Scenario Card Pack

A facilitated learning resource exploring real-world mentoring challenges — from communication barriers and cultural expectations to structural inequalities and confidence gaps. Each scenario invites reflection, discussion, and growth.

MENTORING IN PRACTICE | 15 SCENARIOS



Scenario Card 1: The Silent Mentee

The Scenario

Maria attends every mentoring session on time. However, she rarely speaks, avoids eye contact, and usually responds with short answers such as "yes", "no", or "I don't know". The mentor begins to wonder whether Maria is uninterested, unmotivated, or simply does not want to participate.

Context for Facilitator

Participants should consider that communication styles vary across cultures, communities, and personal experiences. Silence does not always indicate lack of motivation. It may reflect:

- Nervousness or lack of confidence
- Respect for authority figures
- Previous negative experiences
- Cultural communication norms

1

What assumptions might the mentor make?

2

What alternative explanations could exist?

3

How might Maria be feeling?

4

What could the mentor do to build trust?

Avoid Quick Judgement

Avoid interpreting behaviour too quickly without exploring context.

Open-Ended Questions

Use questions that invite reflection rather than yes/no responses.

Psychological Safety

Create an environment where the mentee feels safe to speak freely.

Build Trust First

Trust must be established before openness can be expected.

Scenario Card 2: Family Expectations

The Scenario

Elif wants to start a small business selling handmade products online. During a mentoring session, she shares that her family believes women should prioritise household responsibilities and discourages her from pursuing business activities. She feels torn between her aspirations and family expectations.

Participants should explore the difference between respecting cultural values and supporting empowerment.

Discussion Questions

1. What challenges is Elif facing?
2. How can the mentor remain respectful while supporting her goals?
3. What strategies could help Elif move forward?
4. What support systems might be useful?



Empowerment Without Imposition

Empowerment is not about imposing solutions. Mentors should guide, not direct.



Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity requires both respect and genuine curiosity about the mentee's world.



Realistic Pathways

Mentors can help mentees identify realistic, achievable pathways that honour their context.

Scenario Card 3: The Missing Sessions

Anna has missed three mentoring meetings in the past month. When contacted, she explains that she has two children, no regular childcare support, and often struggles to attend meetings. The mentor becomes frustrated because progress is slowing down.

Discussion Questions

1. What barriers does Anna face?
2. How might the mentor react negatively?
3. How could the mentoring process be adapted?
4. What practical solutions could be explored?

Context for Facilitator

Participants should recognise structural barriers that may affect participation. Absence is not always a sign of disengagement — it is often a sign of competing pressures beyond the mentee's control.

Equal ≠ Identical

Equal treatment does not always mean identical treatment. Equity requires adapting to individual circumstances.

Flexibility for Inclusion

Flexibility is often necessary for genuine inclusion. Rigid structures can exclude those with the most need.

Recognise Structural Barriers

Structural barriers — like lack of childcare — should be recognised and actively addressed in programme design.

Scenario Card 4: Camera Off

A mentee regularly attends online sessions but never turns on her camera. The mentor worries that she is distracted or not fully engaged.

Discussion Questions

1. What assumptions might be made?
2. How could the mentor explore the situation respectfully?
3. What alternative arrangements might help?

Possible Reasons

- Lack of confidence on camera
- Privacy concerns at home
- Poor internet connection
- Living conditions or shared spaces
- Cultural preferences

Curiosity Over Judgment

Curiosity is more useful than judgment when exploring a mentee's behaviour.

Inclusion Requires Flexibility

Inclusion requires flexibility in how sessions are structured and participation is measured.

Communication Preferences Vary

Communication preferences are shaped by personal, cultural, and practical factors.



Scenario Card 5: "Sorry..."

> "Sorry, this may be a stupid question." "Sorry, maybe I'm wrong." "Sorry for taking your time."

Throughout every conversation, the mentee constantly apologises. The mentor notices that the mentee rarely expresses opinions confidently.

This May Indicate

- Low self-confidence
- Previous criticism or negative feedback
- Social conditioning
- Fear of failure or judgement

Discussion Questions

1. What might be behind this behaviour?
2. How could the mentor strengthen confidence?
3. Which mentoring techniques could help?

Language Reflects Confidence

The words a mentee uses often reveal their internal confidence levels. Pay close attention to self-deprecating language.

