

**How to evaluate
Group Mentoring
Programmes: A
*step-by-step guide***

**The Group Mentoring
Toolkit**

1. Introduction

Group mentoring is best understood as a structured process where young people's attitudes, behaviour regulation, and self-understanding develop through peer-to-peer interaction within a facilitated group rather than through each participant's relationships with the mentor alone. It operates by creating a safe space in which young people can participate in shared discussion, encounter alternative perspectives, and reflect on behaviour, relationships, and their choices over a period of time. In many school-based programmes, participation begins through referral from pastoral teams or teaching staff, and young people may initially attend because support has been recommended rather than actively chosen. Early sessions, therefore, might focus on establishing the conditions for future group discussions and supporting, initially reluctant, participation. As engagement develops, discussion might become more open and reflective, allowing young people to reconsider how they interpret experiences and respond to situations in school and beyond.

Because change develops through interaction across sessions, group mentoring cannot be evaluated only by recording attendance or session activity. Evaluation needs to examine how group conditions are established, how peer interaction develops over time, and how shifts in language, interpretation, and behaviour emerge across the mentoring period. Evidence from case-based evaluations of school-based group mentoring shows that these changes are visible in participation patterns, mentor observations, and repeated themes across groups, allowing organisations to describe how change develops in practice rather than relying only on end-of-programme outcome scores.

Group mentoring can also be understood as influencing how young people participate within classroom environments, peer relationships, and wider school systems over time. Evaluations therefore should examine whether engagement with learning, interaction with peers, and responses to conflict or challenge change as

participation in group sessions progresses. In this sense, impact is not only measured through improvements within outcome areas such as emotional regulation, communication, or decision-making, but also through reduced escalation into behaviour that disrupts participation in structured learning environments. This perspective helps explain how changes developed through peer interaction inside mentoring contribute to wider changes across school contexts.

The steps below set out a practical approach that organisations delivering group mentoring can follow to evaluate this process in a structured and credible way.

2. The evaluation approach used in this guide

This guide uses a '*mixed-methods*' approach that measures impact through surveys (based on the outcomes frameworks in this toolkit) as well as other qualitative methods such as reflection sessions, case note analysis, and focus group data. It focuses on measuring change in young people over time and understanding how that change develops through structured peer interaction within facilitated group sessions and how this change transfers into teaching practice and the wider school environment. This approach combines several types of evidence:

- outcome surveys completed at the start and end of group mentoring (and periodically during delivery where possible)
- session records linked to outcome indicators
- mentor observation and professional judgement about participation and group dynamics
- interviews or reflective conversations with young people
- teacher insight into changes in classroom participation, behaviour, and communication
- whole-school indicators such as behaviour patterns, safeguarding insight, curriculum alignment, and pastoral coordination where available

When reported together, these sources allow organisations to examine both what changed and how change developed across the mentoring period. Evaluations in this guide is based on three principles.

1. Group mentoring impact is measured through outcomes and indicators.

Outcomes describe areas of development such as emotional regulation, peer interaction, communication, or participation in structured learning environments. Indicators describe what we would expect to observe if change is taking place. Tracking indicators across sessions allows progress to be interpreted systematically rather than relying only on informal impressions.

2. Group mentoring impact develops through interaction over time. Because group mentoring operates through facilitated dialogue and shared reflection rather than instruction alone, evaluation needs to examine how participation develops, how discussion becomes more reflective, and how interpretations of behaviour and experience shift across sessions.

3. Group mentoring contributes to wider changes by influencing participation within school environments. Changes observed within sessions often support improvements in teacher understanding of pupil needs, classroom climate, and coordination between pastoral systems and external mentoring support. Evaluation therefore considers both movement within psychosocial outcome areas and changes in teaching practice and whole-school responses to pupil need.

This approach allows organisations to produce structured, credible evidence about the difference their group mentoring work makes while remaining realistic about what group mentoring can and cannot influence directly.

