First, let me say that I am truly honored and delighted to receive the Martin P. Levin Mentoring Award. The Society of Pediatric Psychology [SPP; also American Psychological Association, Division 54—Ed.] is very near and dear to my heart. Over the years, I have been fortunate to serve SPP in a variety of capacities and to receive recognition for some of my work. However, this award personally means more to me than any other. I say this because it is such a personal award.

I have several thoughts and reflections about the mentoring process that I would like to share—and I promise to keep my comments brief. I will take the advice of one of my former mentors and “keep it simple.” So, here are a few points to consider.

First, I believe that few people are formally prepared for the mentoring role. Like most of you, I’ve had variable experiences with mentors and supervisors throughout my training and career. In fact, I’m not even sure I had an idea of what “mentoring” was until I was already years into my academic career.

I also think that our current system, at least in academia (but certainly in other settings as well), does little to value and reward mentoring—although I definitely think it should. In most academic settings, raises and promotions are based on one’s publications and grants, and perhaps some teaching, but mentoring doesn’t even register on the radar scope. The number and quality of one’s mentoring activities are not considered on annual evaluations. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising how variable mentors seem to be.

So, how does one become a good mentor? And for students, interns, and those of you who are early in your careers and who can especially profit from good mentorship, how can you cultivate a good mentoring relationship? Frankly, I am not sure how one becomes a good mentor, but it seems to me that a good mentor is much like being a good parent. To me, good mentoring means caring about the students or colleagues you work with, taking pride in their doing well, supporting their efforts, sharing your expertise, and caring enough to give time and thought to the process—even though this time and effort are not likely to be rewarded, other than by personal satisfaction. I also think each mentor needs to find his or her own style, perhaps modeling others whom she or he has admired and being mindful of behaviors to avoid. Moreover, those of us who are mentors need to be mindful of what behaviors we are modeling, as we are role models, whether we intend to be or not.

For those who are seeking a mentor, I have two pieces of advice. First, look for someone who has the “right stuff.” That is, look for someone you respect and admire, whom you feel comfortable with, who has expertise in the area in which you seek mentoring, and who is willing and available to devote some time and energy to the process. This person can be, but does not have to be, your primary academic advisor. In some cases, other faculty and supervisors, or senior colleagues, might better fit the bill. Most professionals have office hours; use them to your advantage.

Second, once you find a good mentor, do your best to cultivate this relationship. A little bit of admiration and appreciation can go a long way. Most mentors, I believe, mentor out of personal caring and satisfaction—so let them know they are appreciated.

On this note of appreciation, I would like to personally thank several individuals who contributed in special ways to my mentoring, either formally or informally. These are individuals whose efforts made an exceptional mark on my own development.
During my undergraduate studies at Fordham University, I very much appreciated the efforts of Dr. Ann Anastasi. Even though she was the chair of the psychology department, she took the time to meet with each new psychology major and offer her wisdom and advice about becoming a psychologist.

From my graduate school training at Purdue University, I would most like to thank Dr. Scott Paris, who generously gave his time, support, and encouragement, as well as advice on research design. Without this support, I might never have pursued a research/academic career.

During my clinical internship at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, I could not have asked for a better mentor and advisor than Dr. Gary Mesibov, whose support, wisdom, and sharp sense of humor continue to influence me to this day. In my experience, Gary was the best all-around model for what a mentor can and should be. During that year, I was also fortunate to have Dr. Carolyn Schroeder as another advisor and as a wonderful role model.

At various points during my academic career at the University of Miami, I benefited from the time, support, and advice provided by Dr. Edward Murray (my "big brother," as a junior faculty member) and as well as from the input, support, and wisdom of Drs. Herbert Quay and Donald Routh.

I would like these individuals to know how special they are and how much I appreciate their caring, advice, and generosity. I would also like to thank the Martin P. Levin family and especially his daughter, Dr. Wendy Levin-Newby, for recognizing the importance of mentoring, by creating this award.

Last, and most important, I thank my current and former students and postdoctoral fellows, from whom I have learned a tremendous amount. You have honored me by showing your appreciation in nominating me for this mentorship award. And, for that, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Note

1 Annette M. La Greca has served as president of Division 54, Society of Pediatric Psychology of the American Psychology (2001), and as editor of the Journal of Pediatric Psychology (1993–1997). She also is the recipient of the Routh Distinguish Service Award (1991) and the Salk Distinguished Research Contribution Award (1997) from the Society of Pediatric Psychology (now American Psychological Association, Division 54).