



**How to write a 1-1
mentoring
evaluation
strategy: A step-
by-step guide**

The 1-1 Mentoring Toolkit

1. Introduction – About One-to-One Mentoring Evaluation Strategies

An evaluation strategy is a positioning and design document that explains how a one-to-one mentoring organisation understands its mentoring model, how change is expected to occur through mentoring relationships, and how this will be examined through evaluation and research over time. Rather than functioning solely as a reporting framework, a mentoring evaluation strategy should position mentoring within the wider evidence base, clarify the organisation's underlying theory of change, identify the mechanisms through which mentoring is expected to generate change, and explain how these mechanisms will be examined in practice. A strategy should also establish the rationale for the organisation's approach to evidence collection, including how data collection aligns with the realities of one-to-one mentoring delivery and why particular forms of evidence are considered operationally useful. A one-to-one mentoring evaluation strategy should:

- explain the purpose of the strategy
- position the mentoring offer within the wider research literature
- clarify how the organisation understands one-to-one mentoring in practice
- explain the underlying theory of change
- identify the mechanisms through which mentoring is expected to generate change
- explain whether mentoring is being treated as an activity-led or mechanism-led intervention
- describe how mentoring relationships are understood to operate over time
- explain what the evaluation will examine, test, or explore
- identify how evidence collection links to mentoring delivery
- explain how evaluation findings will support practice development, learning, and evidence generation



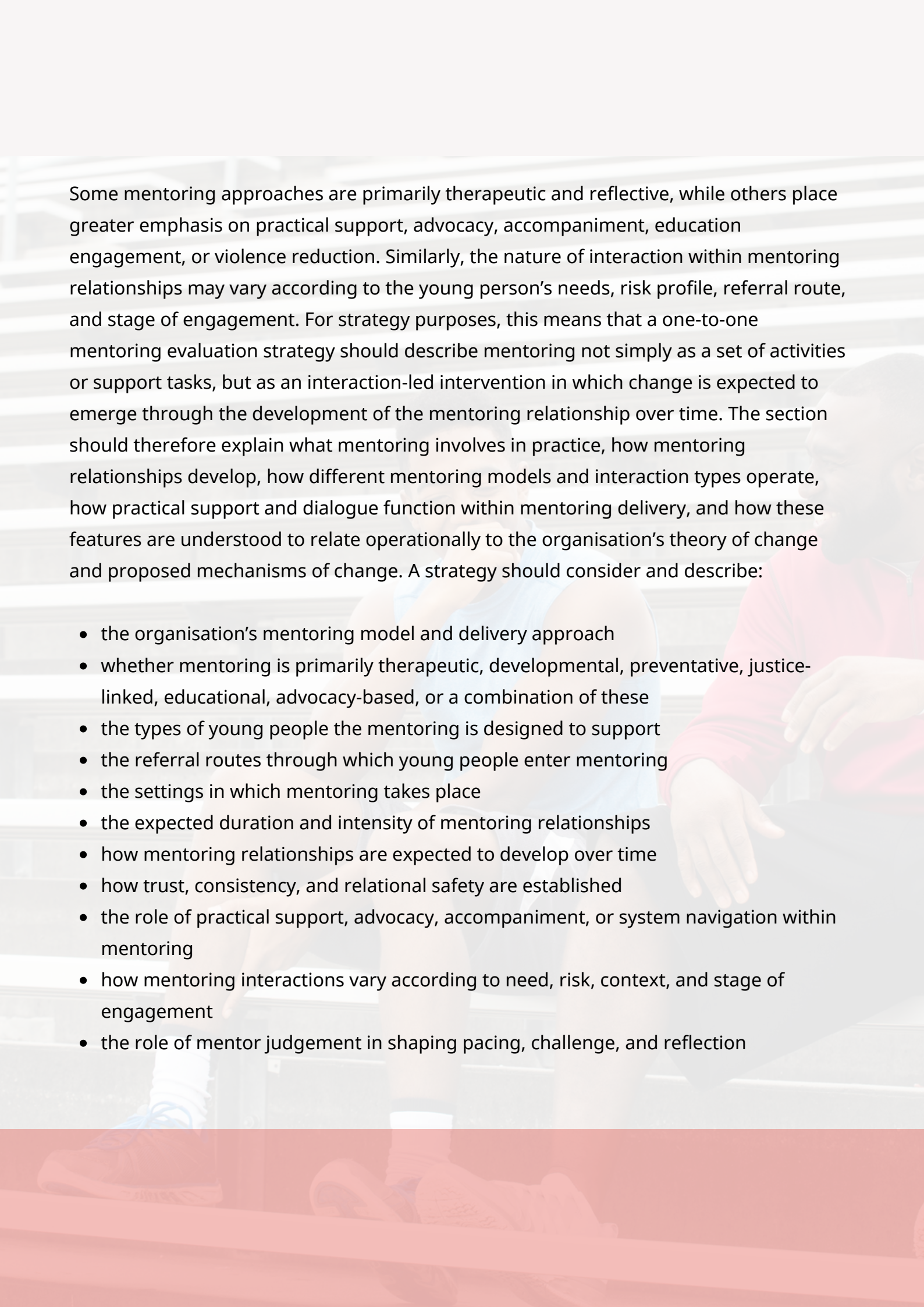
A strategy should also explain:

- why one-to-one mentoring cannot be understood solely through activities delivered
- why interaction and relationship development may function as mechanisms of change
- how mentoring differs from curriculum-led or manualised interventions
- why mentoring evaluation may require attention to process, sequence, pacing, and relational development over time
- why outcome measurement alone may provide limited explanation of how mentoring works in practice
- how mentoring relationships are expected to support reflection, engagement, agency, behavioural development, or wider system engagement

The introduction section of an evaluation strategy should therefore establish the conceptual and evaluative foundations for the strategy before moving into more detailed sections on mentoring delivery, theories of change, mechanisms of change, evidence review, evaluation themes, and approaches to data collection and analysis.

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. Rather than operating through a fixed curriculum or manualised programme, one-to-one mentoring is typically responsive, relational, and shaped by mentor judgement, with pacing, focus, and depth adapting to the young person's needs, circumstances, readiness for change, and wider context. Mentoring delivery also varies between organisations and delivery models.



Some mentoring approaches are primarily therapeutic and reflective, while others place greater emphasis on practical support, advocacy, accompaniment, education engagement, or violence reduction. Similarly, the nature of interaction within mentoring relationships may vary according to the young person's needs, risk profile, referral route, and stage of engagement. For strategy purposes, this means that a one-to-one mentoring evaluation strategy should describe mentoring not simply as a set of activities or support tasks, but as an interaction-led intervention in which change is expected to emerge through the development of the mentoring relationship over time. The section should therefore explain what mentoring involves in practice, how mentoring relationships develop, how different mentoring models and interaction types operate, how practical support and dialogue function within mentoring delivery, and how these features are understood to relate operationally to the organisation's theory of change and proposed mechanisms of change. A strategy should consider and describe:

- the organisation's mentoring model and delivery approach
- whether mentoring is primarily therapeutic, developmental, preventative, justice-linked, educational, advocacy-based, or a combination of these
- the types of young people the mentoring is designed to support
- the referral routes through which young people enter mentoring
- the settings in which mentoring takes place
- the expected duration and intensity of mentoring relationships
- how mentoring relationships are expected to develop over time
- how trust, consistency, and relational safety are established
- the role of practical support, advocacy, accompaniment, or system navigation within mentoring
- how mentoring interactions vary according to need, risk, context, and stage of engagement
- the role of mentor judgement in shaping pacing, challenge, and reflection

- how mentoring supports reflection, agency, behavioural development, or wider progression
- how mentoring interacts with schools, youth justice services, safeguarding systems, families, or community organisations
- what aspects of mentoring delivery are understood to function as mechanisms of change within the theory of change
- what forms of interaction, engagement, or relationship development the evaluation will later need to examine in practice

