

# SUMMARY FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

## Part of the Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide

| Produced by Foundations, and commissioned by the Department for Education

This document summarises the [Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide](#) to support elected members – who play a key role in shaping local services – to reflect on their local offer of mentoring and befriending interventions, and consider how it could be strengthened.

This Practice Guide mainly relates to Outcome 4 of the Children's Social Care National Framework<sup>1</sup>: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes. It is also relevant to Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network, and Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes.

The Practice Guide on Mentoring and Befriending is the third in a series of [Practice Guides](#). The Guides set out the best available evidence for leaders in the children's social care sector to support effective practice and improve how services are commissioned, developed and delivered.

## INTRODUCTION

Mentoring and befriending programmes aim to support children and young people to build safe, supportive relationships with trusted adults, to help them overcome adversity and trauma, and to reach their full potential. In the UK, mentoring and befriending describes a broad range of practices and interventions which use reciprocal, purposeful, and non-judgemental relationships to guide and support individuals (befriending) to improve their wellbeing, develop skills, and achieve personal outcomes and goals (mentoring).

A mentoring or befriending relationship can provide a unique form of emotional support for children and young people. Children and young people identify a variety of perceived positive outcomes of participating in mentoring, including:

- Gaining practical knowledge and emotional support as they transition to adulthood – particularly important for young people leaving care

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-framework>

- Receiving emotional support to address new challenges
- Increasing confidence and self-esteem
- Being introduced by their mentor to new environments and activities.

The Practice Guide focuses on mentoring and befriending interventions for children and young people who are **care-experienced, considered at risk of being placed in care, or at risk of poor developmental outcomes**. Wherever we refer to children and young people in the Guide and supporting resources, it is this population group that we are talking about, and not all children and young people. When we refer to ‘children’ and ‘young people’ this includes people aged up to 18 years old and those aged 19 to 25 years old respectively.

## The best evidence on mentoring and befriending interventions and practices

The Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide contains actionable key principles and recommendations for senior leaders. These are based on a new systematic review<sup>2</sup> of existing evidence, which explored what works, for whom, and in what context.

**Key principles:** draw out evidence on the circumstances, experiences, and preferences of children and young people in the UK, and internationally, on how to engage and work with them. They also cover evidence on the effective implementation and design of mentoring and befriending interventions. This evidence helps to ensure that accessible, acceptable interventions can be effectively implemented.

**Recommendations:** draw out the best-evidenced interventions for improving children and young people’s outcomes. We only make recommendations where at least one rigorous impact evaluation has evidenced that the intervention achieves positive outcomes for children and young people or parents in the UK, or in countries with similar child welfare systems to the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> Read the systematic review: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/systematic-review-mentoring-and-befriending-practice-guide.pdf>

# KEY PRINCIPLES

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**Key Principle 1:** Model strong leadership that promotes collaboration, maps local programmes, and understands their interactions to improve outcomes.

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**Key Principle 2:** Develop flexible programmes that allow tailored support to be provided to a child or young person so they can sustain a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship.

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**Key Principle 3:** Give children and young people autonomy and control over the form and purpose of their mentoring or befriending relationship.

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**Key Principle 4:** Target mentoring support at young people leaving care, living in supported or temporary accommodation, and living independently.

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**Key Principle 5:** Carefully match mentors and mentees, taking into consideration interests, experiences and personal attributes.

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**Key Principle 6:** Ensure mentors are supported to meet the needs of mentees through training and supervision.

