



Papou's Mouse,  
Inc.

## **Papou's Mouse (PM) Match-Making Families Program**

### **Training Manual**

#### **Introduction to the Program**

Welcome to Papou's Mouse, an organization dedicated to supporting families affected by childhood cancer. Our Match-making Families Program connects families with childhood cancer *survivor families* to those currently undergoing treatment. This supportive relationship aims to provide guidance, empathy, and practical advice to families navigating this challenging journey.

The journey through childhood cancer is often fraught with emotional, physical, and financial challenges. Papou's Mouse seeks to ease this burden by fostering strong connections between those who have walked this path and those currently facing it. Our Mouse Families who have a survivor of childhood cancer, understand the nuances of this experience and are best equipped to provide valuable insights and encouragement.

## **Why are we Called *Papou's Mouse*?**

“We are called Papou’s Mouse because these are our son’s nicknames. Papou (Alexander) was supported by Mouse (Xavier) throughout his entire cancer battle. *Papou had his Mouse*. And we know that made a difference! We want every family battling childhood cancer to have their Mouse.”

~*Vincent & Luby Myrthil, Founders*

In the context of our program:

“Papou-families” are families who are facing childhood cancer.

“Mouse-families” are families who have experienced childhood cancer and wish to support families currently facing similar challenges.

## **Match-making Families Program Overview**

This is a transformative partnership where experienced survivor families (Mouse-families) support families undergoing treatment (Papou-families) by providing guidance, sharing knowledge, and offering encouragement.

### **Mouse-families are Supported, too!**

Mouse-families are not alone in their support role. *They* are supported by a network of fellow Mouse-families, the Papou’s Mouse team including our program coordinators who provide encouragement, share insights, and collaborate on best practices.

### **Benefits for Mouse-families**

By participating in our Match-making Program, Mouse-families contribute to a legacy of compassion and support that uplifts both themselves and the families they assist. This unique opportunity allows Mouse-families to draw on their personal experiences to offer guidance and empathy, playing a pivotal role in a family’s journey with childhood cancer.

As Mouse-families engage in this transformative work, they find themselves inspired by the courage and determination of the families they support, which in turn fuels their own growth and continued development.

## What our Match-making families Program Is and Is Not

Match-making Program IS:	Match-making Program is NOT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A supportive and collaborative relationship</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A one-sided relationship</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Focused on growth, learning, and development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A form or replacement of therapy or counseling</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A partnership based on mutual respect and trust</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● An opportunity for a person to control or dictate</li></ul>

Understanding the essence of this program lays the foundation for a successful partnership. It is vital for both Mouse and Papou-families to recognize their roles and the dynamics of their relationship to foster an environment conducive to growth and learning.

## Mentorship

The PM Match-making Program is more akin to mentoring. Mentoring establishes a long-term relationship that emphasizes personal and professional growth through gentle guidance and mostly shared experiences.

Mentoring takes a holistic approach, fostering the mentee's overall development. It is patient, never forceful. It lets the mentee choose the pace.

The mentor family must always remember that everyone processes trauma in different ways and thus has different needs.

Please watch our video [here](#) for more information.

## Cornerstones of Mentor-like Relationships

By setting expectations from the outset, Mouse-families and Papou-families can engage in a productive and supportive partnership. Here are a few key principles to maintain this environment:

**Open Communication:** Encourage vulnerable honest and transparent dialogue with your Papou-family from the beginning.

Examples:

“There is no judgment. We each handle this differently. We each process differently. We understand this fact.”

“I want you to be forthcoming with me if/when our approach to supporting you needs to be tweaked. Remember, we are here to support you!”

This type of open and clear communication from you helps to build trust and encourages that any issues or concerns can be addressed promptly and effectively.

**Mutual Respect:** Recognize and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and experiences each participant brings to the relationship.

This respect fosters a sense of belonging and encourages a collaborative spirit.

**Active Listening:** Take the time to truly listen to each other's perspectives and feelings. Active listening demonstrates empathy and understanding, which are vital in providing support.

**Pay attention to when you are sharing *too many of your own experiences*, vs. just listening and letting them know that you can relate and understand.**

**Self-Reflection:** Take time to assess your approach to being supportive. If you are struggling, reach out to us. Let's talk it through and see what tweaks we may be able to identify. Self-reflection allows for tremendous personal growth.

**Boundaries:** Establish and respect personal boundaries to create a comfortable space for all parties involved. Clear boundaries help maintain professionalism and prevent misunderstandings.

**Feedback:** Papou's Mouse will send out materials asking for feedback from both Papou and Mouse families. We will reach out as needed to provide guidance. Feedback is important. In addition to furthering the effectiveness of the match-made families, it allows us at Papou's Mouse to continually improve our function in this matchmaking process.

