



**A Model Group
Mentoring Evaluation
Strategy: *An interaction-
led approach to
measuring change***

**The Group Mentoring
Toolkit**

1. About this model strategy

This model evaluation strategy sets out how an organisation delivering Group Mentoring can examine and strengthen the evidence base for its offer. Its role is to provide an off-the-shelf strategy that organisations can adopt or adapt for their own Group Mentoring provision. It is based on observed delivery in school settings and analysis of how group mentoring functions in practice and is informed by the wider literature on mentoring effectiveness, peer interaction, social learning, and dialogic approaches to change. The strategy treats group mentoring as a theory-based intervention, meaning that it sets out how change is expected to happen, not just what outcomes are reported. Its purpose is to articulate and test how change is generated in group mentoring settings, for whom it works, and under what conditions, rather than to simply report whether positive outcomes are present.

Group Mentoring delivered by a mentoring provider is typically organised as a structured, time-limited intervention delivered through small groups facilitated by trained mentors. It may take place in school or community settings. While some of the evidence reviewed in this strategy is drawn more heavily from school-based delivery, the core logic is intended to support Group Mentoring more broadly. While sessions may draw on a shared bank of materials and themes, delivery is often deliberately responsive rather than fixed. Mentors use professional judgement to shape pacing, emphasis, and focus in response to group dynamics and patterns of engagement. As a result, the programme cannot be adequately understood or evaluated by reference to activities delivered or content covered alone. Its active components lie in the relational and interactional processes that develop within the group over time.

Evidence from practice shows that for group mentoring, engagement, reflection, and changes in behaviour emerge through the establishment of a relationally safe group

space, facilitated dialogue, and peer interaction that supports the group's ability to make sense of their actions or attitudes as individuals. Changes in behaviour are often observed to occur following prior shifts in language, interpretation, and peer dynamics, rather than preceding them. Interaction within the group is therefore treated as central to how individual learning and change occur. The evaluation approach set out here is designed to make these mechanisms explicit and to test whether they are operating as expected across different contexts and for different cohorts.

This model strategy first defines the intervention before looking at the ways in which the underlying claims and assumptions about how group mentoring works can be tested through evaluation. Section 2 explains what Group Mentoring is and how it works. Section 3 then sets out the role and aims of the model strategy, whilst section 4 reviews the evidence used to justify the model strategy's approach. Finally, section 5 translates this logic into a set of evaluation and research questions.

2. About Group Mentoring

A group mentoring programme is often delivered as a structured, time-limited offer in school or community settings, often over a defined number of sessions. Groups are small and facilitated by trained mentors, with composition shaped by need, group dynamics, and practical constraints of the setting. While delivery is responsive to need and peer dynamics rather than fixed, programmes often follow a consistent format, with sessions that allow interaction to develop over time.

The core components of Group Mentoring are defined by how sessions function, rather than by activities or curriculum content alone. Change is understood to arise through peer interaction, facilitated dialogue, and mentor judgement, rather than through instruction or the rigid delivery of prescribed material. Mentors use professional judgement to shape the pace of sessions, what content is given greater

emphasis, and how to respond to what is happening within the group, for instance, emerging disclosures, patterns of engagement, and shifts in group dynamics.

Through shared discussion and mentor prompts, young people reflect on their experiences, hear how others interpret similar situations, and reconsider how they understand their behaviour, emotions, and choices. Learning is expected to develop through changes in language and interpretation of their behaviour within the group, and to transfer this once outside the group to other, external-world settings.

Session materials are used to prompt discussion and reflection, not as curriculum materials that must be covered. While delivery may vary across groups and contexts, the peer-to-peer interactive mechanisms through which change is expected to occur are a more consistent feature of group mentoring programmes.

3. Aim of the strategy

This section sets out the main learning aims that an organisation could adopt if using evaluation and research to strengthen its group mentoring offer. This model evaluation strategy aims to:

- position a mentoring organisation's group mentoring programme within the wider research literature, so that learning from its own delivery is understood in relation to existing evidence on group mentoring for young people
- understand what the existing evidence says about the relationship between impact and programme length, structure, and setting
- develop a coherent account of the mechanisms through which group mentoring works in practice, in particular, the role of group interaction, mentor facilitation, and peer-to-peer dynamics across different groups and cohorts
- identify gaps in current evidence and define the overarching evaluation theme and sub-themes that can guide individual evaluation and research activity.

