

NHS R&D NORTH WEST

MENTOR TOOLKIT

A practical guide for mentors with NHS R&D North West

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ABOUT NHS R&D NORTH WEST



NHS R&D NW supports the development of the health and care research workforce across the North West. Our mentoring programme is designed to empower researchers at every stage of their journey — from aspiring clinicians and AHPs to experienced academics, and from social care and public health professionals to local authority and third sector colleagues looking to grow their research careers.

We believe anyone working in health and care who wants to support learning, compassion, leadership and research culture can be a mentor.

Mentoring helps people gain clarity, confidence, and momentum in their research and career journeys, and strengthens the culture of learning and curiosity right across the health and care system.

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Research is a team activity —
and supporting people at every
career stage is essential to
building a thriving research
environment.

Professor Lucy Chappell (CEO of NIHR)



BEFORE YOU START

What mentoring means in the health and research context, boundaries, expectations, and your mentor pledge.

NHS R&D NORTH WEST MENTORING PROGRAMME

Mentoring is typically offered as part of participation in our Researcher Development Programmes. We encourage mentors and mentees to meet regularly over a 12-month period, with monthly conversations of around 60 minutes (approximately 11–12 sessions in total). Rather than using a central matching process, mentees are invited to identify and approach a mentor who aligns with their goals and interests.

WHAT IS MENTORING IN HEALTH AND CARE RESEARCH?

As a mentor in the health and care research community, you are:

- A sounding board
- A guide
- A champion of learning
- A role model for compassionate leadership

WHAT IS MENTORING IN HEALTH AND CARE RESEARCH?

Your mentee sets the agenda.

Your role is to create a safe, reflective space where they can explore:

- Work–life balance
- Confidence and identity as a researcher
- Navigating health, care and academic systems
- Funding pathways
- Leadership skills
- Belonging and contribution

WHAT MENTORING IS NOT

You are not expected to be:

- their manager
- a fixer
- a therapist
- a career saviour

Mentors are not responsible for solving problems but for enabling insight and action.

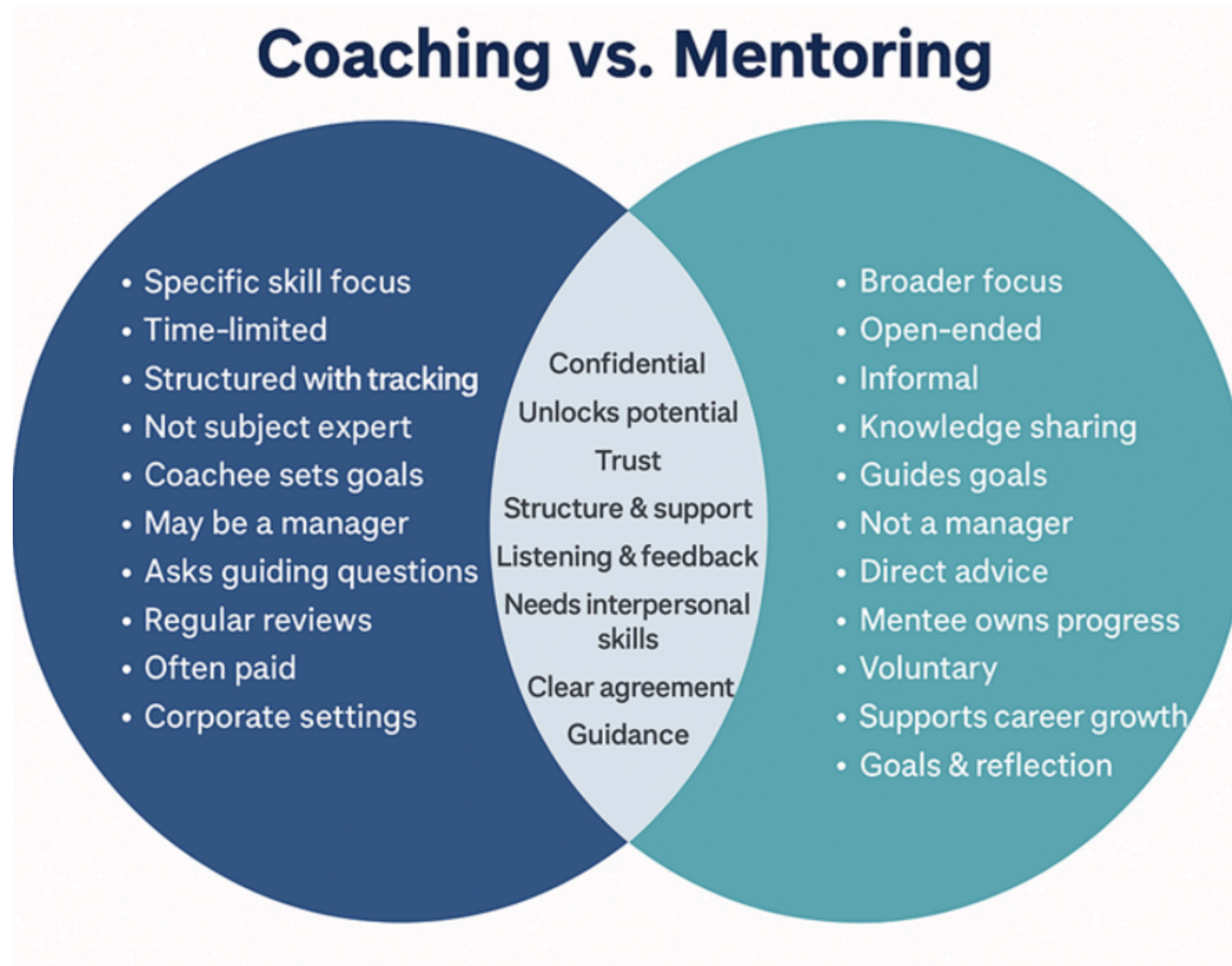
SAFEGUARDING AND PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Mentoring is a supportive but boundaried relationship. If at any point a mentee discloses information that raises a concern for their safety or the safety of others — including risk of harm, serious distress, or a safeguarding concern — you are not expected to manage this alone.

