



**A Model One-to-One
Mentoring Evaluation
Strategy: A
*relationship-led
approach to measuring
change***

The 1-1 Mentoring Toolkit

1. About this model strategy

This model evaluation strategy sets out how an organisation delivering one-to-one 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 one-to-one mentoring provision. It is based on observed delivery in one-to-one mentoring settings and analysis of how mentoring relationships function in practice, and is informed by the wider literature on mentoring effectiveness, relationship quality, trust, continuity, dialogue, and relational approaches to change. The strategy treats one-to-one 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 through one-to-one mentoring relationships, for whom it works, and under what conditions, rather than to restate whether positive outcomes are present.

One-to-one mentoring delivered by a mentoring provider is typically organised as a sustained relationship between a consistent adult and a young person over time. It may take place in school, community, justice-linked, or other support settings. While mentoring models differ across organisations, the core logic set out in this model strategy is intended to support one-to-one mentoring more broadly where delivery is usually responsive to the way the mentor-mentee relationship develops, rather than presupposing a fixed or rigid approach. In one-to-one mentoring sessions, mentors use their professional judgement to inform the pace at which the relationship is expected to develop based on the young person's needs, risk profile, readiness to engage, and the underlying reasons for them being referred to mentoring. As a result, one-to-one mentoring, as an intervention, cannot be adequately understood or evaluated by reference to what happens in the sessions alone. Whilst mentors might offer significant practical support to young people as part of an engagement strategy (offering support getting passports, driving licenses, through to advocating for them in upcoming court appearances), the active components of one-to-one mentoring lie

in the relational and interactional processes that develop within the mentoring relationship over time.

Evidence from the wider mentoring literature suggests that engagement, reflection, and developmental change are shaped through trust, continuity, dialogue, responsiveness, and opportunities for sustained relational support. Relationship quality often matters in one-to-one engagements more than the value of any particular activities undertaken, and change is commonly understood to develop through conversation, reflection, encouragement, challenge, and support rather than through instruction alone.

The evaluation approach set out in this model evaluation strategy is designed to make these mechanisms explicit and to test whether they are operating as expected across different young people, contexts, and mentoring relationships.

This strategy moves from defining the intervention to setting out the conditions under which the underlying claims and assumptions about how it works can be tested. Section 2 explains what one-to-one mentoring is and how it works. Section 3 then sets out the role and aims of the model strategy, after which section 4 reviews the evidence base used to justify the model strategy's approach. Finally, section 5 translates this logic into a set of evaluation and research questions.

2. About One-to-One Mentoring

One-to-one mentoring is a relationship-based intervention in which a consistent adult works alongside a young person over time to support reflection, engagement, behavioural development, and progression through sustained interaction. It is typically responsive, relational (because based on the interaction between two people), and shaped by mentor judgement - with the pace, session focus, and the

decision to explore in depth issues affecting the young person being adapted according to the young person's needs, circumstances, and readiness for to engage.

One-to-one mentoring varies across organisations and delivery models. Some approaches are more trauma-informed, therapeutic or reflective, while others place greater emphasis on practical support, advocacy, accompaniment, education engagement, violence reduction, or system navigation. The settings in which mentoring takes place also vary, as do the referral routes, duration, intensity, and frequency of contact that shape delivery.

For strategy purposes, however, the key point is that one-to-one mentoring should not be understood simply as a set of support tasks or activities. It is better understood as a relationship-led and interaction-led intervention in which change is expected to emerge through the development of the mentoring relationship over time. Trust, consistency, responsiveness, relational safety, reflection, and mentor judgement therefore become central to how the intervention is expected to work. Within a one-to-one mentoring engagement, practical support and relational support are not always separate. Goal-setting, advocacy, accompaniment, and help with navigating wider systems may all matter, but their value often lies partly in how they strengthen engagement, trust, and the young person's sense of being supported by a trusted adult. This means that mentoring relationships are expected to support change not only through direct conversation but also through the quality, continuity, and responsiveness of that conversation over time.

A one-to-one mentoring strategy should therefore describe what mentoring involves in practice, how the mentor-mentee relationship is expected to develop, how trust and consistency are established, how practical support interacts with relational work, and what aspects of mentoring interaction are understood to function as mechanisms of change within the theory of change.

3. Aim of the strategy

As a model strategy for one-to-one mentoring, this section sets out the main aims that an organisation might adopt when using evaluation and research to strengthen its mentoring offer. It aims to:

- position a mentoring organisation's one-to-one mentoring programme within the wider research literature, so that learning from its own delivery is understood in relation to existing evidence on mentoring for young people and young adults
- understand what the existing evidence says about the relationship between impact and relationship quality, duration, continuity, and responsiveness
- develop a coherent account of the mechanisms through which its one-to-one mentoring works in practice, in particular, the role of trust, dialogue, reflection, responsiveness, and relational development for different types of young mentee
- identify gaps in current evidence and define the overarching evaluation theme and sub-themes that can guide commissioned evaluation and research activity.