These aims allow a mentoring provider to situate its group mentoring offer within the wider evidence base, strengthen understanding of how change is generated in practice, and set a focused and coherent evaluation programme for the period ahead.

4. Evidence Review

As a model strategy, this section uses the evidence review to identify what the wider evidence base suggests about how group mentoring works, what forms of change it has been observed to support in other studies, and what kind of evaluation approaches are most appropriate for examining those processes.

Two strands of evidence we used for this. The first is an examination of the literature on the effectiveness of group mentoring programmes. This was used to identify how existing reviews explain change, what delivery features they emphasise, and where peer interaction is treated as the central mechanism of change, or where this was left unspecified. The second was a theory- and mechanism-focused scoping review of group mentoring and related pedagogical literature. This was used to examine how different traditions understood or conceptualised learning, interaction, and change within group settings, and to provide the evidence to support the model strategy approach set out in the sections that follow.

4.1. What the review literature says about Group Mentoring

An external review of the literature was undertaken to scope how review-level studies conceptualise group and peer-based mentoring for adolescents aged 11–16, with particular attention to the extent to which peer interaction is treated as the primary mechanism of observed change, relative to other features such as the use of resources, mentor facilitation, group structure, and delivery setting. Searches were conducted in ERIC and PubMed in January 2026 using predefined and replicable terms relating to group mentoring, peer mentoring, and secondary-age populations.

The review prioritised systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and meta-analyses, with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria applied at title and abstract stage. Eleven review-level studies were identified and included. **Whilst this review used a structured and replicable search approach, but it was undertaken to inform strategy development rather than as a full PRISMA-compliant systematic review.**

Across these reviews, group and peer-based mentoring was rarely analysed in terms of specific activities or curriculum content. Instead, studies tended to organise their analyses around a set of delivery features they treated as explanatory. These included the quality and stability of relationships, the presence and role of adult facilitation and supervision, the structure and consistency of provision, and the wider organisational or school context in which mentoring was embedded. Peer interaction was typically discussed within this broader configuration, rather than isolated as a standalone mechanism of change.

Reviews that focused specifically on mentoring examined variation across programmes primarily through differences in delivery conditions rather than mentoring format. DuBois et al. (2011) and Burton et al. (2022) both compared group and one-to-one models, but placed explanatory weight on programme structure, adult support, and responsiveness to participant need. In these reviews, peer interaction was recognised as a potentially important feature of group-based mentoring, but its role was usually interpreted in relation to facilitation, supervision, and programme design rather than treated as an independent or active intervention component.

Narrative reviews of mentoring practice similarly emphasised implementation quality and relational support as the main lenses through which interventions were understood and compared. Across the bodies of work reviewed by Rhodes and DuBois (2008), Eby et al. (2013), and Allen and Eby (2007), peer interaction was

acknowledged as part of the mentoring process, but analysis focused more consistently on how mentoring relationships were supported, monitored, and sustained across different contexts.

Reviews from adjacent fields adopted a comparable analytical stance. In school-based mental health intervention reviews, Troy et al. (2022) examined how the normative understanding of how relationships should be conducted, organisational culture, and shared practices shaped intervention functioning within educational settings, rather than presenting peer interaction as a discrete change mechanism. Reviews of alternative mentoring formats, such as e-mentoring, likewise framed delivery content and the role of peer-to-peer interaction as secondary to the conditions through which mentoring relationships were enabled, supported, and made inclusive (Single and Muller, 2014).

The literature tends to treat peer interaction as one element within a wider set of relational and organisational conditions, rather than as the primary unit of analysis in its own right. Practice-led evaluation, however, shows that mentors themselves often understand peer-to-peer interaction to be the active mechanism through which group mentoring generates reflection, challenge, and change. For a model strategy, this matters because it shows both what the review literature already supports and where a more explicit mechanism-led account of Group Mentoring is still needed.

4.2. Theory and mechanism evidence

A second evidence strand was therefore used to examine the pedagogies informing group mentoring interventions more directly. This strand focused on theory-led and mechanism-focused studies of group-based practice in school and education-adjacent settings. A systematic search of the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database was conducted in February 2026. The following search string was applied in full: ("group mentoring" OR "group intervention" OR "small group") AND

("pedagogy" OR "theory of change" OR "theoretical framework" OR "conceptual framework") AND ("evaluation" OR "programme evaluation" OR "assessment") AND ("school*" OR "education*").