3. A Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1 — Decide what you want to understand. Start by being clear about the purpose of the evaluation by asking ‘*what do I want to know?*’. Most group mentoring evaluations aim to answer one or more of the following questions:

- What difference does group mentoring make for young people?
- How does group mentoring produce that difference?
- Which groups of young people benefit most?
- What changes happen during group mentoring, and what happens afterwards?

Because group mentoring works through structured peer interaction rather than individual support alone, evaluation should examine both *outcomes* and *interaction* within sessions.

Step 2 — Select the outcome areas you will measure. Use the group mentoring outcomes framework as the structure for your evaluation. Outcomes frameworks are made up of the outcomes areas themselves, as well as indicators. **Not every evaluation has to measure and collect data on all outcomes and indicators, so be selective. Over the course of a year, you can build up an evidence base that covers all of the framework – but each individual evaluation can be more targeted on specific outcomes.** The framework in this toolkit includes ten areas of developmental change (outcomes) that group mentoring is expected to influence directly:

- emotional regulation
- managing behaviour in group settings
- peer relationships

- school belonging
- learning engagement
- decision-making
- communication and reflection
- identity and agency
- future motivation
- reduced harmful behaviour

These outcome areas describe developmental change that takes place through participation in structured discussion and peer interaction across the mentoring period. They should form the core structure for monitoring progress across all groups.

Where group mentoring is delivered in school settings, organisations may also choose to use the companion **teacher** and **whole-school** outcomes frameworks alongside the pupil framework. These frameworks support evaluation of how pupil-level change contributes to classroom practice, staff confidence, safeguarding insight, curriculum delivery, and wider pastoral coordination. Used together, the three frameworks provide a structured way to understand how change develops across pupils, teachers, and school systems rather than at participant level alone.

Indicators within each outcome area describe observable signs of change, such as listening to peers' perspectives, remaining settled during sessions, expressing views appropriately, reflecting on experiences, or describing links between present choices and future outcomes. Session notes, mentor observations, teacher feedback, and survey responses should be interpreted against these indicators rather than recorded as unstructured narrative alone.

Wider indicators such as attendance, behaviour incidents, exclusions, and curriculum participation should still be recorded where available, but interpreted alongside mentoring progress rather than treated as direct mentoring outcomes.

Step 3 — Decide your approach to data collection. You will need a consistent group mentoring dataset built from these four sources of data:

- **Outcome surveys** - Administer the group mentoring survey at the start and end of delivery. Where programmes run across several weeks or terms, repeat the survey at intervals during delivery so that progress can still be captured if participation ends earlier than expected.
- **Session data** — After each session, record evidence linked to framework indicators, for example:
 - Numbers participating in discussions
 - Instances of young people listening to peers' perspectives
 - Examples of where young people reflected on experiences
 - Examples of young people responding constructively during disagreement
 - Examples of young people contributing appropriately in group activity
 - Examples of young people using reflective language about behaviour or choices
- **Mentor observation and judgement** — Mentor judgement helps interpret the pace of session discussions, readiness to participate in discussion, and shifts in group interaction across sessions. Recording these observations helps explain why change develops at different speeds for different groups.

- **Teacher feedback** — Teachers can provide evidence about changes in classroom behaviour, participation, peer interaction, emotional regulation, and responsiveness to boundaries following mentoring sessions.
- **Whole-school monitoring information** — Schools may contribute evidence about safeguarding insight, behaviour trends, curriculum engagement, pastoral coordination, and integration of mentoring themes into wider provision.
- **Short interviews or reflective conversations** — These help explain how change happened, not just whether it happened.

Step 4 — Collect baseline information before mentoring begins. Before group mentoring begins, record:

- survey responses
- referral reasons and background context
- risk indicators
- SEN status and EHCP
- Participation concerns where available

This creates a starting point against which change can be interpreted later.

