

Step 8: Supporting the new Freemason

This Step starts after Initiation and follows the new Freemason as he goes through the degree ceremonies and experiences elements of Freemasonry for the first time. The Personal Mentor, assisted by sponsors and others, provides the new member with the information, personal contact and encouraging support that he needs and in the manner in which he wants it. The desired end result is a member who enjoys his Freemasonry, has a growing understanding and appreciation of it and is willing to continue his membership and commitment at a level that suits and satisfies him. An Introduction to the Members' Pathway explains the Pathway and how this Step fits within its framework.

Why is Early Support so Important? - The ceremony of Initiation will have made an impact on the new Freemason and he will be likely to remember it for a long time. As people form enduring first impressions within the first ten seconds of meeting, Lodge members' behaviour towards the Initiate in the period soon after Initiation will determine whether or not he likes and feels comfortable with them and even whether he wishes to form lasting friendships with them. Any inconsiderate actions by members may create a negative impression of Freemasonry as a whole. In the days, weeks and months following Initiation the new Freemason will reflect on his experiences and consider whether or not his expectations have been met, exceeded or possibly disappointed. At this point the new Freemason is at his most vulnerable; a significant proportion of new members leave the Craft within two years of Initiation, often before becoming Master Masons. If the new Freemason perceives either the ceremony or the actions of Lodge members to be anything other than positive, or if his expectations are not met, he may consider terminating his membership. The Personal Mentor and sponsors have a small window of opportunity to respond to all early reactions, to address any concerns and to provide the support that the new Freemason needs.

Guidance for Lodge Members - Remember how you felt when you first joined the Lodge, and how you benefited from a warm welcome, a smile and kind word from an older or more experienced member. Imagine yourself in the new Freemason's position. What might help his comfort and confidence? Spend time with a new member at each of his early meetings and get to know him better. Introduce him to other members and visitors. Use names to help him remember without embarrassment. If no one is sitting with a new member, move over to keep him company. Ensure that he is not left alone, uncertain what is happening or what he is expected to do. Explain to him and show him the correct way to address others, give signs and fire at the festive board. Being new to his surroundings he cannot be held responsible for any mistakes he may inadvertently make. It is the responsibility of those who are meant to support him to ensure he is properly briefed. Some Freemasons will settle in more quickly than others. Continue this "intensive care" for as long as the new Freemason needs this level of support.

Guidance for Personal Mentors - Arrange an informal meeting with the new Freemason soon after his Initiation to: - discuss what happened during his Initiation and what he needs to know for the immediate future. - practise with him the sign of the degree, and any firing undertaken at the Festive Board. - address any questions that he may have at this point. Hold this and other meetings in an environment where you can talk freely, such as in one person's home, the Masonic Centre, a pub or over a meal. Meetings at Masonic Halls will allow you to show him some of the elements you will be discussing. Attempt to understand issues from his perspective. Be patient and show empathy at all times. Gauge his level of interest and enthusiasm and respond at that level. Avoid "force feeding" him what you think he should know and understand. Respond quickly to allay any misgivings, doubts or fears.

Reassure and encourage him when he is anxious or lacks confidence. Protect him from expectations that place him under undue pressure. Pass on any communications or resources provided by the Lodge and the Province. Help him to find information he wants from the various materials he will have been given. Discuss the information he now wants about Freemasonry and how he would prefer to access that information. Draw on the Topics for discussion with a new Freemason and locally produced guides but proceed at his pace, not yours, and respond to his interests and curiosity, rather than a fixed programme. Arrange other meetings to suit the amount of contact he would like with you as his Personal Mentor. Agree the mode of contact to be used; face-to-face, by phone, email, social media or other medium. Form a view on how much personal support and encouragement he might need and prepare to deliver this at a level that has the most positive impact upon him. As informal meetings progress, involve his sponsors and other Lodge members as appropriate. At the end of each meeting arrange the next one rather than leave it to him to call one when needed. Suggest visiting other Lodges, with you or another supporter, if and when he has the time to do so.

As Mentor at Lodge meetings sit with the new Freemason in the Lodge. Explain what is happening, always demonstrating correct behaviours such as obeying the gavel. When you both agree he is ready, arrange for him to deliver some ritual or undertake some other work in support of a Lodge meeting. Find ways to involve him in the Lodge that suit his availability, skills, circumstances and confidence. Make sure his contributions are valued and recognised by others in the Lodge. Discuss his contribution to other members' ceremonies with the Lodge's Director of Ceremonies, so that he is asked to do what is appropriate to him. Prepare him for the ceremonies of Passing and Raising by: - helping him to learn the questions leading to the degree and the answers to give in open Lodge - detailing the relevant adjustments to his clothing for each ceremony - explaining the key elements of the ceremony without disclosing anything that harms his experience - identifying similarities and differences between the ceremonies. Arrange to meet shortly after each ceremony, to help him reflect, practice signs, address questions and relate the latest ceremony with the previous ones. Discuss Lodge offices and **the best time** for him to accept office. Monitor his progression to be sure it suits his circumstance and needs and not just the Lodge's. Continue the above cycle, reviewing the level of support he wants at intervals and making adjustments to ensure he gets what he needs to gain enjoyment and satisfaction from his membership. Look out for any discomfort or drops in interest, attendance or commitment and respond early.