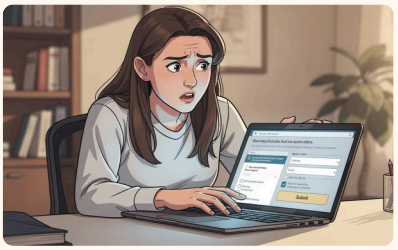
Reinforce Strengths

Mentors should actively and consistently reinforce the mentee's strengths and contributions.

Psychological Safety

A psychologically safe environment encourages participation and reduces the need for constant self-protection.

Scenario Cards 6 & 7: Skills Gaps and Financial Control



Card 6: No Digital Skills

A mentee wants to start a business but struggles with basic digital tasks such as email, online forms, and video meetings. She feels embarrassed and hides these difficulties.

- How might embarrassment affect learning?
- How can the mentor provide support without creating shame?
- What learning plan could be developed?



Card 7: Who Controls the Money?

Fatma wants to start a small home-based business. She shares that all major financial decisions are made by her husband. She feels uncomfortable discussing money and is unsure whether she can invest in her business idea.

- What challenges might Fatma be experiencing?
- How can the mentor support her without criticising her family situation?
- What gradual steps could be explored?

Skills ≠ Personal Failure

Skills gaps should never be treated as personal failures. They are opportunities for growth.

Build Confidence + Competence

Mentoring should build confidence alongside competence — both matter equally.

Respect Circumstances

Respect personal circumstances while supporting informed, autonomous decision-making.

Encourage Agency

Encourage agency rather than dependence. The goal is self-determination.

Scenario Cards 8 & 9: Social Pressure & Language Barriers

Card 8: What Will People Say?

A mentee is excited about launching a business but worries that people in her village will gossip or criticise her if she fails. She says: *"I don't want everyone talking about me."*

Fear of community judgement can significantly influence confidence and risk-taking.

1. What social pressures are present?
2. How can mentors help mentees manage fear of judgement?
3. How can resilience be strengthened?

Card 9: Lost in Translation

A migrant woman attends mentoring sessions but struggles to fully understand some discussions because of language barriers. She often smiles and agrees, even when she is confused.

Participants should consider the impact of language barriers on participation and confidence.

1. How might misunderstanding affect the mentoring process?
2. What signs might indicate confusion?
3. How can communication be adapted?

Community Expectations

Community expectations can powerfully influence behaviour. Fear of failure is often linked to fear of social judgement.

Never Assume Understanding

Understanding should never be assumed. Plain language and visual explanations improve inclusion significantly.

Support Self-Belief

Mentors can actively support confidence and self-belief in the face of both social and linguistic challenges.

Scenario Cards 10 & 11: Access and Financial Stress



Card 10: No Way to Get There

A mentee lives in a remote village and depends on public transport. Several opportunities for networking and training exist, but transport options are limited and expensive.

- What barriers exist beyond the mentee's control?
- How could activities be adapted?
- What alternatives might increase accessibility?



Card 11: Financial Stress

A mentee wants to develop a business idea but is struggling to cover daily expenses. She feels guilty spending time on personal development instead of finding immediate income.

- How might financial stress affect mentoring?
- What realistic goals could be set?
- How can mentors balance ambition with practical realities?

Inclusion Needs Logistics

Inclusion requires consideration of logistics. Participation barriers are often systemic, not personal.

Flexibility Increases Engagement

Flexible formats — online, asynchronous, local — increase engagement for those facing access barriers.

Small Steps Matter

Financial insecurity affects decision-making. Small, achievable steps are important when stress is high.

Empathy Guides Support

Empathy should guide mentoring support, especially when a mentee is managing survival alongside development.

Scenario Cards 12 & 13: Past Failure & Returning After Motherhood

Card 12: I Failed Before

Several years ago, a mentee started a small business that eventually closed. She now avoids discussing new ideas and frequently says: *"I already tried and failed."*

Past experiences strongly influence self-confidence and willingness to take risks.

1. How might previous failure shape current behaviour?
2. What can mentors do to reframe failure as learning?
3. How can confidence be rebuilt?

Card 13: Returning After Motherhood

A young mother wants to return to work or start a business after several years focused on childcare. She worries that her skills are outdated and lacks confidence in professional settings.

Career breaks often affect confidence more than competence.

1. What strengths might she already possess?
2. How can mentors help identify transferable skills?
3. What realistic development steps could be taken?

