



ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL PIERCERS



**ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL PIERCERS
SUGGESTED APPRENTICE BODY PIERCER
GUIDELINES AND CURRICULUM**

Intent and Scope

Body piercers learn in a variety of different manners, but none is as tried and true as a body piercing apprenticeship under the mentorship of an experienced piercer.

The purposes of the APP Suggested Apprentice Body Piercer Guidelines and Curriculum is first to establish a curriculum that helps apprentices learn and mentors teach vital health and safety information. Secondly, it is intended to promote a positive relationship between a mentor and their apprentice. Finally, these guidelines and curriculum give a realistic basis for apprenticeship timelines and skillsets.

The strength of an apprenticeship is that it can be modified to meet the needs of the individual apprentice. While this guide reflects an appropriate minimum standard, additional apprenticeship hours (including observation and supervised piercing procedures) may be required. Continuing one's education is a necessity. Both apprentice and mentor are encouraged to seek out continuing education opportunities.



Mentor Requirements

Before taking on an apprentice, the mentor(s) should meet the following minimum criteria:

- Five (5) years professional piercing experience
- Up-to-date CPR, First Aid and Bloodborne Pathogens Training

In addition, the following suggested prerequisites are optional but encouraged.

- Attendance of the Association of Professional Piercers conference, with a minimum of five (5) classes attended
- Peer recommendation: two (2) piercers that do not work at the same shop as the mentor should write letters of recommendation for the mentor to the apprentice before the relationship begins
- Association of Professional Piercers membership: this means that the piercer has submitted their piercing facility to peer review, as well as having satisfactorily completed a questionnaire and professional requirements to have gained membership
- Finally, we encourage Mentors to follow the APP's longstanding health and safety standards outlined in the APP Procedure Manual and the APP's initial jewelry standards, even if they are not APP members

This combination of objective training and subjective peer review is intended to prevent potential mentors from taking on apprentices before they have achieved an appropriate professional competency. It is suggested that mentors have a superb background in, and attend classes on, materials, safe studio practices and up-to-date techniques.

In addition, every piercing mentor should read and sign the APP Mentor Code of Ethics, providing their apprentice with a signed copy of both the APP Mentor Code of Ethics and APP Apprentice's Bill of Rights.

Piercing Mentor Code of Ethics

Every piercer who is training an apprentice piercer shall:

- Only train another piercer after they have professionally pierced for a minimum of five years, and have peer support to become a mentor.
- Maintain a clean, safe, and healthy workplace for all employees, apprentices and clients.
- Not engage in hazing their apprentices.
- Not engage in sexual, verbal, or physical harassment of their apprentices.
- Not abuse authority or power over their apprentices.
- Promote the fair and respectful provision of feedback on performance.
- Teach appropriate health and safety to their apprentice, and practice appropriate health and safety in their own piercing career.
- Never discriminate based on race, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Never allow an apprentice to perform a piercing unsupervised that they have not yet performed.
- Embody professionalism toward their apprentice and clientele.
- Comply with all local labor laws.
- Encourage their apprentice to seek education from professional sources throughout the body piercing community.
- Make every effort to expand their own education.

Piercing Apprentice's Bill of Rights*

Every piercing apprentice has the right:

- To a clean, safe work environment, with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) provided at no cost to them.
- To appropriate bloodborne pathogens training, paid for by the shop they are training at.
- To a workplace free of hazing.
- To a professional work relationship with their mentor. This relationship must be devoid of sexual, verbal, or any other type of illegal harassment.
- To an apprenticeship free of abuse of authority or power by their mentor.
- To fair and respectful provision of feedback on performance.
- To an apprenticeship compliant with local labor laws.
- To observation and instruction by their mentor for every piercing they are attempting for the first time.
- To decline to perform piercings they are not properly trained to do.
- To a reasonable work schedule, in compliance with local labor laws.
- To a knowledgeable piercing mentor with enough experience to train a new piercer.
- To pursue employment in another field or with another body art studio.

* The term "Bill of Rights" has been adopted by Jim Ward and the Gauntlet's Piercer Bill of Rights, written and published in 1995. This is not a legal term, and should not be used as one. This document is intended to suggest the APP ideals of what a moral and ethical learning environment should be.