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

4. Evidence Review

As a model strategy, this document uses the evidence review to do more than summarise existing studies. Its role is to identify what the wider evidence base suggests about how one-to-one mentoring works, what forms of change it may

support, and what kind of evaluation strategy is most appropriate for examining those processes.

Two strands of evidence were explored for this purpose. The first was a review of the literature on the effectiveness of one-to-one mentoring. This was used to identify how existing reviews explain change, what delivery components they emphasised, and where relationships, continuity, or responsiveness were treated as central or left unspecified. The second was a theory- and mechanism-focused examination of mentoring relationship literature and related practice evidence. This was used to examine how different traditions understand, or conceptualise, relational development, interaction, and change within one-to-one mentoring, and to provide the evidence to support the model strategy approach set out in the sections that follow.

4.1. Review-level evidence on one-to-one mentoring

There is considerable evidence relating to one-to-one mentoring that organisations can use to inform strategic thinking, develop theories of change, identify mechanisms of change, and justify evaluation approaches. This evidence base includes systematic reviews, meta-analyses, scoping reviews, integrative reviews, and wider research examining how mentoring relationships operate, what outcomes mentoring may influence, and what factors appear important in supporting mentoring effectiveness.

Across this literature, mentoring is rarely explained through activities alone. Instead, existing reviews tend to emphasise relationship quality, continuity, consistency, responsiveness, and sustained engagement as the main delivery features associated with stronger mentoring outcomes. DuBois et al. (2011) and Rhodes and DuBois (2008), for example, both suggest that mentoring works best when relationships are strong, supportive, stable, and last long enough for trust to build over time.

The literature also suggests that talking, listening, and relational support are central to how mentoring works, with Goldner and Ben-Eliyahu (2021) describing mentoring relationships as operating through trust, conversation, support, and reflection rather than through instruction alone. This supports the view that one-to-one mentoring is best understood as a relational and interaction-led intervention rather than an explicitly activity-led model.

The literature reviewed also indicates that mentoring does not work in the same way for all young people or across settings. Relationship fit, mentoring intensity, continuity, and duration may all influence how mentoring works and what outcomes emerge. Reviews focusing on culturally specific, identity-based, or context-dependent mentoring approaches similarly suggest that the effectiveness and meaning of mentoring may vary according to the young person's background, context, and wider systems of support (Farruggia et al., 2011; Edwards et al., 2022; Sanchez et al., 2023). At the same time, the review-level literature often provides limited explanation of how mentoring relationships create change in practice or how change develops over time. 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 one-to-one mentoring is still needed.

4.2. Theory and mechanism evidence

A second evidence strand was therefore used to examine the relational and developmental logic of one-to-one mentoring more directly. This strand focused on literature exploring how mentoring relationships function, what forms of interaction appear to matter within those relationships, and how mentoring supports reflection, engagement, agency, behavioural development, or wider progression over time.

Across this literature, one-to-one mentoring is typically understood as a '*dyadic*' intervention in which a young person's interaction with a consistent adult creates the

conditions for trust, reflection, challenge, and developmental support. The key explanatory unit is the mentoring relationship itself. Change is therefore not usually understood to arise through exposure to fixed content, but through sustained dialogue, relational consistency, and mentor responsiveness. Rhodes (2008) for instance, positions mentoring as developmental support grounded in relationship quality and sustained interaction, and Goldner and Ben-Eliyahu (2021) similarly emphasise relational trust, conversation, emotional support, and reflective interaction as central features of community-based mentoring relationships. Albright et al. (2017) extends this understanding by showing that mentoring may also need to be understood in relation to identity, context, and structural conditions rather than as a generic interpersonal intervention.

This literature suggests that mentoring may also support change through more than one route. In some relationships, reflective conversation and emotional support may be most important. In others, advocacy, accompaniment, consistency, or practical system support may play a stronger role in establishing engagement and enabling developmental change. Boering et al. (2024), for example, frame youth-initiated mentoring in justice contexts as involving mechanisms linked to support, relationship activation, and wider ecological connection rather than simple behaviour change alone. One immediate implication of this is that mentor responsiveness matters. One-to-one mentoring is rarely delivered as a fixed sequence. Instead, mentors adjust pacing, challenge, conversation style, and practical support in response to the young person's readiness, risks, and circumstances. The mentoring relationship therefore operates as a flexible, context-sensitive mechanism rather than a standardised package.