Please refer to your own organisation's safeguarding lead or speak to your line manager. You can also seek support from your NHS Trust Mentoring Champion or the NW Leadership Academy Mentoring Hub (<https://nw.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk>).

Confidentiality has limits: always be transparent with your mentee about this from the outset.

Similarities and differences between coaching and mentoring



WHY MENTORING MATTERS IN HEALTH & CARE RESEARCH

Retention

Researchers with mentors are more likely to stay in research roles

Assurance

Mentees often report reduced impostor syndrome

Equity

Mentoring supports a more inclusive and equitable research culture

Confidence

Mentoring increases confidence in navigating research pathways

Leadership

Mentors experience increased leadership capability and compassion

These outcomes are drawn from qualitative feedback gathered across previous NHS R&D NW mentoring cohorts. Themes reflect participants' own reported experiences.

COMMON MENTEE GOALS

Based on NHS R&D NW programmes data, common goals include:

- Building research confidence
- Understanding research career routes
- Strengthening academic writing or publishing skills
- Navigating NIHR funding pathways
- Finding balance between clinical workload and research
- Developing leadership identity
- Building networks and collaborations
- Returning to research after a pause
- Clarifying long-term career vision
- Improving communication & presentation skills

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

In any mentoring journey, a few bumps along the road are completely normal. Below are some common challenges mentors and mentees might encounter, along with ways to navigate them constructively and keep the mentoring relationship on track.

Mentee isn't showing up or is frequently changing meeting times.

Set clear expectations in a mentor-mentee agreement at the start.
Discuss how you'll handle schedule changes and consider whether virtual meetings or flexible timing might help both parties stay consistent.

Mentee doesn't seem engaged or isn't making progress.

Remember that the mentee may be facing unseen obstacles. Encourage them to take the lead and explore what might be holding them back. Offer tools or resources to help them clarify their vision and find new motivation.

Mentee expects too much from the mentor or has issues beyond the mentor's expertise.

Reinforce boundaries and be prepared to signpost them to appropriate support if needed. Emphasise that mentoring has its limits and that it's okay to guide them to other resources for specialised help.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES (PT.2)

Mentee has goals the mentor is unsure about.

It's okay not to have all the answers. Help your mentee identify what steps they can take on their own and where they might find additional guidance. If needed, direct them to others who may be better positioned to help.

Mentee is making mistakes or not following advice.

As a mentor, your role is to offer guidance, not to control outcomes. Sometimes the mentee will learn by doing things their own way. Encourage reflection and support their decision-making, even if it means letting them try a different approach.

YOUR MENTOR PLEDGE

Take a moment to reflect on the mentor you want to be. Use the prompts below to shape your personal pledge.

Why do you want to mentor?

What motivates you to support someone's development in health and care research?

What strengths do you bring as a mentor?

Listening? Encouragement? Experience in research, leadership or navigating complexity?

How will you create a safe and inclusive space?

How will you ensure your mentee feels respected, heard and valued?

What boundaries do you want to set?

Think about time, communication, expectations and your role.

How will you support your mentee's growth?

What approaches will you use — questioning, reflection, goal-setting, signposting...?

What do you hope to gain from mentoring?

Mentoring is reciprocal — what learning or development do you hope for?

Write your answers here

NOW, SHAPE YOUR PLEDGE

Below is a set of commitments you can adopt or adapt.
Tick, underline, or rewrite in your own words:

My Commitment as an NHS R&D NW Mentor

- I will create a safe, inclusive, non-judgemental space.
- I will champion equity, diversity and belonging in research.
- I will support my mentee to set their own goals.
- I will listen actively and ask thoughtful questions.
- I will respect boundaries and maintain confidentiality.
- I will model compassionate leadership.
- I will help my mentee recognise their achievements.
- I will support them to navigate complexity, not remove it for them.