Red and Green Flags

Apprenticeships can differ in many ways, depending on the mentor, apprentice, studio, and the geographic location. There are, however, some “red flags” that can act as cautionary warnings for someone who is seeking, or is already in, an apprenticeship. Opposite from that, there are “green flags” which indicate the potential for a healthy and positive learning and working environment. Here are some listed red and green flags for consideration.

Red Flags

- Mentor or supervisor wants too much control over apprentice’s life, which can include:
 - requiring you to live with them
 - wants you on-call at all times
 - will pay your bills or expenses rather than a paycheck
 - manipulates your finances until you are dependent on them
 - seeks to control your outside social interactions in inappropriate ways including your personal friendships, romantic relationships, or family relationships. This does not include appropriate requests such as not dating clients or coworkers.
- Refuses to provide an offer in writing
- Mentor presents themselves as being able to “ruin” someone’s career
- Unable to find former workers that left on good terms
 - the supervisor may say things like every former worker is a “backstabber” or other shops “stole our employees”
- Mentor does not have good relationships with other studios
 - prohibits outside “visitors” or shadowing, guest spots, etc.
- Mentor or studio is unprepared or ill-supplied to teach the apprentice
- Apprentices are asked to pierce far too soon
 - Example: “We showed you how to do this twice, now you work next Saturday”
- Apprentices are asked to provide their own Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - Example: “You aren’t an employee so you have to bring your own gloves to clean the shop”
- Mentor is witnessed lying about anything to anyone
- Studio is not following local laws or required local health and safety requirements

Green Flags

- Mentor responds to feedback positively
 - this doesn't mean they do everything that a worker wants, however, they do listen and show an openness to new ideas
- Mentor is not only following local laws, but is deeply interested in maintaining legal and ethical standards
- Mentor considers workers as valuable, not just for the work they bring to the shop, but as human beings deserving respect
- Mentor is eager to prevent miscommunication and attempts to put as much in writing as possible, including rules, responsibilities, payment, etc.
- Mentor has their own healthy boundaries, and respects their workers and customers healthy boundaries

Reporting Problems

Many people are hesitant to file reports to government agencies, often because they feel nothing will be done. While that may be the case, putting a report on record documents the issue in a legal sense. Those affected should gather or save as much supporting documentation as possible to be included.

Who do I contact?

- Problems with employment - Contact Department of Labor, or local equivalent
- Studio is not following local regulations - Contact the Health Department, or local equivalent
- Victims or direct witnesses of an assault - Contact law enforcement

For additional information and resources on harassment and abuse from the APP, including what to do if you feel that a member of the APP has violated the terms of their membership, please visit www.safepiercing.org/harassment_abuse.

Minimum Requirements of a Piercing Apprenticeship

A note about the numbers referenced:

The following numbers are provided as a *minimum standard*, based on input from APP Members. No number of hours or procedures can accurately say what an individual apprentice may need to become competent. That being the case, the numbers listed below are presented as industry standard *minimums* before an apprentice be allowed to pierce the public without a mentor present.

- **Apprentices are expected to be 18 years of age or older.** Even if local laws allow, the nature of body piercing requires apprentices to be adults.

- **1200 Hours working with a mentor piercer:** (documented daily, co-signed by both apprentice and mentor)

This training involves observing the mentor perform piercings, maintain paperwork, process tools (if applicable), and do client consultations, as well as other piercing studio related responsibilities. The daily logbook is located on page 12.

- **100 hours of documented procedure observation.** This should include no fewer than 100 piercing procedures. Those 100 piercing procedures should feature a variety of piercing locations and techniques.

- **50 piercings performed under mentor supervision.** The apprentice should never attempt a piercing they haven't done before without mentor supervision.

- **Required Education:**

The following classes, available in person and online, must be completed by the apprentice before working in the piercing facility, and maintained as the program requires.