**Confidentiality:** Ensures that shared information remains private and secure. Sharing discreet details should be limited to within the two families and the support personnel at Papou's Mouse (and with your own therapist). Use discretion. Pause and ask yourself if there is any reason you might not want to share the details before you do.

By adhering to these principles, the Papou's Mouse Match-making Families Program can continue to be a beacon of support and community for families affected by childhood cancer. This commitment to a safe and respectful, non-judgmental environment enhances the mentoring experience and strengthens the bonds that make a real difference in participants'

lives. **Trust and confidentiality foster deeper connections and facilitate more impactful discussions.**

## How to Get Started

### Establishing Expectations and Building Trust

Mouse-families and Papou-families should set clear expectations and work on building a trusting relationship. Here are some effective and ineffective behaviors for various roles:

Role	<u>Effective Characteristics</u>	<u>Ineffective Characteristics</u>
Listener	Active listening and offering a personal experience to relate.	Dominates conversations with personal opinions, has an expectation of the mentee.
Champion	Provides a safe space for open discussion.	Shields the mentee from all challenges.
Motivator	Encourages skill-building and personal growth.	Focuses solely on weaknesses.
Connector (Resource)	Connects the Papou-family to valuable resources.	Pushes unwanted connections.
Encourager	Encourages the Papou family to step out of their comfort zone.	Overwhelms the Papou family with challenges.
Clarifier	Helps the Papou-family gain clarity on their goals.	Over complicated simple issues.
Affirmer	Validates and supports the Papou-family's feelings.	Offers insincere praise
Sponsor	Advocates for the Papou-family in various settings.	Uses sponsorship for personal gain.

By recognizing the roles and responsibilities within the relationship, both Mouse and Papou-families can engage more effectively. This clarity fosters a productive environment where both parties feel valued and supported.

### **Questions to Ask During the First Meeting**

Start with noting: “There is no pressure to have an answer for each of these questions! And we can stop at any time.”

1. Can you share a bit about your family?
2. What are some interests or hobbies that your family enjoys together?
3. How do you like to keep in touch—would you prefer text, phone calls, or meeting face-to-face?
4. Do you have any hopes for what you’ll gain from our mentoring relationship?
5. Do you have any thoughts on what a successful mentoring relationship look like for you?
6. Do you have any worries or concerns about how the mentoring process will go for you?
7. Can you tell me about your child's experience with treatment and how it’s affected you/your family?
8. How do you typically cope with stress in your life?
9. Are there specific topics or areas that you feel you want to talk about?
10. Are there specific topics or areas that you don’t want to talk about?
11. Are there any boundaries or preferences I should keep in mind to make you comfortable?
12. Is there anything else about yourself or your family that you’d like to share with me?

## Questions to Ask During the Second Meeting

1. How have you been *feeling* about your current situation?
2. Can you tell me about your child's experience with treatment and how it's affected you/your family?
3. Ask about each family member.
4. What are some recent successes or achievements that you're proud of?
5. What strengths do you see in your family that you cherish?
6. How does your family celebrate milestones or achievements together?
7. What is something that you are truly passionate about that brings you joy?

These questions serve as a foundation for establishing rapport and understanding the Papou-Family's unique circumstances. They encourage open dialogue and help both parties identify key areas of focus for their relationship.

You can approach these questions following these lists, or use them as a guide and notate answers as they organically come out in conversations. Getting through either list in full in one sitting/conversation may be a lot for some families/people. Pay attention and if you think you should break it up into more than one conversation per list- you are well on your way to being a quality mentor!

## Create a Communication System for Yourself

Taking a few notes during phone calls (especially early on in the relationship) can help you not forget important dates, struggles, achievements, promises for resource connection, etc... It also shows you how long you are going in between contact. Here is an example, and you may use our [spreadsheet](#).

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TYPE OF CONTACT</u>	<u>DISCUSSED</u>	<u>FOLLOW UP ON</u>	<u>IN NEXT CHAT</u>	<u>I NEED TO</u>
1/1/25	Met in person	Did intro meeting with the questionnaire. Got through all questions. Left it at that. They seemed tired.	Said we'd check in in a few days.		
1/5/25	Called	They are overwhelmed, want this relationship but are very unsure how it will play out. Worried they are too busy to make time to be supported.	Ask PM about supports e.g. play therapy currently available. (Show them that we help with time management by doing something <b>for</b> them.)	How did the X test go?	Find flyer for X support
1/12/25	Texted and they called back!	They were thankful for the play therapy info and have already had their first session!	Just overall how are they doing and is there anything we can be helping with?		Listen better

You may not use this spreadsheet for long. But it can be very helpful, especially in the beginning.