SESSION PLANNING

A practical structure for sessions

YOU'VE BEEN CONTACTED BY A POTENTIAL MENTEE!

In the NHS R&D NW programme, mentees identify and reach out to mentors they feel would be a good fit for their needs — so this initial contact is the start of the relationship. Someone has reached out asking if you might be able to support them as a mentor. Now what? It's easy to jump straight in, but we recommend a quick sense-check first. You want to be confident the relationship will be productive, appropriate, and mutually beneficial. This can be done via email or, if you have time, a short 15–20 minute conversation to see whether the connection feels like a good fit.

You could ask:

- What made you reach out for mentoring support right now?
- What do you hope to get out of mentoring?
- Are there specific skills, experiences or challenges you'd like to focus on?
- Are you looking for guidance, reflective space, or a sounding board?
- How often would you like to meet, and in what format (online, in-person, phone)?
- How much time can you realistically commit between sessions?
- Have you worked with a mentor, coach, or supervisor in this way before?
- What do you expect from me as a mentor — and what should I expect from you?

Remember: it's completely OK if it doesn't feel like the right fit.

Many people will appreciate your honesty. If you don't feel you're the best person to support them, simply reply with thanks and let them know — and signpost them elsewhere if appropriate.

GUIDANCE FOR SESSION 1:

Building connection & foundations

This is a suggested Mentor-Mentee Agreement template — we recommend completing this together in Session 1

Mentor name	
Mentee name	
Start date	
End date	
Focus area	(e.g. research career / NIHR funding / leadership / confidence)

Confidentiality & Boundaries

Everything discussed in sessions is confidential. The one exception is if a safeguarding or safety concern arises — in this case the mentor will follow their organisation's policy and will inform the mentee wherever possible.
This relationship does not replace line management, HR processes, clinical supervision, or therapeutic support.

Frequency	(e.g. monthly)
Session length	(e.g. 45–60 minutes)
Format	(online / in-person / phone)
Between sessions	(e.g. email only / no contact between sessions)
Cancellations	(e.g. 48 hours' notice where possible)

Review & Close

Mid-point review: (e.g. Session 6 — to check how the relationship is working)
Closing session: We will use the final session to reflect, acknowledge progress, and agree next steps.
After the programme: (e.g. informal connection / occasional check-ins / no further contact — to agree)

Our Commitments

The mentee will: come prepared with a focus for each session · take responsibility for their own goals · be open and honest · give reasonable notice to reschedule.
The mentor will: create a safe, non-judgemental space · listen actively and ask thoughtful questions · support the mentee to find their own answers — not fix or advise beyond their role · signpost to other support when needed.

	Mentor	Mentee
Name		
Signature		
Date		

This agreement can be revisited and adapted at any point — just discuss and update your copies

PURPOSE OF THE FIRST SESSION

- BUILD RAPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY
- UNDERSTAND WHY THE MENTEE IS SEEKING MENTORING NOW
- CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS, ROLES AND BOUNDARIES
- AGREE HOW YOU WILL WORK TOGETHER
- SET A FOUNDATION FOR ALL FUTURE CONVERSATIONS

1. Warm welcome & connection

Start with informal conversation. Ask a few warm-up questions so the mentee feels at ease.

Suggested prompts:

- Tell me a little about your journey into health, care or research.
- What made you reach out for support at this moment?
- What's one thing you're proud of recently?

2. Explore their motivation for mentoring

- This helps you understand their needs and shape future sessions.
- Prompts:
 - What do you hope mentoring will help you with?
 - What feels unclear or challenging in your career right now?
 - What would make mentoring feel “useful” to you?

3. Kick-off: Defining the Mentoring Agreement

This is your shared framework. It sets expectations, boundaries, and ways of working.

You can cover:

Roles

- Mentee leads the agenda and sets the goals.
- Mentor listens, reflects, guides — not fixes.

Boundaries

- Confidentiality
- What's in scope vs out of scope (e.g., mental health support, supervision)

Logistics

- How often you will meet (e.g., monthly)
- Session length (usually 45–60 minutes)
- Format (online/in person/phone)
- Preferred communication style (email / messages / none between sessions)

Expectations

- Mentee comes prepared with ideas
- Mentor offers reflection, questions, challenge, support
- You agree how to handle cancellations or delays

4. Light touch exploration of goals

- You're not defining goals yet — just getting information.

Prompts:

- What would you love to feel more confident about?
- Where do you want to see progress over the next few months?

5. End the session on a positive note

- Give reassurance, highlight strengths you've already observed, and confirm the next session date.