- ☐ Body art specific OSHA approved Bloodborne Pathogens Training, compliant with local regulations. The Association of Professional Piercers online BBP Program is highly recommended if an in person, industry specific course is not readily available.
- ☐ CPR (maintained as program requires)
- ☐ First Aid (maintained as program requires)
- ☐ APP Exposure Control Plans
- ☐ APP Infection Control Plans
- ☐ APP Personal Protective Equipment Standard
- ☐ Any state, province, or country specific training required by law.

Other Requirements to consider:

A mentor may want an apprentice to provide or complete some of the following items:

- ☐ A Resume
- ☐ A Personal Statement (Why do you want to pierce?)
- ☐ An apprenticeship application developed by the mentor
- ☐ Reliable transportation to the training facility, whether it be public transport or a reliable vehicle.
- ☐ A camera or a working camera phone to document piercings performed
- ☐ In the United States, a Hepatitis B vaccine, and/or a serological test (titer test), or a signed Hepatitis B Vaccine Declination form is an OSHA requirement.

The Apprenticeship Process

While apprenticeship styles differ amongst piercers, it is considered an industry standard that an apprenticeship will include, at a minimum, observation of piercing procedures, as well as piercings performed by the apprentice while the mentor coaches and ensures safety.

Apprentice observation:

While there are several learning methods which mentors may employ in the process of training a new piercer, observation of piercing procedures is considered an integral part of every apprenticeship.

- ☐ 100 hours of documented observation. This should include no fewer than 50 piercing procedures. Those 50 piercing procedures should feature a variety of piercing locations and techniques.

Mentor observed apprentice piercings

When the APP Membership was polled, the requisite number of piercings performed under observation was controversial. It is clearly important that an apprentice performs a substantial number of piercings on different areas of the body utilizing different modern piercing techniques under the watchful eye of their mentor. It is also extremely important to master certain skills previous to piercing the public.

It is suggested that every apprentice perform a minimum of 50 piercings under mentor supervision. The apprentice should never attempt a piercing they haven't done before without mentor supervision. After a period of two years of professional piercing, a piercer may consider performing a piercing they haven't done before without a mentor present, so long as the piercee is made aware of the piercer's experience level.

In addition to performing piercing under mentor supervision, it is important that every apprentice demonstrate consistent competency in the following skills:

- ☐ Hand Washing
- ☐ Glove donning
- ☐ Marking and piercing placement
- ☐ Skin Prep
- ☐ Jewelry Insertion
- ☐ Safe Sharps Disposal
- ☐ Piercing Procedure Asepsis
- ☐ Cross Contamination Prevention
- ☐ Clamped Piercing Technique
- ☐ Receiver Tube Piercing Technique
- ☐ "Freehand" Piercing Technique
- ☐ Smooth Piercing technique
- ☐ Accurate piercing technique
- ☐ Jewelry Selection for Initial Piercing
- ☐ Jewelry Selection for Healed Piercing
- ☐ Aftercare Knowledge
- ☐ Troubleshooting Knowledge
- ☐ Bedside Manner
- ☐ Customer Service
- ☐ Instrument Reprocessing
- ☐ Client Paperwork
- ☐ Universal and Standard Precaution
- ☐ Needle Stick Protocol
- ☐ Autoclave Use
- ☐ Autoclave Maintenance
- ☐ Clean-Up Room Protocols

The Mentor's role

A mentor must ensure that the apprentice is well versed and has received thorough instruction in health and safety, hand washing, marking, piercing placement, initial jewelry selection, safe sharps disposal and aftercare before piercing volunteers. Typically, apprentice piercings are performed at a discount, but this is not a requirement. Volunteers for apprentice piercings should be informed by the mentor that they are being pierced by an apprentice piercer, and that the mentor will be present to monitor safety and assist should occasion require.

Mentors should take the role of coach or teacher, allowing the apprentice to demonstrate competency. **Mentors must step in if the safety of the client or the apprentice is at risk.**

Required Reading

Every apprentice should read the following resources in their entirety. Piercing Mentors should be well-versed in the text, and available to answer questions.

