

Mentoring Programme Guidance

East Midlands Children's Services



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Foreword

Those who lead and work in children's services across the East Midlands have been committed to sector-led improvement for over 10 years. Sector-led improvement is based on the belief that 'the knowledge, skill and expertise to improve the system lies within the system'. We have many examples of where this has proved to be the case across the East Midlands region.

Learning from each other is at the heart of mentoring where those with experience, skill and knowledge support those who are wanting to learn and improve. We are excited to have the opportunity to develop a regional mentoring programme to support leaders in children's services across the Local Authorities and Children's Trust in the East Midlands.

We are always conscious of conflicting demands on time and how resources are continuously stretched. We are committed to this approach as an important element of the development of a Regional Learning and Development hub. The DCS group across the region have agreed to release

capacity of their experienced leaders to act as mentors, in the first instance for middle leaders who are new into post as a priority group of mentees. As the programme grows and evolves, we are hopeful that the mentoring offer can be made more widely available, should time, money and pressures allow.

Our children, young people and families deserve the best services, and we are confident that this approach, creating a regional culture of mentorship, will enable us to share and learn from each other, as part of our quest for continuous quality improvement, and will enable us to ultimately improve outcomes for those we work with and for.

Andy Smith

Strategic Director People Services, Derby City Council



Introduction

The East Midlands region has a long and strong history of sector-led improvement and peer support at the centre of the regional approach to continuous quality improvement across children's services. The Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) wishes to build on this further and has identified as a priority, the establishment of a mentoring facility for middle leaders, especially those new in role.

The region aims to develop a pool of mentors to support others in the region to enhance their leadership skills, boost confidence and support transition into new roles. In order to develop this facility, we are aiming to establish a regional mentoring programme and develop a pilot cohort of mentors and mentees, to enable us to evaluate the impact and feasibility of this approach.

This document has been produced for both mentees and mentors to support the development of this programme. We recognise that those who are mentees initially may develop into mentors as part of the regional succession planning process.

This document includes:

- Information on mentoring and a range of reflective questions for both mentee and mentor to consider, to enable mentoring to be as impactful as possible.
- An overview of core mentoring skills so both mentor and mentee understand the core skills that are needed to support effective mentoring conversations.
- Process and supporting resources for the operation of the programme.

Part 1

The 'what' of mentoring



Mentoring vs Coaching

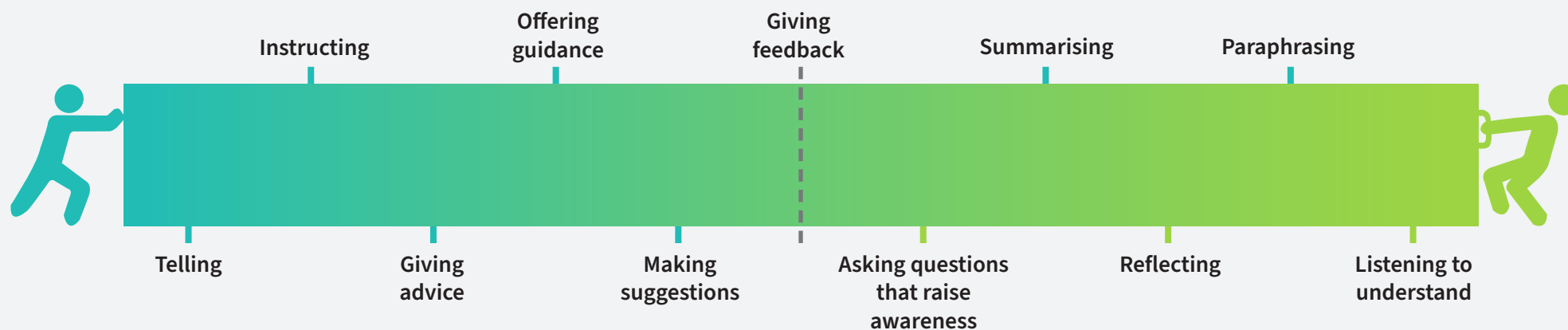
Coaching and mentoring sit on a push/pull continuum of impactful support. While there are similarities between coaching and mentoring, there are subtle differences.