GUIDANCE FOR SESSION 2-7

Vision & Values, Turning Vision into Goals, Obstacles & Successes

PURPOSE OF THESE SESSIONS

- **HELP THE MENTEE VISUALISE WHAT THEY WANT FROM THEIR FUTURE**
- **BRING OUT THEIR VALUES, MOTIVATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS BEGIN SHAPING A CLEARER SENSE OF DIRECTION**
- **TURN VISION INTO PRACTICAL GOALS**
- **IDENTIFY PRIORITIES AND FOCUS AREAS**
- **DEVELOP A ROADMAP TAILORED TO THEIR CONTEXT (NIHR, NHS, SOCIAL CARE, PUBLIC HEALTH, ACADEMIC AND THIRD SECTOR PATHWAYS)**
- **CHECK PROGRESS AND ACKNOWLEDGE ACHIEVEMENTS EXPLORE OBSTACLES (INTERNAL & EXTERNAL)**
- **REFRAME CHALLENGES AND BUILD CONFIDENCE**

What to cover

1. Start with a recap of the previous session

- What reflections came up since our first meeting?
- Anything new they want to bring today?
- Pull out themes and patterns.

2. Clarify their vision

This is about imagining their desired future.

Prompts:

- What does a fulfilling research or professional life look like to you?
- What impact do you hope your work will have?
- What kind of researcher / clinician / leader do you want to become?

3. Explore values

Values drive behaviour and choices. When values are unclear, decisions feel harder.

Prompts:

- What matters most to you in your work?
- What energises you? What drains you?
- Which values feel essential to protect?

4. Begin identifying long-term themes:

- Themes often emerge such as:
- confidence
- research identity
- leadership
- career transitions
- work-life integration
- impact and purpose

5. Define short-, medium- and long-term goals

Encourage SMART or CLEAR goals.

Prompts:

- What do you want to achieve in the next 3–6 months?
- Which goal feels the most urgent or energising?
- What would progress look like?

Goals could be related to:

Funding applications, Skills-building, Academic outputs, Leadership development, Project planning, Networking strategy

6. Identify barriers and supports

Explore realistically what helps and what hinders.

Prompts:

- What skills or knowledge do you need to move forward?
- Who could support you on this journey?
- What structures or habits would be useful?

7. Create a flexible roadmap

Help them map steps, timelines, dependencies.

8. Explore barriers

This may include:

- time constraints
- confidence dips
- organisational culture
- unclear expectations
- impostor feelings

Prompts:

- What's getting in the way?
- Which barriers are practical? Which are mindset?
- What would help you move past this?

9. Journey reflection

Prompts:

- What feels different since we started?
- What have you achieved so far?
- What surprised you?

10. Celebrate progress

Mentors should name strengths the mentee might not notice.

11. Adjust goals if needed

Resetting is normal and healthy.

GUIDANCE FOR SESSIONS 8-11

Deepen & Strengthen

PURPOSE OF THESE SESSIONS

- STRENGTHEN MOMENTUM AND DEEPEN INSIGHT
- BUILD CAPABILITY
- ENSURE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN VALUES, GOALS AND REALITY

What to cover

1. Deeper exploration

Pick 1–2 key themes for a deep dive.

These might include:

- confidence in networking
- navigating NIHR funding
- career transition
- leadership identity
- navigating organisational complexity

2. Build specific skills or strategies

Depending on the mentee's goals:

- Networking map
- Funding readiness checklist
- Research career pathways
- Communication & visibility

3. Reconnect values + goals

Ensure their actions match what matters most to them.

GUIDANCE FOR LAST SESSION: Closure & Look Ahead

PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

- REFLECT ON THE JOURNEY ACKNOWLEDGING PROGRESS AND GROWTH
- AGREE NEXT STEPS
- CLOSE THE RELATIONSHIP POSITIVELY OR TRANSITION THOUGHTFULLY

What to cover

1. Reflect on the whole journey

Prompts:

- What have you learned about yourself?
- What feels clearer now?
- How have your confidence, clarity or skills developed?

2. Review the roadmap

Identify:

- achievements
- new directions
- goals to carry forward

3. Discuss what happens next

Options include:

- ending the formal mentoring relationship
- occasional check-ins
- informal professional connection

4. Encourage paying it forward

Mentoring strengthens research culture.

RESOURCES

LIFELINE

The Life Line is a simple but powerful reflective tool used to help mentees map their personal and professional journey. The mentee draws a horizontal timeline representing their life — from early memory to the present day — and plots key moments: highs and lows, turning points, challenges, achievements, and moments of change. The line rises and falls like a graph to show how they felt at different points in time.

How to use it:

Ask the mentee to draw their Life Line before or at the start of a session — it takes 10–15 minutes.

Invite them to mark moments that shaped who they are, their interest in research, and their professional identity.

Listen carefully as they talk through it. Avoid interpreting — ask, don't tell.

Use the reflective questions on the right to deepen exploration.

Suggested questions:

- When you look at your Life-Line now what strikes you?
- What do you notice?
- What was it like filling it in?
- What did you realize?
- What surprises if any were there?
- In what ways have things that have happened to you in your life shaped how you are now?
- What in your life has influenced your interest in research?
- What have you learnt from this exercise?

Tip: Only use this tool if the mentee feels comfortable. It can surface personal material — hold a warm and non-judgemental space throughout.

Source: Open University Life Line resource: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=28130§ion=2.1>.