- The APP Procedure Manual (most recent version 2013)
- The CDC Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities, 2008
- The CDC Guideline for Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings, 2007
- <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>

Suggested Reading

It is strongly suggested that apprentices read medical literature, as well as develop an understanding and respect for the history of our community. The following list is far from complete but an excellent starting point.

- Health and Safety Texts
- AORN Guidelines for Perioperative Practice, current Edition
- Berry and Kohn's Operating Room Technique
- Anatomy texts (*Gray's Anatomy*, *Atlas of Human Anatomy*)
- Body Piercing Texts and Web Resources
- *The Piercing Bible* by Elayne Angel
- *Running the Gauntlet* by Jim Ward
- *Spirit + Flesh* by Fakir Musafar
- Modern Primitives
- *A Brief History of the Evolution of Body Adornment: Ancient Origins and Today* by Blake Andrew Perlingieri
- <http://sacreddebris.com>

Additional Shop Skills

The following list of skills should be considered in making an apprentice a well rounded piercer. Individual shops and mentors should absolutely add their own perspective to any apprenticeship.

- Selecting appropriate size and style jewelry
- Using jewelry selection to complement a customer's style
- Understanding materials and relevant safety standards
- De-escalation of problems with customers
- Speaking Clearly and Directly with customers
- Maintaining personal appearance
- Understanding how conduct outside of the shop affects the shop
- Aftercare troubleshooting
- Worn jewelry shop protocols: how to safely handle worn jewelry and shop policies on reprocessing worn jewelry for the original wearer
- How to give shop tours
- How to use/maintain the clean ultrasonic-learn to use/maintain anodizer
- Use of calipers and gauge wheels
- Learn about all the jewelry that your shop sells, and the manufacturers that make it
- How to inspect, clean, measure, package, label, sterilize, and stock new jewelry

Definitions

Apprenticeship :

a specific period of guided progress through the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels of piercer training

Apprenticeship Hour :

One hour (60 minutes) of training, including observing procedures by your mentor or other piercers in the studio, being observed performing procedures by your mentor, having scholarly discussions with your mentor, performing research, or other active or passive training exercises

Successful Piercing Procedure :

A successful piercing procedure will include marking, proper skin prep, actual piercing execution, jewelry insertion, proper sharps disposal, with necessary PPE and hand washing protocol. It should be completed without cross contamination. It should be accurate, and on the marks the apprentice made. It should have jewelry inserted smoothly. It should have jewelry that fits properly for healing - long enough to allow for "normal" swelling, not so long as to snag and cause issues with healing. If downsizing during healing is expected, the client should be given appropriate instructions. Regional variation in swelling should be considered. It should include aftercare instructions, as well as answers for any client questions.

Jewelry Change "Procedure" :

Service involving piercer/apprentice exchanging old piece of body jewelry for a new piece of body jewelry in an existing piercing. May be performed for healed or healing piercings.

DATE:

HOURS AT THE SHOP:

TASKS PERFORMED:

NUMBER OF PIERCINGS OBSERVED: _____

TYPE OF PIERCINGS OBSERVED:

NUMBER OF PIERCINGS PERFORMED: _____

TYPE OF PIERCINGS PERFORMED:

MENTOR'S NOTES:

APPRENTICE'S NOTES:

WITNESS NAME: _____

WITNESS SIGNATURE: _____

Piercing name:

Also known as:

Inventor or Culturally Associated with:

Jewelry Info

Style:

Gauge:

Length/Diameter:

Jewelry Notes:

Supplies and equipment typically required for this piercing:**What you will start with as a beginner:****Technique:****Healing time:****Common Problems:****Performed during apprenticeship:**

1) (client) _____ (date) _____

Notes: _____

2) _____ (date) _____

Notes: _____

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- Teach appropriate health and safety to their apprentice, and practice appropriate health and safety in their own piercing career.
- Never discriminate based on race, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Never allow an apprentice to perform a piercing unsupervised that they have not yet performed.
- Embody professionalism toward their apprentice and clientele.
- Comply with all local labor laws.
- Encourage their apprentice to seek education from professional sources throughout the body piercing community.
- Make every effort to expand their own education.