Step 5 — Record what happens during mentoring. During group mentoring, record evidence that links session activity to outcome indicators in the framework. Examples include:

- whether the session took place
- levels of participation across the group
- topics discussed
- examples of peer interaction

- discussion of relationships, decisions, or emotions
- evidence of reflection during discussion
- changes in engagement across sessions

Recording sessions in this way allows organisations to track movement within outcome areas over time rather than relying only on end-point comparison.

Step 6 — Track how the group process develops. Group mentoring often progresses through recognisable stages:

- establishing relational safety within the group
- supporting participation in structured discussion
- developing shared language about behaviour and experience
- increasing reflection across peer interaction
- transfer of learning beyond sessions into classroom and peer contexts

Recording when these shifts occur helps explain why change happens when it does. This is especially useful for case-based group mentoring evaluations as these often group young people into *types* to understand engagement patterns based on common experiences or characteristics. The resulting typologies – or case studies based on the type of young people in the sessions are a useful way of understanding not just if the sessions are effective, but if they work better for young people with specific experiences compared to others.

Step 7 — Repeat outcome surveys during delivery where possible. Use the group mentoring survey as a structured progress-tracking tool across the mentoring period. Minimum approach:

- baseline survey at the start

- end of programme survey in the final session

If the programme runs for a prolonged period – such as a school term (10-13 weeks) it might be useful to administer the survey halfway through as well. This helps capture gradual change and reduces the risk of losing outcome data where participation ends earlier than expected.

Step 8 — Collect young people's reflections on change. Collect qualitative evidence through short interviews or, where appropriate and safe, small group discussions. Useful prompts include:

- what has changed since group mentoring began
- what helped those changes happen
- what they learned from discussion with other young people
- what they are doing differently in school now

These responses provide evidence about mechanisms such as peer interaction, reflection, and reinterpretation of experience.

Step 9 — Compare start and end of programme data. At the end of group mentoring, compare:

- baseline survey responses
- follow-up survey responses
- session monitoring data linked to framework indicators
- interview evidence

Look for patterns of movement across the ten outcome areas. In many groups, early change is first observed in participation, communication, and peer interaction,

followed later by changes in behaviour, decision-making, and engagement with learning. Tracking the sequence of change helps interpret whether group mentoring mechanisms operated as expected.

Step 10 — Examine how change happened, not just what changed. Group mentoring works through structured interaction over time. Look for evidence that:

- participation increased across sessions
- discussion became more reflective
- young people responded to peers' perspectives differently
- shared language about behaviour and choices developed within the group
- changes observed during sessions transferred into classroom or peer contexts

This helps demonstrate whether group mentoring mechanisms were operating as expected.

Step 11 — Interpret wider outcomes alongside mentoring progress. Where available, combine mentoring evidence with external data such as:

- school attendance
- behaviour records
- exclusions
- participation in lessons
- engagement with support services
- teacher-reported changes in classroom climate, relational practice, and confidence addressing pupil needs
- whole-school developments such as earlier safeguarding identification, improved pastoral coordination, integration of mentoring themes into

curriculum delivery, and strengthened partnerships with external mentoring providers

Group mentoring contributes to these outcomes but does not produce them on its own. Interpreting them alongside pupil-level evidence helps explain how learning developed through peer interaction transfers into teaching practice and wider school systems. Organisations working in school settings may also interpret these patterns using the teacher and whole-school outcomes frameworks, which provide a structured way to examine how changes observed in group sessions influence classroom climate, teaching practice, safeguarding processes, behaviour systems, and wider school coordination. This helps explain how learning developed through peer interaction transfers beyond the group into the functioning of the school environment over time.

Step 12 — Summarise what the evidence shows. A clear group mentoring evaluation should answer three questions:

- What changed?
- Which outcome areas improved.
- How did change happen?
- What role peer interaction and facilitated discussion played.
- What happened afterwards?
- Whether change transferred beyond sessions into classroom participation, peer relationships, and wider school contexts.

Together, these provide a credible and practice-appropriate account of group mentoring impact.

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