LIFELINE

Time: about 30 minutes

Instructions

- a) Above the chart write your date of birth and today's date.
- b) Below the chart make a scale for your age in 5 or 10 year intervals
- c) Note good times or events above the chart and difficult times below it.
- d) Draw a line like a temperature chart to show how you felt about your life from your earliest memories to the present day.

Notes about good times and events

Date of Birth
...../...../.....

Today's date
...../...../.....

Years

Good times

OK

Distress

Ages

0

... now

Difficult times or events

- Review:
- What happened in the year before and after the low points?
 - What turning points helped you to new highs? How did you change?
 - Are there any connections between study or work and personal events?
 - How do your experiences compare with the description of transitions*?
 - You can draw similar charts on a larger scale for periods with many changes.

WHEEL OF LIFE AND WORK

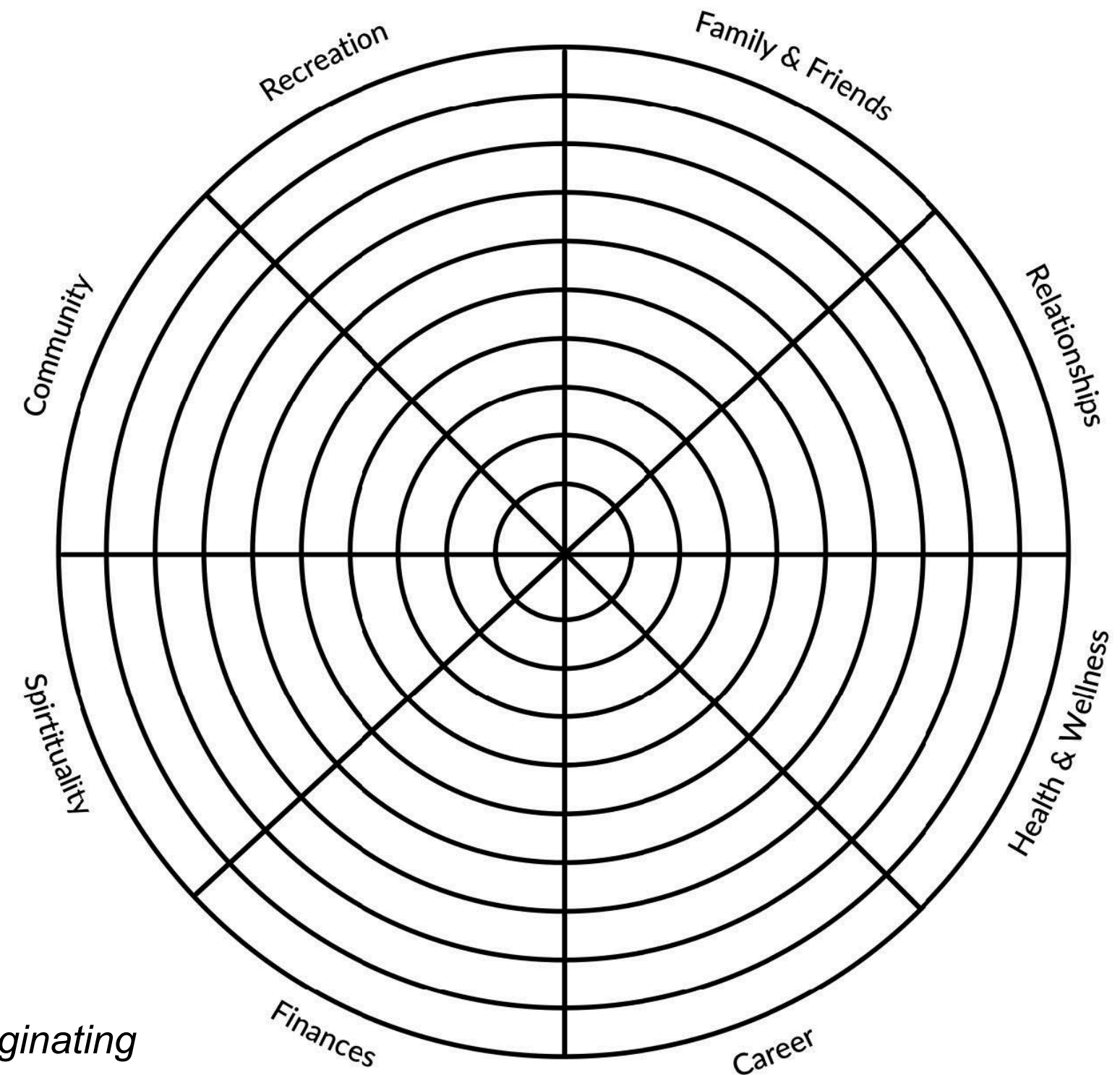
A reflective tool to help mentees identify their mentoring priorities. It is a helpful insight into where someone is most satisfied and where they may benefit from some change.

The mentee can plot how satisfied in that area of life on the wheel or what percentage of time each part takes up. Feel free to add categories. You could join up the dots to reflect this (like a spider web), or you can colour in the rings. The rings represent 1-10. With 1 near the centre and 10 on the outside. 10 represents most satisfied.