English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and doctoral dissertations were included, with no date restrictions applied. Titles and abstracts were screened against explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, with full texts consulted where required to clarify pedagogical focus. Studies were retained where pedagogy or mechanism functioned as a primary explanatory frame rather than as background context. Approximately 200 records were identified through database searching, of which 53 studies were included in qualitative synthesis for theory and mechanism mapping. This was not a systematic review of effectiveness. While all 53 studies informed the overall mapping of pedagogical approaches, a smaller number were drawn on directly to exemplify and differentiate distinct pedagogical traditions; other studies were not taken forward where they reiterated already-identified pedagogical logics or where pedagogy was implicit rather than analytically developed.

Analysis of pedagogical approaches within the reviewed literature shows how group mentoring interventions are understood to generate change by examining the claims studies made about learning, interaction, and development within groups. Across the studies reviewed, authors described concrete processes through which change was expected to occur, including observation and modelling between peers, structured dialogue, shared reflection, and participation in group practices over time. These processes were not evenly distributed across pedagogical traditions, and in practice, interventions rarely aligned cleanly with a single pedagogical model, with most studies describing hybrid approaches combining elements from multiple traditions. Pedagogy was most clearly articulated in studies that described the group itself as doing explanatory work in the intervention, that is, where interaction between

participants was treated as the means through which learning, reflection, and change were expected to occur, rather than the group being used simply as a setting in which individually oriented activities were delivered.

In a substantial part of the literature, group-based interventions are framed as social learning environments in which change arises through peer observation, modelling, and reinforcement between group participants. Drawing on social learning theory, peer interaction was described as shaping engagement, norms, and behaviour, with learning mediated by how young people observe and respond to one another within structured group activity (Bandura, 1977). Studies of cooperative learning in school settings similarly position peer interaction as an active mechanism influencing participation and conduct, while emphasising the role of adult facilitation in establishing structure and expectations (Johnson et al., 1994).

A closely related body of work shifted the explanatory focus from modelling to dialogue. Studies aligned with dialogic and interaction-focused pedagogies describe learning as emerging through cumulative talk, shared reasoning, and collective interpretation within groups. In this literature, facilitated dialogue was treated as the mechanism through which understanding develops, rather than as a by-product of group delivery (Mercer and Howe, 2012; Littleton and Mercer, 2013).

Other pedagogical traditions located the explanatory role of the group in sustained participation and group identity development over time. Work drawing on communities of practice and related perspectives described change as arising through ongoing engagement in shared activity, with belonging, identity, and participation developing through repeated peer-to-peer interaction. In these accounts, learning was understood as participation in social practice rather than the acquisition of discrete skills (Wenger, 1998; Stoll et al., 2006).

Alongside these approaches, the literature also included pedagogical models that are compatible with group delivery but do not treat the group itself as the primary mechanism of change. Experiential, reflective, feedback-oriented, and motivation-focused pedagogies typically conceptualised learning as an individual cognitive or motivational process, with groups providing structure or efficiency rather than explanatory force. In these models, interaction may support learning but is not assumed to be the primary driver of change (Schön, 1983; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Benabou and Tirole, 2003).

4.3. Implications for the model strategy

The evidence reviewed shows that group mentoring interventions are underpinned by different theories of learning, with direct implications for how group mentoring should be understood, evaluated, and developed in practice. For a model strategy, the key distinction is between pedagogies that treat the group itself as the primary mechanism of change and those that use the group mainly as a delivery context. The evidence reviewed suggests that a group mentoring model can reasonably be framed around interaction within the group as the primary driver of change. On this basis, ten core mechanisms can be articulated as the active components of delivery. These mechanisms describe how engagement, reflection, and behavioural change arise through group-based interaction over time, rather than through exposure to informal curriculum content, prescribed activities, or direct instruction from a mentor. While not framed as formal programme components, articulating these mechanisms makes explicit how a group mentoring offer operates in practice. Stated directly, these mechanisms are:

- Group mentoring works by creating a relationally safe group space, in which young people are willing to engage without fear of judgement, sanction, or loss of peer status.

