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## **Welcome to the Becoming a Peer Mentor Course**

Peer mentoring is one of the most powerful ways people can support one another to grow, reflect, and move forward with confidence. This course is designed to help you develop the skills, awareness, and mindset needed to build supportive, equitable, and emotionally safe mentoring relationships.

Whether you are stepping into this role for the first time or deepening skills you already use in everyday life, this programme will guide you through the foundations of effective peer mentoring. You will explore how to build trust, communicate with clarity, and support others in ways that strengthen confidence and agency without taking over or feeling responsible for someone else's journey.

Peer mentoring is not about being an expert. It is about being present, curious, and committed to mutual growth. It is a partnership where both people learn, reflect, and develop together.

### **What You Will Gain from This Course**

Throughout the programme, you will develop a range of skills and insights that support both your mentoring relationships and your wider personal and professional life. These include:

#### **Healthy Boundaries**

Learning how to set and maintain boundaries that protect both you and the person you are supporting. Boundaries create emotional safety, prevent over-responsibility, and ensure the relationship remains purposeful and sustainable.

#### **Active Listening**

Practising listening in a way that helps others feel heard, understood, and valued. Active listening involves noticing tone, emotion, body language, and what is left unsaid.

#### **Skilful Questioning**

Exploring how to ask thoughtful, open questions that encourage reflection, insight, and problem-solving. Skilful questioning helps people find their own answers rather than relying on advice or direction.

## **Reflective Practice**

Learning how to pause, notice, and make sense of your own responses, assumptions, and patterns. This supports self-awareness and more intentional, compassionate mentoring.

## **Confidence in Supporting Others**

Developing confidence in your ability to support others through challenges, transitions, and moments of uncertainty - without needing to 'fix' or 'rescue'.

## **A Sense of Purpose and Contribution**

Strengthening connection, belonging, and shared learning. Many people find that mentoring not only supports others but also deepens their own resilience, clarity, and sense of direction.

## **How the Course Works**

This course is structured around practical activities, reflective exercises, and opportunities to apply what you learn. Each session builds on the last, helping you develop a grounded understanding of:

- what peer mentoring is
- how to build a safe and supportive relationship
- how to communicate with empathy and clarity
- how to navigate challenges
- how to support someone's growth while honouring your own boundaries

You will be encouraged to reflect on your own experiences, strengths, and values as you develop your mentoring identity.

## **A Note on Emotional Safety**

Peer mentoring involves trust, openness, and sometimes vulnerability. This course is designed to support emotional safety by encouraging:

- respect for difference
- curiosity rather than judgement
- clear boundaries
- confidentiality
- choice and consent
- compassion for yourself and others

## **Closing Reflection**

Peer mentoring begins with a willingness to show up with openness, curiosity and care. As you move into the first session, take a moment to notice what drew you to this course, what you hope to gain and what strengths you already bring. You do not need to be perfect or have all the answers, simply being present and willing to learn is enough. This journey is about growing alongside someone else, discovering new insights and building relationships that feel safe, purposeful and empowering for both partners.

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## Session One: What is Peer Mentoring?

*'Find a great mentor who believes in you; your life will change forever.'*

**Bill Walsh**

### Purpose of the Session

This session introduces the foundations of peer mentoring and explores what makes these relationships safe, supportive and effective. You will learn what peer mentoring is, and what it is not, and begin to understand the principles that help mentoring partnerships flourish. The session encourages you to reflect on your own strengths, experiences and values, and to consider how these shape the way you support others. By the end of this session, you will have a clearer sense of what peer mentoring involves and how you can begin building relationships grounded in trust, equality and mutual learning.

### What Peer Mentoring Is

Peer mentoring is a collaborative, reciprocal relationship where two people support one another's growth. Unlike traditional mentoring, it is not based on hierarchy, expertise, or seniority. Instead, it is grounded in complementary strengths, shared responsibility, mutual learning, emotional safety and respect for difference.

Peer mentors are both mentors and learners. The relationship works best when each person brings something different - perspectives, experiences, skills, or ways of thinking - that enrich the partnership.

A peer mentoring relationship is:

- **intentional** (you choose to work together)
- **structured** (you agree goals, boundaries, and expectations)
- **supportive** (you encourage, challenge, and reflect together)
- **growth-focused** (you help each other move toward your goals)

It is not:

- counselling
- friendship (though friendships may form)
- supervision
- a space for rescuing or fixing
- a one-way exchange

At its heart, peer mentoring is a learning conversation, one where insight emerges through curiosity, reflection, and asking thoughtful questions rather than giving advice.

### **Why Peer Mentoring Works**

Peer mentoring is powerful because it:

**Reduces hierarchy:** People often open up more easily to someone 'on their level'.

**Builds confidence:** Both partners practise leadership, communication, and self-reflection.

**Strengthens emotional literacy:** Mentors learn to notice feelings, name them, and respond with empathy.

**Encourages agency:** Rather than telling someone what to do, peer mentors help each other think clearly and make their own decisions.