I agree to abide by the Piercing Mentor Code of Conduct.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

Why We Should Consider Paid Apprenticeships

An Editorial By Jef Saunders, Becky Dill, & Monica Sabin

Intro

It is difficult to say for sure where or when the conventions of piercing apprenticeship were developed. The Gauntlet, the first body piercing studio in the United States, had an apprenticeship model where piercers were paid employees, with defined training goals and a pathway to advancement. Almost certainly, some of our roots also come from tattoo apprenticeships, meaning these “unwritten rules” go back a very, very long time. Is it any surprise that some of these customs are in need of an update?

One particular norm that is desperately in need of changing is the idea that an apprentice is an unpaid student/servant to their mentor. The Apprenticeship Guideline and Curriculum was originally assembled with the goal of apprentice safety and cultivating quality mentor/apprentice relationships, and the original document strongly hinted that the apprentice position should be a paid one in the modern era.

It is easy to see why an experienced piercer, who made it through an unpaid apprenticeship, might eagerly follow the script that their trainer followed. Unpaid apprenticeships were the norm in the body art industry, and for many piercers, giving someone the gift of a piercing career is its own payment. It is difficult for the older generation to understand why things should change.

Incomes have not gone up at the same rate as housing, health care, higher education and food costs have. Which is to say that, while an unpaid apprentice in 1990 could probably work an additional part time job and still scrape by, that becomes less and less likely every year afterwards. To put it bluntly, an unpaid apprentice in 2020 has it much harder than an unpaid apprentice years earlier.

Paying the apprentice is good for the shop and the trainer. A healthy trainee is a good trainee. If an apprentice is struggling to cover the cost of basic needs, such as food and housing, this can carry over into their time in the studio. This can prolong their apprenticeship and/or distract from a quality learning process putting more strain on the trainer and the studio. Providing pay during training can prevent the apprentice from having to abruptly leave the apprenticeship when they can no longer financially manage participating in an unpaid apprenticeship. This can also help to reinforce professional standards held by the trainer and the studio, that will be carried on by the apprentice and their future career.

Paid apprenticeships help piercers. A paid position is something most people can easily commit to. This allows for more focus on your training and less on how you will survive. There is the better opportunity to adequately prepare for a professional piercing career. In the United States and other regions, there are typically governmental protections regarding paid workers that an informal apprentice may not be able to receive.

Paid apprenticeship can also help the piercing industry. There are many ways in which systemic racism manifests in our society and continues to benefit those that have more resources, more access, and fewer barriers to achieve success. Apprenticeships can last a couple of years. If the apprenticeship goes unpaid, or if the pay is lower than the cost of living, then piercing careers

only become accessible to the most privileged. This, coupled with other factors, leaves our industry lacking diversity. By offering paid apprenticeships, candidates from different backgrounds have a more equitable opportunity to become a part of the industry.

Another issue the industry faces is the potential for abuse to occur in the studio. Differences in power or status, whether perceived or real, are often at the root of harassment and abuse. In addition, if an apprentice is being compensated through untraditional means, they might struggle to leave any toxic and dangerous situations. Normalizing paid apprenticeships can help to lessen the prevalence of abuse by financial manipulation (intentional or incidental) from mentors towards their apprentices.

While paid apprenticeships will not eliminate systemic racism or abuse, it is a start to addressing some of the unchecked privilege and power dynamics from which our industry suffers.

Closing

As leaders in our industry, we often promote continued learning and adapting as new information becomes available. We feel that this growth is important so we can improve as professionals, provide our clients with a better experience, and practice safe piercing. We hope that this editorial will help broaden perspectives on industry norms about apprenticeships and our ability to shape the future of our industry together.

*Note: This editorial content does not address local, state/provincial, or federal laws. The legal work status of an apprentice or trainee piercer will often dictate pay is mandatory. In the US, this information can be found through the Department of Labor. Mentors have a responsibility to research and maintain legal employment standards in their area.

Additions? Corrections? Suggestions?

The APP Suggested Body Piercing Apprentice Curriculum is intended to be modified and amended with Board of Directors oversight. Please contact the Membership Committee at members@safepiercing.org with any improvements you may have.

Contributors:

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