In simple terms, coaching sits on the 'pull' side of the continuum. A 'coach' is someone who will work alongside someone being coached, the 'coachee', to help and support them in achieving goals that the coachee has identified. The coach is an expert in the skills of coaching and the subject matter or professional background of the person being coached is less relevant. What is most important is that the coach is skilled in the use of intentional listening and skilful

questioning and that coach and coachee can establish a rapport and relationship that creates a climate within which the coachee is empowered to reflect, and craft actions. Coaching can be undertaken on a 1:1, group or team basis, in person, online or over the phone. A coach's role is not to give advice.

Mentoring sits on the 'push' side of the continuum. A 'mentor' will most likely share a professional heritage, lived or professional experience with their 'mentee'. The mentor may be a more experienced member of staff in the same organisation or externally, with a similar experience or background.

Coaching push/ pull continuum





The East Midlands' Mentoring Programme

The East Midlands' Mentoring Programme aims to provide 1:1 mentoring facility for middle leaders, especially those new in role. It is designed to add value to existing local, regional or national programmes and those who are members of and participate in the East Midlands Council Coaching and Mentoring Network or similar local, regional or national programmes.

Reverse mentoring

There is a growing prevalence of programmes that focus on 'inclusive' or 'reverse' mentoring which is an approach designed to support more powerful conversations relating to equality, diversity, inclusion and equity. In an inclusive/reverse mentoring programme senior leaders are the mentees and less senior leaders or non-leadership staff, drawn from groups that are under-represented in the most senior leadership positions, are the mentors.

Inclusive/reverse mentoring programmes support mentees and mentors to grow, develop and exchange knowledge and expertise. 'Inclusive' or 'reverse' mentoring programmes are often part of an organisation's Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Strategy and can help develop future leaders and educate and empower current leaders to become champions.

The benefits of mentoring

For mentees:

Having an opportunity to work alongside a mentor who has a shared lived or professional experience, context, situation or who has knowledge about an area that you are seeking to gain a greater understanding of, can be a very powerful personal and professional development opportunity. Benefits for mentees include:

- Supporting transition into a new role.
- Gaining knowledge and learning from the experience of others.
- Career development.
- Managing professional relationships.
- Developing leadership skills.
- Improving confidence.
- Supporting wellbeing.
- Improving performance.
- Managing competing priorities and work pressures.

For mentors:

There are also multiple benefits of being a mentor, including but not exclusively:

- Supporting succession planning.
- Building leadership skills.
- Gaining a deeper value and understanding of equality, diversity, inclusion, equity and social justice.
- Giving back and supporting others.
- Understanding your profession on a deeper level and updating your knowledge.
- Enhancing communication skills, including intentional listening and questioning for understanding.
- Personal growth and development.
- Making a difference in someone's life.
- Network building.



Questions for mentees

- Am I clear what I want to gain from the mentoring relationship and what experience or knowledge I would like my mentor to have?
- Do I have a mentor in mind?
- Have I discussed this with my line manager?

Questions for mentors

- Am I clear what experience and knowledge I can bring to a mentoring relationship?
- Do I need to invest or reinvest time into developing or refreshing my mentoring skills?
- Have I discussed this with my line manager?

Roles and responsibilities

Each mentoring pair will decide how to make the partnership work. It is expected that mentees will:

- Take responsibility for managing your own development.
- Set clear, realistic objectives and initiate learning and development activities.
- Be responsible for scheduling all meetings and rescheduling them if needed.
- Take responsibility for setting meeting agendas.
- Be open to feedback from your mentor and receptive to new ideas.
- Show consideration for your mentor's time.
- Adhere to confidentiality of the mentoring partnership.
- Maintain the commitment to the mentoring partnership – the frequency, structure and length will be discussed and agreed with the mentor, but it's typically 4-6 sessions over 12 months, with learning and development activities between meetings.

