



## Introduction to Mentoring at The Lab

The Lab is a national network of not-for-profit mentored computer clubs for young people who identify as being on the autism spectrum and who are interested in technology, especially gaming, coding and digital media.

Participants at Lab sessions often have highly developed technical skills but lack some of the social and friendship skills that are important to every child's personal development. Through a child's interests in technology, The Lab aims to encourage social engagement and the development of important life skills. Key to The Lab providing this valuable service is having good mentors – people who can look at a young person's strengths and interests and work with them to increase the sense of enthusiasm and engagement that they have for technology.



The Lab currently engages around 80 mentors at over 30 venues around the country. Many have been with The Lab since its inception in 2011, finding it's not just a cool part-time job but that sharing their technical skills and enthusiasm for gaming and technology is in itself an immensely rewarding activity. Attending The Lab is the highlight of the week for many young Lab participants with the experience and enthusiasm of Lab mentors being a key aspect of their experience.



Participants at Lab sessions are not there because they have a disability but because they share differences from other kids. You'll find very few behavioural issues in a Lab session and mentors are not expected to be teachers, disciplinarians or therapists. Mentors are there to assist young people to share their interests, to develop new skills and to have fun whenever possible.

Because kids with autism don't adapt very well to change, consistent attendance is very important. Being reliable and considerate to the entire group are key aspects of a mentor's responsibilities. It's important to be engaged with the group at all times. Look for opportunities to share your knowledge and skills in a way that is empathetic with the group's needs. The Lab is an unstructured activity, letting kids find their own place in their own time but this doesn't mean that it's a passive activity for mentors. Being involved with the group and quietly getting to know about a participants' interests and skills is an important part of successful mentoring.

We have an active network of mentors around the country with regular online meetings to share experiences and help to support new mentors. Our website contains more information <https://thelab.org.au> or contact [admin@thelab.org.au](mailto:admin@thelab.org.au). We hope that you'll get involved!