3. **Aim of your Strategy**

A one-to-one mentoring evaluation strategy should set out a clear set of aims explaining what the organisation intends the strategy to achieve through evaluation, learning, evidence generation, and practice development. The purpose of this section is to explain how the organisation will use evaluation activity to strengthen understanding of how mentoring operates in practice, how change is expected to occur, and how evidence will be used to examine, refine, or support the organisation's mentoring model over time. A strategy should also explain how evaluation activity relates to the organisation's theory of change, proposed mechanisms of change, and wider evidence position within the mentoring literature. A strategy should explain:

- what the organisation wants to understand, test, examine, or evidence through evaluation
- whether the strategy is focused on impact, mechanisms of change, implementation, practice development, or a combination of these
- how the evaluation links to the organisation's theory of change
- how evidence will be used to support organisational learning and delivery development

- what aspects of mentoring relationships, interaction, or mentoring delivery the evaluation will examine
- how the organisation will examine both mentoring outcomes and how mentoring produces those outcomes in practice
- how the organisation will examine variation in mentoring relationships across different young people, contexts, referral routes, or mentoring approaches
- whether factors such as mentoring duration, intensity, frequency of contact, or relationship continuity are expected to influence mentoring outcomes or engagement
- how evaluation findings will support future delivery, commissioning, funding, or research activity

A strategy should also include a small number of overarching evaluation and research questions that guide the evaluation approach over time. These questions should examine both mentoring outcomes and the processes through which mentoring is expected to generate change. Different types of evaluation and research questions may be used depending on the organisation's aims, evidence needs, delivery model, commissioning context, and stage of programme development. In practice, strategies often combine impact-focused questions with implementation, process, and mechanisms-focused questions in order to understand not only whether mentoring is associated with change, but how, for whom, and under what conditions change appears to occur. Example evaluation and research questions may include:

1. *What changes do young people experience through participation in one-to-one mentoring?*
2. *How do mentoring relationships support reflection, engagement, behavioural development, or wider progression over time?*
3. *Which aspects of mentoring interaction appear most important in supporting change for different young people?*

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4. *How do factors such as mentoring duration, intensity, frequency of contact, or continuity of relationship influence engagement, developmental change, or mentoring outcomes?*
5. *For whom, in what contexts, and under what conditions does one-to-one mentoring appear to work best?*

Together, these types of evaluation and research questions help organisations examine both mentoring impact and the mechanisms through which mentoring is expected to generate change, while also testing, refining, or confirming the organisation's theory of change over time. A strategy may also:

- complement existing effectiveness studies or outcome evidence by examining how mentoring works in practice
- explore mentoring as a dyadic or interaction-led intervention
- examine how trust, engagement, dialogue, reflection, reframing, agency, or behavioural development emerge within mentoring relationships over time
- test whether different mentoring approaches or mentoring types operate through different mechanisms of change
- examine how mentoring interacts with wider systems such as schools, youth justice services, safeguarding systems, or community provision
- identify gaps in the existing evidence base that the organisation's evaluation activity is intended to address.

The aims section should therefore establish the strategic purpose of the evaluation approach and clarify what the organisation intends to learn, examine, position, or evidence through the strategy over time.

4. Evidence Review

A one-to-one mentoring evaluation strategy should include an evidence review that positions the organisation's mentoring model within the wider research and practice literature. The purpose of this section is not simply to summarise existing studies, but to explain what the current evidence base suggests about how one-to-one mentoring operates, what types of outcomes mentoring may influence, what factors appear associated with stronger mentoring relationships or outcomes, and where important explanatory gaps remain. An evidence review should also explain how existing evidence has informed the organisation's theory of change, proposed mechanisms of change, evaluation priorities, and overall evaluation approach. A strategy should use evidence to:

- position the mentoring model within existing mentoring research and practice literature
- identify what the literature suggests about how one-to-one mentoring works
- identify what types of outcomes mentoring is commonly associated with
- examine what factors appear important in supporting mentoring effectiveness, such as relationship quality, duration, continuity, responsiveness, or mentor support
- identify what existing evidence suggests about mentoring relationships, interaction, engagement, or behavioural development
- identify gaps, limitations, or inconsistencies within the existing evidence base
- explain how the organisation's mentoring model aligns with, differs from, or extends existing evidence
- support the rationale for the organisation's theory of change and proposed mechanisms of change
- explain why particular evaluation themes, research questions, or data collection approaches have been selected
- justify the organisation's overall evaluation approach and evidence priorities



An evidence review may draw on:

- academic literature relating to mentoring, youth work, therapeutic practice, violence reduction, education, psychology, or relational interventions
- systematic reviews, scoping reviews, integrative reviews, or meta-analyses
- internal evaluation reports, case reviews, monitoring data, or transcript analysis
- practice frameworks used by mentoring organisations
- commissioner outcome frameworks or policy literature
- practitioner or young person consultation activity

4.1. External evidence – Reviews of reviews

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. The themes below illustrate some of the major areas emerging from the wider mentoring literature and how organisations may use this evidence to support the development of evaluation strategies, theories of change, evaluation questions, and approaches to evidence collection.

- **Good mentoring relationships matter:** Studies by DuBois et al. (2011) and Rhodes and DuBois (2008) found that mentoring works best when relationships are strong, consistent, supportive, and last long enough for trust to build over time. The research suggests that relationship quality often matters more than the specific activities delivered. Organisations can use this evidence to support evaluation approaches that examine trust, consistency, engagement, relationship length, and mentoring interaction over time.

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- **Talking and listening are a key part of mentoring:** Goldner and Ben-Eliyahu (2021) found that mentoring relationships often work through trust, conversation, support, and reflection rather than instruction alone. Organisations may use this evidence to support theories of change that focus on dialogue, reflection, relational safety, and interaction as important parts of how mentoring helps young people change over time.
 - **Mentors often need to adapt their approach:** Research suggests that mentoring relationships work better when mentors adjust support, challenge, pacing, and conversation style to match the young person's needs, emotional state, and readiness for engagement. Werntz et al. (2025) highlighted responsiveness and relational continuity as important parts of therapeutic mentoring. Organisations may use this evidence to support flexible mentoring models and evaluation approaches that examine how mentors adapt their work in practice.
 - **Different young people respond differently to mentoring:** Research suggests that mentoring does not work in exactly the same way for all young people or in all settings. Relationship fit, mentoring intensity, continuity, and duration may all influence how mentoring works and what outcomes emerge. Organisations can use this evidence to support evaluation questions exploring for whom mentoring appears to work best, under what conditions, and through which types of mentoring relationships or approaches.
 - **There are still gaps in the mentoring evidence base:** Although mentoring is widely described as relationship-based, research often provides limited explanation of how mentoring relationships create change in practice or how change develops over time. Organisations may therefore use qualitative methods, case studies, reflective discussions, process evaluation, or mentoring interaction analysis to explore these areas in more detail and strengthen understanding of how mentoring works in practice.

4.2. Positioning your one-to-one mentoring model within the wider evidence base

As a provider of one-to-one mentoring, you might now see that your mentoring approach reflects many of the features described within the wider mentoring literature, particularly where your mentoring model emphasises sustained relationships, dialogue, trust, responsiveness, consistency, reflection, or developmental support over time. This section of a strategy should therefore explain how your mentoring model aligns with, differs from, or extends the wider evidence base and how the literature helps you understand the specific role of mentoring relationships within your delivery approach.