It is expected that mentors will:

- Motivate and encourage your mentee to take responsibility for their own learning and development activities.
- Help identify learning and who else can provide support.
- Provide constructive feedback and act as a sounding board for ideas.
- Challenge your mentee to take a broad perspective.
- Use listening skills and a facilitative approach to increase mentee's awareness of strengths and weaknesses.
- Adhere to confidentiality of mentoring partnership.
- Provide advice where prudent and appropriate.
- Maintain commitment to the mentoring partnership – the frequency, structure and length will be discussed and agreed with the mentee, but it's typically 4-6 sessions over 12 months, with learning and development activities inbetween.



Questions for mentees

- Do I have the capacity to fully commit to this opportunity?
- Do I have a topic/challenge/opportunity that mentoring would help me with?
- What media will be most useful and comfortable for our conversations (phone, in person, online etc)?
- How can I ensure that I am not interrupted?

Questions for mentors

- Do I have the capacity needed to be fully committed to this mentoring relationship?
- How can I ensure that I am not interrupted during the session?

Both mentor and mentee need to be committed to the mentoring relationship. Consider how you can ensure that you can give your full attention during a session and how you can prepare for each conversation:

- Think about where you will meet to make sure you will not be interrupted either in person or by 'pop up' notifications and phone/text messages.
- Try, if possible, to allow time before and after each conversation to prepare and reflect on your experience.
- Check in at the start of each conversation that both are comfortable and able to give their full attention to the conversation.

Getting the most out of mentoring

Mentoring will not be successful unless both the mentee and mentor want to engage in the relationship and that the 'dynamic' is conducive to shared learning. Getting the match right is crucial.

Considering organisational context

When considering who might make a great mentor for an individual, it is important to consider the context of the organisation in which the mentee is employed and the experience that the mentor has had. For example, an organisation on an 'improvement journey' may require a greater degree of compliance from its staff than one that is more highly performing and enjoying the associated freedoms and flexibilities that come with it. If a mentee is employed in an organisation with this context, they will most likely benefit from working with a mentor who has similar experience. If a mentee is employed in an organisation that enjoys freedoms and flexibilities, working with a mentor who has experienced the opportunities that this context can bring will most likely be helpful.

Considering personal context

It is also important for both mentor and mentee to understand the personal context (experience, knowledge, skill) of the mentee and how this might influence the support that they might find most helpful from a mentor.

Alongside professional experience, we need to consider the importance of lived experience. It is important not to make assumptions about whether a mentoring relationship will work best, if we can 'match' lived experience, but we should ask the question.



Questions for mentees

- Is the role I am in, new to me?
- Does my current role reflect my professional heritage and career pathway or am I operating outside of my previous experience?
- What do I hope or need to gain from the mentoring relationship?
- Do I want my lived experience and/or protected characteristics to be taken into consideration when matching me with a mentor?
- What is the context of the organisation I am currently employed in?
- How much scope do I have for innovation?

Questions for mentors

- What is the background and experience of the mentee and how well do I understand their personal context?
- What are the mentee's learning priorities?
- Am I the right match for them?
- What type of organisational context have I experienced?
- What can I do to understand a context I have not experienced?

Part 2

Core mentoring skills





Core mentoring skills

There are a number of core skills, most of which are also applicable to coaching, that underpin good and effective mentoring conversations, including but not exclusively:

- Establishing rapport and trust.
- Intentional listening and listening for meaning.
- Questioning for understanding.
- Reflecting back and checking out.

It is important for both mentor and mentee to understand the core skills that are needed to support effective mentoring conversations.



Question for mentees

- Looking at the mentoring skills dynamic, do I think mentoring will be helpful?

Question for mentors

- Do I need to invest or reinvest time into developing or refreshing my mentoring skills?



Skill 1: Establishing rapport and trust

As this is a regional programme, it is possible that you will be considering mentoring or being mentored by someone you have previously or already work with or have a connection with through colleagues. This adds a layer of complexity as you may have expectations based on prior interactions and your existing relationship. Both mentor and mentee need to decide if previous relationships with each other or those they work with will impact on the mentoring relationship. If it is felt that this might be the case, an ‘unconnected mentor’ can be sought from the regional pool.