Possible mentoring questions:

- Where does research currently fit into my work life?
- What is a priority?
- What can I delegate? Do less of? Stop? Do more of?

Source: Adapted from the Wheel of Life, a widely used coaching tool originating in the work of Paul J. Meyer (1960s), founder of the Success Motivation Institute. Commonly used in life coaching and career development practice.



IDEAL RESEARCH DAY FREE WRITING

Your “Ideal Research Day” it’s an invitation to imagine what a fulfilling, balanced, energising day in your research life could look like — one that aligns with your values, strengths and aspirations. This exercise helps uncover what matters most to you, what motivates you, and what might need to change.

How It Works

1. Set a timer for 5 minutes (or up to 15 if you want more space).
2. Write freely about your ideal research day — from the moment you wake up to the moment you finish work.
3. Don’t overthink. Don’t edit. Don’t worry about being “realistic.”
4. Let your imagination and instincts guide you.

Write as if no one will read it — the goal is reflection, not perfection.

Prompts to Help You Get Started

You don’t need to answer all of these — they’re simply here to spark ideas.

- Where are you working — in a hospital? University? Community? At home?
- How much time do you have protected for research?
- What kind of research activities fill your day?
- Writing? Data analysis? Patient recruitment? Literature reviews? Meetings?
- Who are you working with?
- Collaborators, peers, supervisors, students, PPI contributors...
- What does the atmosphere feel like?
- Calm, energising, focused, collaborative...
- What makes you feel purposeful or satisfied during this day?
- What strengths are you using or developing?
- How do you want to feel at the end of the day?

Source: Free writing as a reflective practice is grounded in expressive writing research: Pennebaker, J. W., & Smyth, J. M. (2016). Opening Up by Writing It Down (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

IDEAL RESEARCH DAY REFLECTION

After You Write: Reflection Questions

Once you've finished, take a moment to read your "Ideal Research Day" back.

Then reflect:

- What values appear in your writing?
- What energises you? What matters most?
- What feels close to your current reality, and what feels far away?
- Which parts could you move toward, even in small steps?
- What would need to change — systems, habits, support, confidence?

These insights can feed directly into your mentoring goals and roadmap.

VISION BOARD

A creative tool to help you imagine your future as a researcher.

A vision board helps you visualise the kind of research life you want to move towards — not just the roles or achievements, but the feel, values, impact, and environment that matter to you.

There's no right or wrong way to build this. Use images, words, colours, concepts, and anything that resonates.

How to Create Your Vision Board

Take a blank page (physical or digital) and gather:

- Images
- Words or phrases
- Symbols or icons
- Colours that represent feelings or aspirations
- Snippets from articles, journals, or research websites
- Sketches, diagrams, or mind maps

Begin arranging them in a way that feels meaningful. Let instinct guide you — this is your space to imagine the future.



Source: Visualisation as a goal-setting technique is supported by: Vasquez, N. A., & Buehler, R. (2007).

Seeing future success: Does imagery perspective influence achievement motivation? Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33(10), 1392–1405.

What You Might Include

1. Your Research Identity

Who do you want to be as a researcher?

- Compassionate?
- Innovative?
- Rigorous?
- Collaborative?
- Patient-focused?
- Curious?
- Values-led?

Add keywords, images, or colours that represent this identity.

2. Areas of Interest

What topics, populations, or problems excite you?

- AHP research
- Public health
- Mental health
- Long-term conditions
- Inequalities
- Implementation science
- Data and innovation

Add visuals or words connected to your field or aspirations.

3. Skills You Want to Grow

Examples:

- Writing for publication
- Qualitative / quantitative methods
- Presenting research
- Applying for NIHR funding
- Leadership & collaboration
- Project management
- Networking

Add symbols, images, or icons representing tools and skills.

4. Environments Where You Thrive

Consider settings that energise you:

- University campus
- NHS Trust R&I department
- Community setting
- Research labs
- Collaborative workspaces
- Quiet writing environments

Add photos, textures, colours or shapes that evoke these spaces.

5. People Who Inspire You

Think about:

- Mentors
- Researchers you admire
- Leaders in your field
- Clinicians who influence you
- Teams or communities you want to belong to

Add quotes, names, or symbolic images.

6. Future Milestones

Add visuals or words representing:

- Completing a fellowship
- Submitting a thesis / applying for a PhD
- Publishing a paper
- Leading a study
- Presenting at a conference
- Improving patient care
- Training others

Reflection Questions

Once your board feels complete:

- What patterns or themes do you notice?
- What excites you most?
- Which elements feel immediate, and which feel longer-term?
- What values stand out?
- What small steps could you take towards this vision?

Your mentor can help translate these insights into actions and goals in the next sessions.

DEFINING PURPOSE

Ikigai helps you reflect on four key areas that shape a meaningful research career. Where they overlap is your sense of purpose: the work that feels energising, valuable and aligned to your strengths.