→ Failure as Experience

Failure can provide valuable experience. Mentors can help mentees identify lessons learned and reframe their story.

→ Parenting Builds Skills

Parenting develops many transferable skills — organisation, negotiation, empathy, resilience — that are highly valuable.

→ Confidence Grows Gradually

Confidence grows through reflection, small successes, and consistent encouragement. Growth can happen step by step.

Scenario Cards 14 & 15: Isolation & Overwhelm

Card 14: Building a New Life

A migrant woman recently moved to a new country. She has professional experience but very few social or professional connections. She often feels isolated.

Social capital plays a major role in employment and entrepreneurship.

1. What challenges might isolation create?
2. How can networking become part of mentoring?
3. What local resources could be useful?

Networks matter. Belonging supports confidence. Mentors can act as connectors.

Card 15: Everything at Once

A mentee is managing work, childcare, household responsibilities, financial concerns, and participation in the mentoring programme. She frequently says: *"I don't know where to start."*

Overwhelm often appears as procrastination, withdrawal, or lack of progress.

1. What signs of overwhelm can you identify?
2. How can a mentor help prioritise?
3. Which tools from the mentoring programme could support her?

Networks Matter

Social and professional networks are essential for opportunity. Mentors can actively help build these connections.

Belonging Builds Confidence

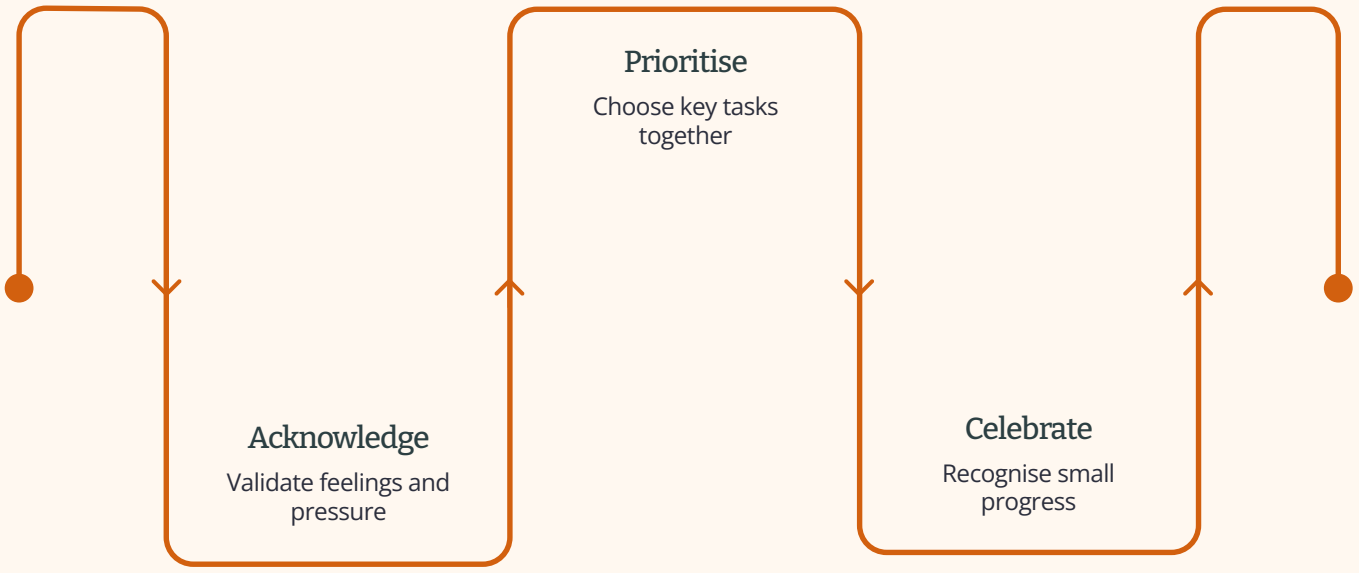
A sense of belonging supports confidence and motivation. Isolation is a barrier that mentoring can help address.

Overwhelm is a Signal

Overwhelm is often a signal, not a lack of motivation. Prioritisation and time management are essential mentoring tools.

Small Wins Build Momentum

Small wins build momentum and confidence. Breaking goals into manageable steps transforms overwhelm into progress.



When a mentee feels overwhelmed, the most effective response is not to push harder — it is to slow down, listen, and co-create a manageable path forward together.