For example, if your mentoring model emphasises relationship-building, continuity of contact, or relational safety, you may position your mentoring approach alongside evidence suggesting that relationship quality, duration, and responsiveness are associated with stronger mentoring outcomes. If your mentoring approach places greater emphasis on reflective dialogue, emotional support, or developmental interaction, you may draw on literature relating to developmental mentoring, relational practice, or therapeutic mentoring approaches. A strategy should therefore consider:

- what aspects of the organisation's mentoring model appear consistent with the wider evidence base
- whether mentoring is understood primarily as relational, developmental, therapeutic, preventative, educational, advocacy-based, or justice-linked support
- what forms of interaction appear central within the organisation's mentoring relationships
- whether mentoring is understood as activity-led, relationship-led, or interaction-led
- how mentoring relationships are expected to support engagement, reflection, behavioural development, or wider progression
- whether mentoring interaction varies across different young people, referral routes, contexts, or levels of need

- what aspects of mentoring practice appear insufficiently explained by the wider literature
- whether the organisation's mentoring model includes distinctive approaches, delivery features, or mechanisms not fully reflected within existing research
- how the organisation's mentoring model informs the theory of change and proposed mechanisms of change
- what aspects of mentoring practice the evaluation strategy will later examine in more detail

In practice, this section allows organisations to move from reviewing the literature generally towards positioning their own mentoring approach more explicitly within the evidence base. It also provides a bridge between the evidence review and the later sections of the strategy relating to mechanisms of change, evaluation themes, and evaluation design.

4.3. Implications for strategy

For one-to-one mentoring providers, the evidence reviewed above suggests that mentoring is best understood as a relational and interaction-led intervention in which relationship quality, continuity, responsiveness, and sustained engagement appear important in supporting developmental change over time. In practice, this means that organisations may choose to develop evaluation strategies that examine mentoring relationships, mentoring interaction, engagement, reflection, behavioural development, and wider progression over time rather than focusing solely on activities delivered or outcomes achieved. This evidence may support:

- mechanism-led theories of change
- evaluation questions examining how mentoring works in practice

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- process and implementation evaluation
 - qualitative and reflective data collection
 - examination of mentoring interaction over time
 - approaches exploring relationship quality, duration, continuity, and mentoring intensity
 - evaluation themes relating to engagement, reflection, agency, behavioural development, or wider system interaction
 - evaluation approaches examining for whom mentoring appears to work best and under what conditions
 - mixed-methods approaches combining mentoring outcomes with process and interactional evidence

This section therefore provides a bridge between the evidence review and the later sections of the strategy relating to theories of change, mechanisms of change, evaluation themes, and evaluation design.

5. Developing Strategic Evaluation and Research Themes

A one-to-one mentoring evaluation strategy becomes strategic through the level at which it organises the exploration of mentoring. Rather than focusing solely on outputs, activities, or isolated outcomes, strategic evaluation themes examine the underlying relational, developmental, and interactional processes through which mentoring is expected to generate change over time. The purpose of these themes is not simply to structure data collection, but to organise the long-term exploration of mentoring itself. This allows organisations to build an evidence base that strengthens organisational learning, supports practice development, contributes to wider sector learning, and improves understanding of how one-to-one mentoring operates across different young people, contexts, delivery models, and systems over time.

In practice, this means identifying a small number of high-level evaluation and research themes that emerge from the organisation's theory of change, mentoring model, evidence review, mechanisms of change, and evaluation questions. Example strategic evaluation and research themes might include:

1. **Theme: Building trust and keeping young people engaged:** This theme would explore how mentors build trust, consistency, and safety within mentoring relationships, and how this helps young people stay engaged over time.
2. **Theme: Talking, listening, and helping young people reflect:** This theme would explore how conversations between mentors and young people help young people think differently about themselves, their experiences, their choices, and their future.
3. **Theme: Change over time:** This theme would explore how changes in confidence, emotional regulation, behaviour, decision making, or engagement develop gradually through mentoring relationships over time.
4. **Theme: Different young people respond differently to mentoring:** This theme would explore how mentoring works differently across young people, contexts, levels of need, mentoring intensity, and relationship duration, including which young people appear to benefit most from different mentoring approaches.
5. **Theme: How mentors adapt their mentoring approach:** This theme would explore how mentors adjust support, challenge, pacing, and conversation styles in response to the young person's needs, readiness, risks, and circumstances.
6. **Theme: Mentoring and the young person's wider life:** This theme would explore how mentoring connects with school, family, youth justice services, peer relationships, community settings, and wider support systems, including whether mentoring helps young people engage more positively with these areas of their lives.

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