the small stuff was really big. Sometimes the overall goal looks so big and scary that it would get stressful or disheartening. So we'd break the wins up as we went along so that we always felt we were achieving.

## Best Practices for working on & completing the yearlong project:

- Best practices for staying on task throughout the year and setting goals each month
  - Maintaining accountability. It helped a ton that we had to schedule meetings every month. That forced a check in on where we were at. And because we communicated so well, it was pretty easy to send quick messages checking in on stuff here and there.
- Separating the tasks from the goal.
  - That helps a ton. The big goal is this huge thing that we often felt far away from. But the tasks- like for Mia, finishing a class, sending an email, going to the shelter- those seemed a lot easier to achieve.



## JILL CONT.

### Best Practices for working on & completing the yearlong project (cont.):

- Best practices for adapting when project ideas shift
  - A big thing we had to practice that shifting ideas aren't a bad thing. Shifting goals aren't a bad thing. It's being realistic with what we can accomplish with the time and resources we have and pivoting doesn't make the idea lesser, it just changes the timeline a bit.
  - It took a bit to get used to this. If I told Riley an idea or goal was a bit too big for our scope, at first it was scary and upsetting, but we found a way to communicate to say okay, the goal and idea is still valid and good, let's put it on our radar a bit further out and we could both live with that.



### Best practices for camping:

- Giving grace. I think EmpowHer is this interesting environment of disabled women, who historically never want to admit or feel they can't do something so we tend to not want to be flexible or admit any weakness or trouble. Giving grace to yourself and everyone around you is a really big part of growth.

### Parting Thoughts:

- I think one of the most instrumental things I learned in working with Riley and Mia was to steer but not drive. I think it's really easy to fall into a pit of trying to get mentees to do things the way I want to do them or the way I know how to do them when that's an unfair expectation that really doesn't allow them to shine. My experiences can be valuable examples, but their victories and pursuits are their own and I'm here to offer support and advice.