## Communicate Consistently and Revise Your Approach As Needed

As you continue to communicate consistently, it's important to celebrate milestones, no matter how small, and acknowledge the efforts of both Mouse-families and Papou-families. This

recognition can boost morale and motivation, reinforcing the positive aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Keep in mind that each mentoring relationship is unique and evolves. Embrace the diversity of experiences and perspectives that each participant brings to the table. This diversity enriches the mentoring process and broadens your understanding of the myriad ways families navigate the complexities of childhood cancer.

Throughout this journey, remember that you are not alone. Utilize the support network within Papou's Mouse, seeking advice and sharing experiences with fellow Mouse-families. This community is a valuable resource, offering encouragement and insights that can enhance your mentoring experience.

## **Program Guidelines and Challenges**

### **Causes for Removal from the PM Match-making Program**

Participants may be removed from the program due to:

- Breach of confidentiality
- Inappropriate behavior or language
- Consistently missing scheduled meetings
- Failure to adhere to program guidelines

Papou's Mouse reserves the right to remove families from the program at their discretion.

### **Handling a Difficult Family**

Remember, every family is unique, and what works for one may not work for another. Some families have never experienced a trauma, or have never engaged in a relationship of this sort. Communication styles differ wildly across families and cultures. While your Papou-family may be quite different from your family, they are still deserving of support and the opportunity to learn and grow. Acknowledge their feelings and validate their experiences, showing that you are an ally in their journey. Sometimes all you can do is listen and gently guide by sharing your own journey.

For some, it can be very challenging to be supportive of others who take a very different approach whether it be how they process their emotions, or how they make decisions about their child's care. Acknowledge that this is hard on you, too. And focus on what you *can* do, even if at times all that is is being a good listener.

In addition to communication, it's essential to set clear boundaries and expectations. This clarity can help prevent misunderstandings and ensure everyone is on the same page. This may look like saying, "The program doesn't want us to discuss politics." Then redirect. "Was your

son able to attend that party he was excited about?" For help with setting boundaries, reach out to your program coordinator.

Flexibility and adaptability are key. Be open to adjusting your strategies and be willing to learn from each experience. This adaptability not only enhances your effectiveness as a mentor but also fosters an environment where families feel valued and heard.

Together, with a supportive community, we can overcome challenges and continue to make a positive impact on the families we serve.

## **Discussing Religion, Politics, and Money**

It is important to recognize that each family's experiences and beliefs are deeply personal, and these conversations should be approached with empathy and tact. Encourage open-ended questions to facilitate understanding and allow each party to express their views without fear of judgment.

In situations where differing opinions arise, focus on finding common ground and shared values. Sometimes all you can do is listen. This approach can help maintain a positive and constructive atmosphere, emphasizing the aspects that unite rather than divide. Remember, the goal is not to change minds but to foster mutual respect and acceptance.

If at any point the conversation becomes uncomfortable or unproductive, it's perfectly acceptable to steer the discussion back to the primary focus of the mentoring relationship: supporting the family through their journey with childhood cancer.

## **Conclusion**

Through shared stories and compassionate listening, our program strives to build bridges of understanding and empathy. Mouse-families, drawing from their own experiences, offer practical advice and emotional support, helping families to feel less isolated in their struggles. Each interaction is an opportunity to inspire strength and courage, reminding families that they are not alone in their journey.

We believe that through collaboration and mutual respect, both Mouse and Papou-families can learn and grow. By joining forces, we can face the challenges of childhood cancer together, fostering an environment of hope and healing. With your participation and commitment, we can continue to provide the support necessary to help families thrive, offering a beacon of hope in difficult times.

## **Final Thoughts**

Your dedication and compassion are the cornerstones of this program's success. As you continue to grow and adapt in your role, remember that your efforts contribute to a legacy of hope and healing. Each story shared, every piece of advice given, and all the empathy extended help weave a tapestry of support that strengthens the fabric of our community.

We encourage you to stay connected with fellow Mouse-families and the broader network at Papou's Mouse. Sharing your experiences and insights not only enriches your own journey but also enhances the collective wisdom of our community. Together, we can continue to innovate and improve our approaches, ensuring that we offer the best possible support to families in need.

As you reflect on your experiences, take pride in the positive impact you are making. Your compassion and resilience inspire others and exemplify the spirit of Papou's Mouse. Thank you for your unwavering commitment and for being a beacon of hope for families navigating the complexities of childhood cancer. With your ongoing support, we can continue to build a nurturing environment where everyone feels understood, valued, and empowered to face the future with confidence.



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