1. What You Love

- The work that excites or motivates you.
- Prompts:
- What parts of research do you enjoy most?
- When do you feel energised?

2. What You Are Good At

- Your strengths, skills and natural abilities.
- Prompts:
- What comes easily to you?
- Where do you add value?

3. What the World (and NHS) Needs

- Where your work can make a difference.
- Prompts:
- Who do you want your work to benefit?
- What problems or inequalities are you drawn to?

4. What You Can Be Supported or Paid For

- Opportunities, roles, funding or pathways that value your contribution.
- Prompts:
- Where could your skills be recognised?
- What roles or fellowships align with your strengths?

5. Your Ikigai

- Look for themes that appear across all four areas.
- These point toward the type of research, roles or environments that feel most meaningful for you.

Source: Adapted from the Japanese concept of ikigai (reason for being), popularised in Western career development literature by: García, H., & Miralles, F. (2016). Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life. Penguin Books.



CORE VALUES

Values are the principles that guide decisions, shape motivation, and influence work. Knowing values helps choosing roles, projects and environments that feel right.

How to Use This Tool

Read the list of values below. Circle or highlight the ones that resonate most. Narrow them down to 7–10 core values. Reflect on how these show up in your research life.

Source: Values clarification is a core component of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): Harris, R. (2008). The Happiness Trap. Constable & Robinson. Also widely used in coaching frameworks.

Compassion	Curiosity	Integrity	Well-Being	Making a Difference	Diversity
Empathy	Learning	Honesty	Health	Service	Equity
Kindness	Growth	Accountability	Safety	Advocacy	Respect
Warmth	Personal	Trustworthiness	Balance	Contribution	Belonging
Inclusiveness	Development	Responsibility	Mindfulness	Leadership	Community
Belonging	Innovation	Ethics	Calmness	Vision	Cultural Sensitivity
Collaboration	Creativity	Fairness	Stability	Excellence	Acceptance
Teamwork	Open-Mindedness	Reliability	Self-Care	Quality	Understanding
Generosity	Adaptability	Dependability	Spirituality	Passion	Support
Selflessness	Resilience	Professionalism	Peace	Motivation	
Relationships	Lifelong Learning	Commitment	Harmony	Courage	
Friendships	Knowledge	Dedication		Boldness	
Love	Inspiration	Consistency			

VALUES IN ACTION

This exercise helps your mentee identify what truly drives them in their health and care role. Your job is not to share your own values or guide them towards particular answers — it's to create a safe space, ask good questions, and help them make sense of what comes up.

Prompts:

- "Which values surprised you when you circled them?"
- "Which one feels most important to you right now, and why?"
- "Where do you feel your values are most visible in your day-to-day work?"
- "Are there any values on your list that feel difficult to live out in your role?"
- "How do your values connect to why you chose to work in health and care?"
- **"For each of your top values, can you describe one specific thing you already do — or could do — that shows this value in action in your work?"**

Source: Based on values-based practice in healthcare: Fulford, K. W. M. (2004). Ten principles of values-based medicine. In J. Radden (Ed.), The Philosophy of Psychiatry: A Companion. Oxford University Press.

Mentor tip: If your mentee struggles to choose or rank values, that's valuable information too. Ask: "What makes it hard to choose?" — this often reveals important insights about tensions they're experiencing in their role.

G.R.O.W. FRAMEWORK

GROW is the most widely used mentoring and coaching framework in the UK, developed in the 1980s by Graham Alexander, Alan Fine, and Sir John Whitmore. It stands for Goal, Reality, Options, Will and gives mentors a simple, repeatable structure for conversations.

- Early sessions — use Goal and Reality questions to help the mentee explore their starting point, including the values exercise
- Mid-journey — use Options to help the mentee think creatively about development and challenges
- Later sessions — lean into Will and review to help the mentee consolidate progress and plan next steps

Stage	The Mentor's Focus	Example Questions
G — Goal	What does the mentee want from this conversation?	<i>"What would be most useful to focus on today?" "What would a good outcome look like for you?"</i>
R — Reality	What is actually going on right now?	<i>"What's happening at the moment?" "What have you already tried?" "What is making this difficult?"</i>
O — Options	What possibilities are available?	<i>"What could you do?" "What else?" "If there were no obstacles, what would you do?"</i>
W — Will	What will the mentee commit to?	<i>"What will you do, and by when?" "How confident are you on a scale of 1-10?" "What support do you need?"</i>

Source: Whitmore, J. (1992). *Coaching for Performance*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

PERSONAL BOARD

A Personal Board is a small, intentional group of people — typically 5–8 — who support a person's professional and personal growth from different angles. Unlike a single mentor it gives the mentee access to a diverse set of perspectives — someone who challenges them, someone who connects them, someone who listens. Crucially, not everyone on the board needs to know they're on it — some relationships can be informal or even aspirational.

This exercise helps your mentee see who is already supporting their growth — and spot the gaps. Your role is to help them think broadly, beyond the obvious names, and reflect on the quality of those relationships.