- Engagement comes before learning and change, with reflective learning only emerging once trust and participation are established.
- Group mentoring works through dialogue, not instruction, with learning generated through facilitated discussion and peer exchange rather than teaching (formal or informal) or advice-giving.
- Peer interaction is a critical driver of change, enabling normalisation, challenge, and reflection that would not occur in the same way in one-to-one settings.
- Group Mentoring enables cognitive–emotional reframing, supporting young people to rethink how they interpret behaviour, emotion, and identity.
- This reframing of how a young person understands themselves comes before behavioural change, with shifts in language and interpretation occurring before observable changes in behaviour.
- Change in the group transfers to the outside world because group mentoring focuses on interpretation rather than rules or compliance.
- Group mentoring addresses underlying attitudes rather than surface behaviour, including emotional, social, and identity-related pressures the young person might face.
- Mentors' professional judgement is central to programme effectiveness, with their ability to respond to group dynamics shaping relevance, pace, and trust.
- Group mentoring complements, rather than replaces, other school support, filling a gap for the young person between curriculum, behaviour management, and more intensive therapeutic provision.

These mechanisms make the model of group mentoring defined here closest to what is termed a '*social constructivist*' or '*collaborative*' learning approach. In these models, change is generated through interaction, dialogue, and shared meaning-making within groups. This framing is not introduced to label any particular model, but because it provides a clear and testable account of how a group mentoring

intervention might be expected to work in practice. For a model strategy, articulating these mechanisms makes it possible to explain why this is a credible approach for the sector to explore, and for evaluation purposes it makes it possible to examine whether, how, and under what conditions these mechanisms are operating in practice.

5. Evaluation and Research Questions

Approaching group mentoring evaluation as one that understands the group, and the interactions within it, as the primary mechanism of change offers a framework that can be used to explore how group mentoring works. The questions below are intended to inform evaluation studies – with the outcomes frameworks in the toolkit used to inform the development of data collection tools themselves. The questions below, grouped by strategic theme, are designed to help organisations examine how change develops across the main outcome domains for group mentoring:

Theme 1 - Safe group spaces as the foundation for meaningful engagement. This theme links mainly to the toolkit outcomes of belonging, participation and engagement, communication and reflection, and peer relationships. In school settings, this is likely to relate more directly to school belonging and learning engagement. In community settings, it is more likely to relate to community belonging and connection, and engagement in structured activity:

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does group mentoring contribute to young people's sense of belonging, participation, engagement, communication, reflection, and peer interaction?
2. **Explanatory:** How does the experience of group mentoring, as a safe and non-punitive intervention, inform impact against toolkit outcomes?
3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and for which settings, is the group space a factor in supporting young people to change?

Theme 2 – Peer interaction as the driver of attitudinal change. This theme links mainly to peer relationships, communication and reflection, decision-making, identity and agency, and emotional regulation. It focuses on whether interaction between young people influences how they interpret experience, respond to others, and think about themselves and their choices.

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does group mentoring contribute to change in peer relationships, communication and reflection, decision-making, identity and agency, and emotional regulation?
2. **Explanatory:** How does peer interaction support change in the way young people understand their behaviour, emotional regulation, relationship development, identity, and choice?
3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and for which groups or settings, does peer interaction play the strongest role in supporting attitudinal change?

Theme 3 – Peer interaction and long-term behavioural change. This theme links mainly to emotional regulation, managing behaviour, decision-making, future motivation, and reduced harmful behaviour. It focuses on whether behavioural change follows earlier shifts in reflection, interpretation, and interaction within the group.

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does group mentoring contribute to change in emotional regulation, behaviour in group settings, decision-making, future motivation, and reduced harmful behaviour?
2. **Explanatory:** How do reflection, interpretation, and peer interaction support behavioural change over time?
3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and for which young people, does behavioural change appear strongest or most sustained?

Theme 4 – Group Mentoring and wider school and community impact. This theme focuses on whether learning developed within the group transfers beyond the session itself. It links to the setting-specific outcome areas in the young people’s framework and, in school settings, may also extend to teacher and whole-school outcomes where relevant.

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does change developed within Group Mentoring transfer into wider school or community environments?
2. **Explanatory:** How does learning developed through peer interaction and reflection transfer beyond the group itself?
3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and in which settings, does wider transfer occur most clearly, including to teacher and whole-school outcomes where relevant?

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How to cite this strategy: Community Impact (2026) *A Model Group Mentoring Evaluation Strategy: An interaction-led approach to measuring change*

Appendix 1 – Model Theory of Change