Preparing for a mentoring conversation is about preparing both mentor and mentee to enable a mentoring rapport to be established. This is where we need to consider the issue of psychological safety and trust.

To build trust and rapport, consider these strategies:

- **Show interest in each other:** Ask curious questions and remember your last conversation.
- **Listen well:** Listen to understand each other, not for a silence to fill.
- **Be vulnerable:** Encourage each other to openly share feelings.
- **Focus on growth:** Highlight potential for positive change.
- **Create a safe space:** Ensure comfort and respect.
- **Share your failures:** Build relatable connections.
- **Validate feelings:** Show empathy without judgement.
- **Assure confidentiality:** Respect privacy to build trust.
- **Communicate effectively:** Tailor your approach to the needs of individuals.

The TERA Quotient

In his book, *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More and Change the Way You Lead Forever*, Michael Bungay Stanier uses the TERA Quotient to consider ‘the key factors that can influence a level of perceived danger or safety’. In this framework, T stands for **Tribe**; E for **Expectations**; R for **Rank** and A for **Autonomy**. It is these four dimensions that influence the perceived level of safety or danger in the relationship. If danger is sensed, some form of retreat will begin; if the environment is seen as safe, higher levels of engagement are likely to result.

T - Tribe

The key question here is about whether you are with me or against me. Are you likely to get my perspective on this or not? This ‘Tribe’ factor helps to explain how a fellow principal can often quickly build rapport and connection with another principal.

E - Expectations

The question to resolve is around ‘Do I know what’s coming?’ If I have some sense about what might happen next and how things might play out, I am more likely to feel safer and willing to engage in the process.

R - Rank

Here, issues of power and hierarchy come into play. If my status in the relationship is reduced, I am likely to feel less safe, less likely to engage and take risks. This is important when leaders coach those for whom they have direct management responsibility. The difference in power, unless carefully and explicitly managed, can create a significant barrier to effective mentoring.

A - Autonomy

This aspect highlights the importance of ‘choice and voice’ in the interaction. Will I have a say in how this proceeds or not? Do I have some control as to the direction this takes? These are important questions helping to define the level of autonomy that will be part of the relationship. Higher levels of autonomy help drive engagement in the interaction and ownership of the actions that flow from it.



A climate of trust

While mentoring, by its very nature, can include ‘advice giving’ informed by previous experience, it is important to establish a climate of trust in which both parties can explore issues and identify learning priorities.

It will be important for mentor and mentee to agree the environment in which the mentoring conversation will take place:

- Where will you have the conversation, in an office or meeting room? What does this say about hierarchy and power? Can you consider somewhere ‘neutral’ without negatively affecting confidentiality?
- Have you considered that some individuals function better while being active or without direct eye contact? How about talking while going for a walk?
- If your mentoring is to take place online, have you considered accessibility including for those who live with neurodivergence or with a disability? Do you need cameras on at all times? Will this make either party feel uncomfortable? Have you enabled closed captions or subtitles?
- How will you create an environment in which those you are with will feel empowered, listened to and valued?

You will also need to consider how both parties ‘maintain presence’:

- How will you enable yourself to be present? Have you done all you can to avoid being interrupted? This gives a powerful message about value and importance.
- Have you allowed sufficient time for preparation, presence in the conversation and reflection afterwards?

Being clear about expectations within a mentoring relationship is important to developing a climate of trust:

- Do you both understand what the intentions are behind your mentoring relationship?
- Have you discussed confidentiality and any circumstances in which this might not be observed?
- Are you realistic about any actions you agree to take to ensure that you can trust each other to do what you say you will?
- Have you discussed what action can be taken by either party if the relationship doesn’t work?



Questions for both mentors and mentees

- When you are considering building trust and rapport in a mentoring conversation, how can you raise your TERA Quotient?
- What might you do a little less of so that rapport, trust and engagement are not undermined?