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**Key Principle 7:** Consider using self-motivated (volunteer, natural, or peer) mentors who can foster an independent relationship with a child or young person.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	STRONG EVIDENCE	GOOD EVIDENCE	PROMISING EVIDENCE
1. Offer evidence-based mentoring programmes to children in out-of-home care due to experiences of significant harm, to support their general mental health and improve post-traumatic symptoms.	✓		
2. Offer evidence-based mentoring and befriending programmes to children and young people who are involved, or are at risk of involvement, with the youth justice system to reduce offending and re-offending.		✓	
3. Offer evidence-based mentoring programmes to children in out-of-home care to improve successful (and long-term) reunification.			✓
4. Offer evidence-based mentoring to children in out-of-home care due to experiences of significant harm to achieve greater permanency.			✓
5. Offer evidence-based mentoring programmes to children and young people with special education needs, or severe mental health challenges, to increase self-determination skills and support their transitions from care.			✓
6. Offer evidence-based mentoring programmes to children and young people to improve employability.			✓

## STRONG EVIDENCE

- Meta-analysis of at least two randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental studies
- Low on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates effectiveness of the intervention(s).

## GOOD EVIDENCE

- Meta-analysis or narrative synthesis of at least two randomised controlled trials and/or quasi-experimental studies
- Moderate on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

## PROMISING EVIDENCE

- One randomised controlled trial or quasi-experimental study
- Low or moderate on risk of bias assessment
- Demonstrates efficacy of the intervention(s).

Read the evidence ratings in full: <https://foundations.org.uk/how-to-use-the-practice-guides/>

# KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK SENIOR LEADERS TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL MENTORING AND BEFRIENDING INTERVENTIONS & PRACTICES

## How evidence-based is the local mentoring and befriending offer?

When thinking about how to strengthen local mentoring and befriending support, senior leaders should make decisions based on the available evidence, while also taking into account lived experience, population data, organisational data, and professional knowledge. The Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide summarises the best-evidenced interventions and practices for care-experienced children and young people, and those at risk of entering care, providing scientific, monitoring and evaluation data. The Guide is a reference point for assessing existing local programmes, and identifying where they can be strengthened, to improve outcomes for this group of children and young people.

The Guide can be used to strengthen any practice or intervention that uses reciprocal, purposeful, and non-judgemental relationships to guide and support children and young people to improve their wellbeing, develop skills, and achieve personal outcomes and goals. This includes statutory services such as Independent Visiting and Personal Advisors for care leavers.

Modelling and promoting strong leadership is essential to maintaining quality services that meet the needs of the local population. Championing evidence-based mentoring and befriending interventions and practices at a local level can help ensure that programmes are designed in a way that is known to achieve good outcomes. Regardless of seniority, staff working in children's social care can practise leadership, using their influence to improve organisational and practice culture, and advocate for children, young people, and families. This includes assessing population needs, collaborating with partners, designing or commissioning interventions and services, ensuring successful implementation, and that outcomes are achieved.

Implementing the Practice Guide could include incorporating key components of evidence-based interventions – such as one-to-one mentoring, skills groups and workshops – into existing programmes of mentoring support. It could also include using the evidence to target interventions at particular groups of children and young people, such as those experiencing poor mental health, those at risk of offending or re-offending, children and young people reunifying with their birth family, and those transitioning from care.

## How do we ensure children, young people, and their support networks are aware of mentoring and befriending programmes?

Relevant agencies and voluntary and community groups should work together to proactively promote mentoring and befriending programmes to children and young people who can benefit from them, and make sure they can access them. Taking a proactive approach to supporting mentoring and befriending programmes could include:

- Developing a local awareness campaign
- Supporting a recruitment drive for volunteer mentors or befrienders to match the needs of children and young people
- Incentivising the local authority workforce to become mentors or befrienders
- Ensuring mentors receive adequate ongoing training and supervision
- Reporting on, and highlighting, the positive impact of mentoring
- Creating clear and easy to navigate referral pathways across agencies, allowing referrals to be tracked and monitored.

## How do we make sure children and young people can access and maintain engagement in mentoring and befriending programmes?

The evidence shows that a range of factors can impact a child or young person's engagement with mentoring and befriending programmes. These include, for example, their race/ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic position, and disability. For some young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, having a mentor of a different ethnicity was identified as a barrier to engagement. Considered matching of mentors and mentees should be supported to ensure that different groups of children and young people can access programmes equally. Practitioners should be encouraged to think creatively when recruiting mentors, including: looking at young people's existing networks; considering near-peer mentors such as older care leavers; or those currently unemployed, to support them to re-enter the workforce.