**Creates belonging:** Shared vulnerability and mutual support deepen connection and trust.

**Supports transition and recovery:** Peer mentoring is especially effective during:

- life changes
- returning to education or work
- navigating adversity
- rebuilding confidence
- developing new habits or skills

### **The Peer Mentoring Contract**

A strong mentoring partnership begins with a clear agreement. This contract should include:

- shared goals
- expectations of each other
- boundaries and limits
- confidentiality agreements
- how you will meet (frequency, format, duration)
- what support looks like
- what is *not* part of the relationship
- how you will review progress

This clarity protects both people and creates psychological safety.

### **What Peer Mentors Actually Do**

Peer mentors:

- listen deeply
- ask thoughtful, open questions
- reflect back what they hear
- help clarify goals
- encourage problem-solving
- celebrate progress
- challenge gently when needed
- model healthy boundaries
- hold space for emotions
- support accountability

They **do not**:

- give instructions
- diagnose or fix
- take responsibility for the other person's choices
- offer therapy
- make assumptions
- rescue or over-function

### **Benefits of Peer Mentoring**

#### **For both partners**

Peer mentoring offers meaningful benefits for both people involved. As partners learn to trust their abilities and recognise the strengths they each bring, confidence naturally grows. Communication skills deepen as both individuals practise listening with care, responding thoughtfully, and expressing themselves with greater clarity. Emotional awareness strengthens too, as each person becomes more attuned to their own feelings and more responsive to the emotions of someone else. Through shared reflection and navigating challenges together, both partners build resilience and develop a stronger sense of what supports their wellbeing.

Peer mentoring also reduces feelings of isolation by creating a reciprocal, supportive connection with someone who understands their context. As partners explore options, ask skilful questions, and think collaboratively, their problem-solving abilities expand. Many people also experience a renewed sense of purpose and contribution, knowing that they are making a positive difference in someone else's life while growing in their own.

### **For the wider community or organisation**

Peer mentoring strengthens relationships across a team or setting by creating deeper trust, shared understanding, and more supportive connections. As people feel more able to talk openly and seek help without fear of judgement, overall wellbeing improves and the culture becomes more compassionate and emotionally attuned.

Over time, peer mentoring helps to build a culture of mutual support where staff or participants feel encouraged to learn from one another rather than struggle alone. It also reduces the stigma around asking for help, making it easier for people to reach out early rather than waiting until challenges escalate. By widening who can offer and receive support, peer mentoring contributes to more equitable access to guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for growth across the whole organisation or community.

### **Potential Challenges (and How to Prevent Them)**

#### **Common Challenges**

Even the most committed peer mentoring partnerships can encounter difficulties, and recognising these early helps prevent frustration or misunderstanding. One common challenge is mismatched expectations, where each partner assumes something different about the purpose, pace, or style of the relationship. This can be compounded by inconsistent attendance, which disrupts trust and makes it harder for the partnership to build momentum. At times, one person may become over-dependent, relying too heavily on the other for emotional support or decision-making, which can place strain on the relationship and blur the purpose of mentoring.

Blurred boundaries are another frequent challenge, especially when partners get on well or share similar experiences. Without clarity, the relationship can drift into friendship, advice-giving, or emotional caretaking rather than structured support.

Differences in background, identity, or communication style can also lead to cultural misunderstandings, where assumptions or unspoken norms create tension or discomfort. Some partners may experience emotional overwhelm, particularly when difficult topics arise or when they feel responsible for the other person's wellbeing.

A lack of clarity about goals can leave the relationship feeling unfocused or stagnant, and even among peers, subtle power imbalances can emerge, for example, when one person is more confident, articulate, or experienced. These dynamics can make it harder to raise concerns or challenge each other constructively. As a result, partners may begin to avoid difficult conversations, leading to unresolved issues or unmet needs. Over time, if these challenges are not addressed, the relationship can lose direction and momentum, making it harder to sustain commitment or see progress.

### **Protective Strategies**

The good news is that many of these challenges can be prevented through thoughtful preparation and ongoing communication. One of the most effective strategies is to agree boundaries early, ensuring both partners understand what the relationship is and is not intended to be. Establishing a clear contract and taking time to review the agreement regularly helps keep expectations aligned and provides a natural opportunity to address any emerging concerns.

It is also helpful to name differences with curiosity, acknowledging that each person brings unique experiences, identities, and communication styles. This openness reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding and supports a more equitable partnership. Regularly checking in about emotional load allows both partners to express how they are feeling and to adjust the pace or focus of sessions if needed. Keeping the relationship anchored in the agreed goals helps prevent drift and ensures that conversations remain purposeful and supportive.

Using supervision or group reflection, whether formal or informal, provides a safe space to explore challenges, gain perspective, and strengthen mentoring skills. Finally, it is important to end the relationship well and intentionally, celebrating progress, acknowledging what has been learned, and ensuring that both partners feel respected and complete. These protective strategies help create a mentoring partnership that is safe, sustainable, and genuinely beneficial for both people.