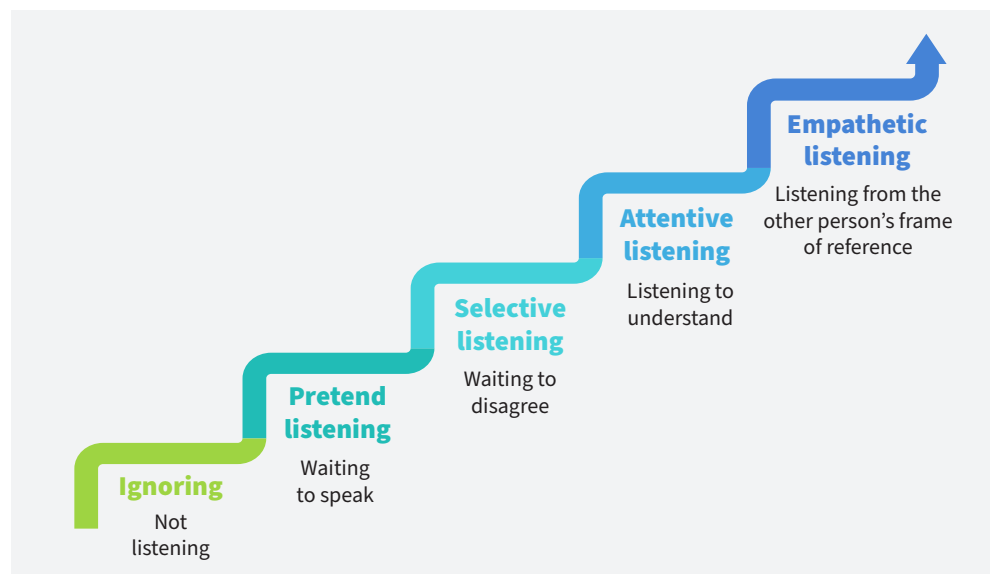
Skill 2: Intentional listening - listening for meaning

There are many 'levels of listening'. Ideally, we want to operate in the 'Attentive' or 'Empathetic' listening space when coaching or mentoring others. Our ability to do so is affected by a number of factors.

How do we ensure that our attention can be fully given and that we can be 'present' in the conversation?

- Make sure you allow time to prepare for a mentoring session and that you won't be distracted or disturbed.
- You will also need to plan for some time after the conversation to allow you to process your discussion.

Much of our communication is non-verbal so we need to think about how we show interest by practising good eye contact and how we notice and use non-verbal cues. It is difficult to tell if someone is actually listening to you, even if you can use visual cues as indicators.



How can you show interest if you are talking to someone who:

- Prefers to talk on the phone?
- Finds engagement easier when working online with their camera off?
- Finds eye contact uncomfortable?
- Prefers to sit or walk alongside you, thus making it more difficult to read facial expression and body language?
- Needs to take notes on a device to aid reflection and memory?

Some would argue that we are always already listening. The thing to consider is who are you listening to. Are you engaged in:

- 'Internal Listening' where our attention is on ourselves, our interpretations, thoughts, feelings, i.e., what do these words mean to me? **or**
- 'Focused Listening' where our focus and awareness is totally on the words, tone, body language of the other person, i.e., reflecting back their emotion, meaning and interpretations.

We need to consider all of these factors when establishing an environment where intentional listening can take place, but what if we consider listening as a belief? What if:

- To improve your listening, you started by challenging the assumptions and beliefs you hold about your colleague(s). If you believe that your colleagues are fully functioning, highly capable adults, that are perfectly capable of thinking for themselves then you will listen with laser sharp precision.
- You reframed your allocated time as - time to think, a thinking partnership.
- You were professionally and productively curious.



Question for mentors

- Are you listening to understand rather than to respond?