4.3. Implications for the model strategy

The evidence reviewed shows that one-to-one mentoring is underpinned by a relational and developmental logic, with direct implications for how mentoring

should be understood, evaluated, and developed in practice. For a model strategy, the key distinction is between mentoring understood mainly as a set of support activities and mentoring understood as a relationship-led and interaction-led intervention. The evidence reviewed suggests that a one-to-one mentoring model can reasonably be framed around the mentoring relationship itself 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 developmental change arise through sustained relational interaction over time, rather than through exposure to activities, tasks, or advice in isolation. Stated directly, these mechanisms are:

- One-to-one mentoring works by creating a consistent and trusted adult relationship in which a young person feels safe enough to engage.
- Engagement comes before any deeper reflection and change, with developmental work becoming more possible only once trust and consistency are established.
- One-to-one mentoring works through dialogue, not instruction, with change supported through conversation, reflection, and interaction rather than advice-giving alone.
- The dyadic mentoring relationship is a critical driver of change, enabling support, challenge, affirmation, and reflection that depend on relational fit and continuity.
- One-to-one mentoring enables cognitive–emotional reframing, supporting young people to reinterpret behaviour, emotion, identity, and future choices.
- Reframing comes before any deeper behavioural or developmental change, with shifts in language, understanding, and self-perception often occurring before more observable changes.

- Mentor responsiveness is central to effectiveness, with pace, mentee challenge, and support shaped by the young person's readiness and need in the wider context of their life outside of the mentoring relationship.
- Practical support, advocacy, or accompaniment can strengthen mentoring by deepening trust, supporting engagement, and helping young people navigate wider systems.
- One-to-one mentoring addresses underlying drivers rather than surface behaviour alone, including emotional, relational, identity-based, and social pressures.
- One-to-one mentoring connects young people to wider support systems and opportunities rather than operating as a stand-alone intervention.

These mechanisms make the model of one-to-one mentoring defined here as a relational, developmental, and interaction-led approach in which change is generated through trust, dialogue, responsiveness, and sustained adult support over time. This framing is not introduced to label delivery, but because it provides a clear and testable account of how the intervention is expected to work. For a model strategy, articulating these mechanisms makes it possible to explain why this is a credible approach for the sector to adopt, 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 the evaluation of an organisation's one-to-one mentoring as a theory-aligned intervention that understands the mentoring relationship, and the interactions within it, as the primary mechanism of change offers a framework against which to explore how mentoring works. The questions below are intended to help organisations examine how change develops across the main relational,

emotional, behavioural, and developmental domains associated with one-to-one mentoring.

Theme 1 - Building trust and sustaining engagement - This theme links mainly to relational safety, engagement, consistency, communication, and early developmental movement. It focuses on whether the mentoring relationship creates the conditions needed for young people to stay engaged over time:

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does one-to-one mentoring contribute to sustained engagement, trust, relational safety, and willingness to participate over time?
2. **Explanatory:** How do consistency, trust, and mentor responsiveness support engagement and continued engagement within mentoring relationships?
3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and for which types of young people, are trust and continuity most important in sustaining engagement?

Theme 2 – Dialogue, reflection, and relational change - This theme links mainly to communication and reflection, emotional awareness, identity and agency, and decision-making. It focuses on how conversation within the mentoring relationship supports change in how young people understand themselves, their experiences, and their choices:

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does one-to-one mentoring contribute to change in communication, reflection, emotional awareness, identity, agency, and decision-making?
2. **Explanatory:** How do dialogue, listening, challenge, and relational support help young people reinterpret their behaviour, emotional development, or future choices?

3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions does reflective dialogue play the strongest role in supporting change?

Theme 3 – Behavioural and developmental change over time - This theme links mainly to emotional regulation, behavioural development, agency, motivation, and wider progression. It focuses on whether more observable changes follow earlier shifts in trust, reflection, and self-understanding:

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does one-to-one mentoring contribute to change in emotional regulation, behaviour, motivation, agency, and wider developmental progression?
2. **Explanatory:** How do trust, reflection, and mentor responsiveness support behavioural and developmental change over time?
3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and for which young people, does change appear strongest or most sustained over time?

Theme 4 – Mentoring and the young person's wider life - This theme focuses on whether change developed within mentoring transfers into the young person's wider systems and relationships. It links to school engagement, family relationships, system navigation, justice-linked engagement, community participation, and wider progression where relevant:

1. **Descriptive:** To what extent does change developed within one-to-one mentoring transfer into the young person's wider life, relationships, and systems?
2. **Explanatory:** How do mentoring relationships support more constructive engagement with school, family, services, community settings, or wider opportunities?

3. **Exploratory:** Under what conditions, and in which contexts, does wider transfer occur most clearly?

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Appendix 1 – A Model One-to-One Theory of Change

This theory of change shows how one-to-one mentoring is expected to produce change. It assumes that regular contact creates relational safety, which enables the young person to engage, speak openly, reflect on choices and experiences, reframe situations, and begin acting differently. Evaluation tests whether this assumed pathway is visible in practice, from delivery and engagement through to mechanisms and outcomes.

