

# Mentoring conversation starter

A shared prompt guide for mentors and mentees

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework



Consultation identified that mentoring often starts informally or inconsistently, with expectations left unspoken. This tool addresses mentoring gaps by supporting clear, respectful conversations that help mentors and mentees establish focus, boundaries, and shared expectations early on.

## What the tool is

A short set of prompts to help mentors and mentees start mentoring or buddy conversations in a clear and constructive way.

## Who the tool is for

Mentors, buddies and mentees across all career phases.

## When to use the tool?

Use this tool at the start of a mentoring or buddy relationship, particularly during onboarding, role change, or other transition points.

## How to use the tool?

Use the prompts flexibly to guide early conversations and establish a shared focus. Select what is useful and leave the rest. The tool is designed to support connection, clarity and sense-making, not to assess performance.

### Mentoring conversation starter tool

#### 1. Setting the scene (use at the first conversation)

For the mentee

- What aspects of your role feel new or less familiar right now?
- What is taking the most energy now?
- What is going better than you expected?

For the mentor

- Looking back, what stood out for you at a similar stage?
- What do people often wish they had understood earlier?
- What kinds of support tend to be most helpful at this point?

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## 2. Understanding support needs (early check-in prompts)

Try exploring together:

- Where do you feel most confident right now?
- Where are things still forming or are less clear?
- What feels more demanding than expected?
- What do you find yourself checking or revisiting to make sure it's right?

Optional mentor prompt

If we fast-forward three months, what would you hope to feel easier or more settled about?

## 3. Navigating boundaries and expectations

Conversation starters

- What kinds of issues feel appropriate to bring to this mentoring space?
- What would you prefer to take elsewhere (manager, support team, systems)?
- How do you usually like to work through challenges – talking it through, thinking it through first, or seeing practical examples?

Mentor reflection (internal)

- Am I supporting understanding, or moving too quickly into fixing?
- Am I helping build capability, or taking on responsibility that isn't mine?

## 4. When things feel heavy (protective prompts)

If the mentee raises pressure or fatigue

- Which aspects feel most draining right now?
- Is this mainly about the work itself, the systems, or role boundaries?
- What would make this feel more manageable in the short term?

Mentors pause point

- Is this something I can support thinking through, or does it need broader support?
- What pathways could help without placing responsibility back on the mentee?

## 5. Making the mentoring space work

Talk through

- How often would check-ins feel useful right now?
- What's a realistic time commitment for both of us?
- How will we know if this is helping?
- When should we review or reset how this arrangement is working?

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## 6. Closing the conversation

Choose one

- What is one useful takeaway from today?
- What would you like to return to next time?
- What would it help if I thought about it before we meet again?

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