Skill 3: Questioning for understanding

Asking questions is the main way that we learn. From a very young age we practise the art of asking 'why'. It is interesting that this favourite question of many toddlers, 'why?' is an open question which makes it very helpful when thinking about how to make mentoring conversations impactful. What if:

- Your questions are designed to help mentor and mentee find out information, not so that the mentor can recommend a solution, but to help the mentee to become more curious and find their own solutions.
- You developed a 'bank of meaningful and powerful questions in your mentoring vocabulary. Notice the reaction to the questions you ask and 'bank' those that elicit powerful or meaningful responses or those that you feel trigger a 'light bulb moment'.
- You consciously used open questions designed to explore, not close a conversation down. i.e. How can..., what if..., where did..., what else..., how shall..., who can... etc.
- You reframed the key purpose of your questioning, to support and enable change, to help move someone on in their thinking.
- Your best advice was to not give advice?



Question for mentors

- Wait! Why am I talking?

Tame your advice monster...

Offer advice last, not first!

Skill 4: Reflecting back and checking out

One of the most powerful ways of demonstrating that you are listening intentionally is by what you say next. This is where reflecting back and checking out comes in. In a mentoring conversation, the skill of the mentor will be to create the conditions in which your mentee can openly identify challenges and opportunities without fear of judgement or retribution.

As a mentor you need to check out your understanding of the issue that is being discussed and ensure that you have understood the conversation correctly. This is also a useful technique for deepening understanding.

The types of comments and questions you might consider using:

- Have I heard you say that...?
- Have I correctly understood that...?
- I think you have said...?
- Am I right in thinking that you...?
- Can I just check that I have understood you correctly in that...?
- Tell me a little more...

Sometimes the most powerful reflection you can provide is the power of silence. If you always step into the space, you are preventing others from occupying it. Leave a silence and see what happens. While by nature, a mentoring relationship lends itself to the mentor giving advice based on your experience, we need to 'avoid the advice trap', i.e., avoid 'solving the wrong problem'.



Question for mentors

- Have I checked that we share an understanding of what we are talking about here?

Part 3

The ‘how’ of the East Midlands’ Mentoring Programme



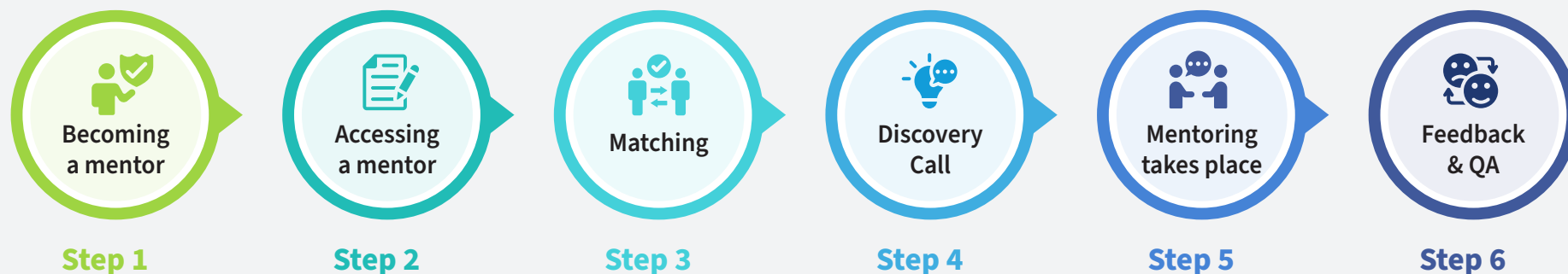
Why has a regional mentoring programme been established?

The development of an East Midlands' Regional Mentoring Programme was identified as a priority in the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) Plan (2024-2026), which is informed by a rigorous process of regional peer challenge.

The RIIA plan defines the key priorities identified and agreed by the East Midlands Directors of Children's Services (EMDCS) group where they consider the benefits of joint work might be greatest and could be addressed by the resources available for regional collaboration.

EMDCS are providing senior level sponsorship for the programme meaning that mentoring can take place during 'work time' and that mentors will not receive additional payment for their time. We have included a number of steps that require both mentor and mentee to liaise with their line manager to retain and inform this senior level sponsorship. The regional programme will work using a number of stages and processes, as summarised below.

East Midlands' Regional Mentoring Programme Process





Step 1: Becoming a mentor

In the first stage of the development of the programme it is intended that the region utilises the skills and expertise of colleagues who are qualified coaches and mentors.