Your role in this exercise is to ask questions and listen — not to suggest who should be on your mentee's board. Use these prompts to help them go deeper:

- "Who do you turn to when you need honest feedback?"
- "Is there anyone who genuinely challenges how you think?"
- "Who celebrates your successes and puts your name forward?"
- "Are there any roles that feel completely empty right now?"
- "Is there someone you admire from a distance who could inspire your growth, even informally?"

Tip: Some mentees in health and care have strong support within their team but lack people outside their immediate workplace. Encourage them to think across organisations, professional networks, and beyond the health sector.

Source: The concept is attributed to general career development literature. A commonly cited practical reference is: Stephens, B. (2025). Building Your Personal Advisory Board.

PERSONAL BOARD PT.2

Your Exercise

Write the name of someone who plays each role in your life around the outline of a hand — one name per finger. If a finger is blank, that is useful information too.

Step 1 — Write a name (or initials) next to each role. One person can fill more than one role, but variety is more powerful.

Step 2 — Spot the gaps. Which roles feel empty or underdeveloped?

Step 3 — Think about who could fill a gap — inside or outside your current team or organisation.

Step 4 — Consider your reach. Do you have people from different levels, backgrounds, and specialisms?

Step 5 — Commit to one action. Who will you reach out to, or invest more in, before your next mentoring session?



MEET YOUR GREMLIN

Your gremlin is your inner critic — the voice in your head that feeds self-doubt, tells you that you are not good enough, or holds you back from taking risks. In health and care, it might sound like: "Who am I to speak up in that meeting?" or "Everyone else knows more than me." The gremlin is not you. It is a pattern of thinking, and once you can see it clearly, you can begin to loosen its grip.

Your role in this exercise is to hold a warm, non-judgmental space. The gremlin exercise can surface real vulnerability — go gently.

Use these questions to help your mentee explore further:

- "When does this voice tend to be loudest for you?"
- "Whose voice does it remind you of?"
- "What would you say to a colleague who spoke to themselves this way?"
- "What does this gremlin stop you from doing or saying at work?"
- "If the gremlin turned down its volume, what would become possible for you?"
- Tip: Humour is a powerful tool here. Encouraging the mentee to give their gremlin a silly name or draw it as small and ridiculous can instantly reduce its power. The goal is not to silence the gremlin permanently — it is to help the mentee hear it without always believing it.

Source: Based on the work of Rick Carson, Taming Your Gremlin (2003)

MEET YOUR GREMLIN PT. 2

Part 1 — Draw Your Gremlin

In the space below, draw your gremlin or inner critic. This is not about art — a quick sketch or doodle is perfect. You might draw it using your non-dominant hand to help you stop overthinking it.

Tips:

- Give it a physical form — big arms to keep you in place, piercing eyes that spot every mistake, a critical frown
- Add speech bubbles with phrases your gremlin uses — "You should have known better", "Who do you think you are?"
- Let it be as ugly, ridiculous, or small as feels right

(Large blank space for drawing)

Part 2 — Get to Know Your Gremlin

Now look at your drawing and answer these questions:

What do you notice about your gremlin?

What do its features tell you about how it operates?

When is your gremlin most active?

In what situations, places, or moments does it tend to show up?

What is your gremlin trying to do?

What is it trying to protect you from?

Where does your gremlin come from?

Which people, experiences, or messages from your past might have shaped it?

How relevant is this thinking today?

Is your gremlin's story still true — or is it out of date?

Part 3 — Tame Your Gremlin

Give your gremlin a name

Naming it makes it feel separate from you — and separating it is where your power begins.

My gremlin's name is: _

Who would you be without this gremlin?

Reframe its message

When your gremlin speaks, try responding with: "Thank you for trying to protect me — but I don't need you right now."

Write your own reframe here:

My one action from this exercise:

THE GROWTH GARDEN

A reflective tool to help mentees notice their progress, strengths, and learning along the way. Just like a real garden, a research career grows through care, patience, small daily actions, and learning from what thrives — and what doesn't yet. The Growth Garden helps your mentee visualise this process.

How It Works

Invite your mentee to create a simple page titled “My Growth Garden”.

On the page, they draw or place:

Seeds (New Beginnings)

Moments where they tried something new, took a small risk, or started a new habit.

Examples: “Submitted my first abstract”, “Reached out to a collaborator”.

Sprouts (Small Wins)

Tiny signs of progress, even if they feel small or slow.

Examples: “Wrote 200 words”, “Understood a new method”, “Got positive feedback”.

Blossoms (Achievements & Breakthroughs)

Things they are proud of — big or small.

Examples: “Presented at journal club”, “Finished ethics application”, “Felt confident in a meeting”.

Weeds (Challenges & Obstacles)

Not to judge — but to notice and understand what's getting in the way.

Examples: “Self-doubt”, “Time pressure”, “Fear of applying”.

They can draw them or simply write words in the right section.

Source: Metaphorical tool drawing on growth mindset theory: Dweck, C. S. (2006). Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. Random House.