Senior leaders should ensure there is a safe environment which supports a child or young person to exercise autonomy in their mentoring relationship as this can improve engagement. They should ensure that tailored support based on their needs can be provided to the child or young person to help them sustain their relationship with their mentor. This may include working with other agencies to create clear referral pathways or opening up regular channels of communication between agencies. Senior leaders should consider how to support young people and mentors to sustain their relationships so young people have someone they can rely on throughout adulthood.

## How do we work with the voluntary sector to make sure children and young people can access mentoring and befriending programmes?

The voluntary sector has an important role to play in the delivery of mentoring and befriending programmes. There should be close connections between local authorities and the voluntary sector to ensure that children and young people who might benefit from a mentor can be considerably matched with one.

The Practice Guide is relevant to voluntary organisations, as well as other organisations that commission, fund and deliver mentoring and befriending programmes. Delivery organisations should be aware of the Practice Guide's key principles and recommendations, and be encouraged to use the [Reflective Tool](#) to assess their programmes and identify opportunities to align these with the best available evidence.

It is important that local commissioners are aware of the Guide. They should be encouraged to use it to make evidence-based decisions and assessments of what programmes to commission to meet the needs of the local population.

## How can we use this Practice Guide to deliver wider Children's Social Care reforms?

The Practice Guide offers senior leaders a clear, evidence-based reference point to assess and strengthen the local mentoring and befriending offer. Making use of the best available evidence is in line with the Children's Social Care National Framework and is the best way for leaders to drive conditions for effective practice. The mentoring and befriending programmes in scope of the Guide can mainly support local leaders to achieve Outcome 4 of the National Framework: 'children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes'. Evidence-based mentoring and befriending can also support local areas to achieve Outcome 2: 'children and young people are supported by their family network', and Outcome 3: 'children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes'.

The Practice Guide provides the tools and evidence needed to expand the availability of evidence-informed mentoring and befriending programmes so more children and young people are supported to establish secure and loving relationships with trusted adults in their communities. Increasing the availability and quality of mentoring and befriending programmes increases children and young people's chances of achieving a range of positive outcomes. These include improved mental health, reduced offending and re-offending, improving successful (and long-term) reunification, greater permanency (for those in care), increased self-determination skills, improved employability, and feeling better supported as they transition from care.

In working to achieve these outcomes, mentoring and befriending programmes can also support local areas to fulfil a number of statutory responsibilities to children in care and care leavers. For children in care, this includes its duties to: appoint an Independent Visitor; prepare, deliver and review a child's care plan; plan for permanence; and promote their educational achievement through the role of the Virtual School Head. For care



leavers, this includes its duties to develop a local offer for care leavers and to provide them with a Personal Advisor.

## How have senior leaders ensured that the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cabinet, and other relevant committees are aware of the Practice Guide?

Consider what existing forums or means of communication can be used to share the Practice Guide across local networks. You may want to engage your Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cabinet, and other relevant committees, to help raise awareness of local mentoring and befriending programmes and their impact. As an example, this could include seeking their support for local awareness campaigns aimed at children and young people, or mentor recruitment drives.

### This resource is part of a set of publications linked to the Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide:

- Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/mentoring-and-befriending>
- Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide (quick guide): <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/quick-guide-mentoring-and-befriending.pdf>
- Reflective Tool for actioning the Practice Guide: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/reflective-tool-mentoring-and-befriending-practice-guide.pdf>

Find out more about the series of Practice Guides:  
[foundations.org.uk/practice-guides](https://foundations.org.uk/practice-guides)

We want to hear from local leaders who are engaging with the Practice Guides.  
Get in touch at [practice\\_guides@foundations.org.uk](mailto:practice_guides@foundations.org.uk)