To continue to grow the mentoring capacity and develop mentors that span a wide range of roles and experience, the region will invite expressions of interest from additional leaders and managers, especially those who have occupied middle leader roles, to undertake mentoring skills training using [this form](#).

Once training has been completed, they will become part of the mentoring pool, and their details will be made available as part of the matching process.

Action at this stage:

Those wishing to become a mentor should complete [this form](#) and submit it to the programme administrator.



2. Accessing a mentor

The priority for accessing a mentor in the first instance will be given to middle leaders, especially those who are new in post. Expressions of interest (EOI) by those who feel they would benefit from working with a mentor should be made using [this form](#).

The EOI should be shared with the applicant's line manager who will decide whether to put it forward as a priority to the programme administrator.

Action at this stage:

Those considering accessing a mentor should complete [this form](#) and discuss with their line manager for onward submission to the programme administrator, if appropriate.



Step 3: Matching

Once agreement has been given that a mentoring relationship should be developed the mentee should:

1. Explore the **regional directory of mentors** in the regional programme and choose who you feel is most appropriate to meet your needs.
2. Complete the mentor **matching request form**, to provide information that will be used for matching.
3. If a mentor is not identified from the regional directory the programme administrator will try to provide an alternative and/or respond to suggestions made by the mentee.

Action needed at this stage

Those considering accessing a mentor should complete this **form**.



Step 4: Discovery call

Once a match is proposed, the mentor and mentee will have a short discovery call to decide whether they feel the match is successful. A 'discovery call' is a short, initial conversation for mentor and mentee to decide if they both feel the match is likely to be successful. The mentee should setup the call and include:

- Brief introductions including professional background and experience.
- Expectations about the mentoring process.
- Timelines within which mentoring could most usefully take place.
- Preferred media to be used, i.e., in person, telephone, online, etc.
- What the mentee hopes to get from mentoring and if the mentor feels they have the appropriate experience to be helpful.
- Do both mentor and mentee feel that this match should go forward?

If both parties feel that the relationship will go ahead, **this agreement** will be signed by both parties and returned to the programme administrator.

If the match is not successful, the programme administrator will try to rematch and provide an alternative.

Actions needed at this stage

- Prospective mentee should contact the 'matched mentor' and set up a discovery call. Following the call the programme administrator should be informed if the match is successful or if a rematch is needed.
- Mentor and mentee to sign **this agreement** and return to the programme administrator.



Step 5: Mentoring takes place

Once the match is agreed and the agreement is in place, the mentor and mentee will manage the relationship to meet their needs and in line with the agreement.

The first meeting is a good opportunity to further discuss what you are hoping to get through the mentoring partnership, getting to know each other and setting your objectives. Ideally, the first meeting should cover:

- Expectations of the mentoring partnership, and role and responsibilities of each.
- What the mentee and mentor hope to get out of the partnership.
- The mentee's objectives.
- Frequency, structure, length and logistics of the meetings.

After the first meeting, good mentoring meetings should:

- Have a clear agenda.
- Review actions from last meeting and assess progress.
- Be related to agreed objectives.
- Focus on exploring the mentee's issues.
- Identify clear actions and next steps, including any activities the mentee will undertake between sessions.
- Agree a date for the next meeting.

Action at this stage:

Mentee to set up the first meeting and agree subsequent meetings with the mentor.



Step 6: Feedback & QA

The mentee will inform the programme administrator when the relationship comes to an end. Any request to extend the relationship should be made to the programme administrator and will be considered with consideration for the capacity of the mentor and any pending requests for mentoring from other mentees.

The mentor and mentee will be sent a feedback form.

These forms are to collect data on the programme for quality assurance processes only and personal data will not be shared unless this is explicitly agreed.

Actions at this stage:

- Mentee to inform the programme administrator that the mentoring relationship is complete.
- Programme administrator will send the feedback form to mentor and mentee for completion.
- Programme administrator will use feedback to complete a quality assurance review of the programme.