

An Access Evidence report

COACHING & MENTORING

for frontline practitioners

Produced by



EVIDENCE



About the Access Evidence series

Access Evidence is a series of evidence informed resources for frontline practitioners working with children, young people and families.

These resources have been co-produced with frontline practitioners, who were involved in both the design and production phases. The series aims to help create a common understanding and language for practitioners across a range of sectors.

CES would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Access Evidence Practice Advisory Group in the development of this summary and implications for practice. The Practice Advisory Group includes youth workers, teachers, early childhood care and education professionals, Gardaí, social workers, psychologists and researchers from Ireland and Northern Ireland.

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Background to this summary

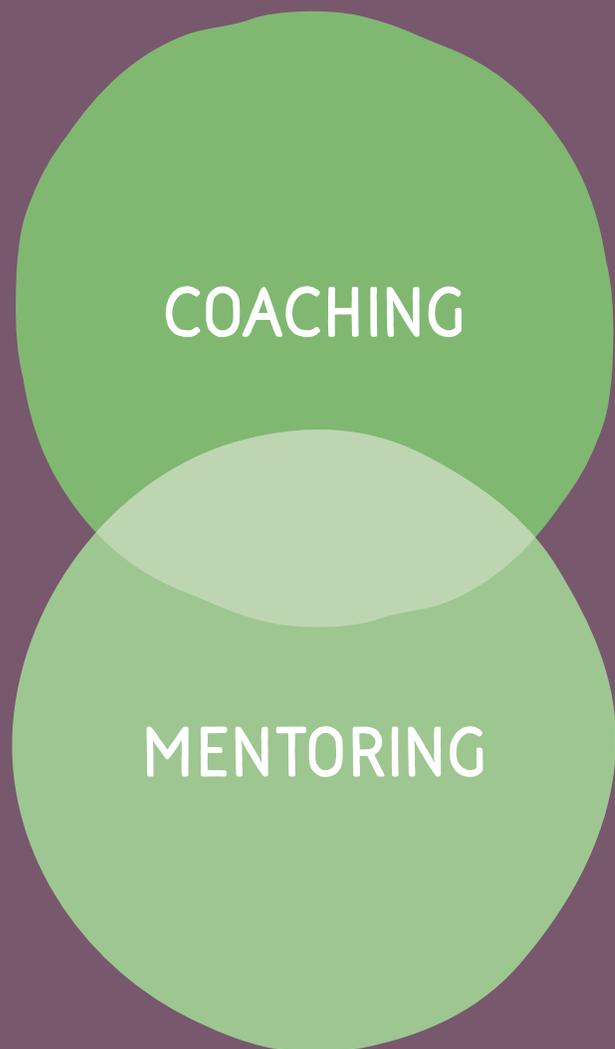
The work of frontline practitioners is demanding and challenging whether it happens in a classroom, clinic or community centre.

Meeting the growing, diverse needs of children and young people, implementing new programmes and practices, and adapting to change are some of the challenges faced by practitioners. Services may experience high levels of staff stress, fatigue and turnover.

Individuals and organisations do different things to make sure that they are meeting the needs of children and young people. Individuals undertake training and continuous professional development. Organisations provide management, supervision and other mechanisms to support staff and to pay attention to the quality and impact of the work that staff do.

This resource focuses on two specific forms of support for individual front line practitioners: **coaching** and **mentoring**. It is written for frontline practitioners working with children and young people in schools, community and social work settings. It explains some of the terms emerging from the literature, along with some learning about what contributes to positive coaching or mentoring initiatives.

Issues that practitioners should think about before they take part in coaching or mentoring are outlined, along with some things that organisations should consider before introducing these supports.



The role of coaching & mentoring in frontline practice

Practitioners and organisations are interested in what helps staff to learn and to make use of their learning to improve their practice.

Services need to combine organisational and individual skills and capacities, good management and supervision and adequate resources to deliver services that benefit children and young people.

Some structures or processes to support and ensure good work are already in place within organisations. Others develop through professional networks or role-specific practices. While some are directed at strengthening the performance of teams, many supports are aimed at helping individual practitioners to develop their knowledge, skills and practice in their particular roles.

Coaching and **mentoring** are both aimed at helping people to be better at what they do. They use many of the same skills and approaches, but coaching is generally short-term, task-based and focused on specific skills and behaviours, while mentoring is longer term, relationship oriented and focused on the personal and career development of the person.

Coaching and mentoring will be familiar to frontline practitioners, many of whom use similar approaches in their work with children and young people.

COACHING & MENTORING
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Key terms

There are many different definitions for both coaching and mentoring, and as a result the terms are often used interchangeably. There are important differences between both approaches.

COACHING IS A COLLABORATIVE HELPING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A COACH AND AN INDIVIDUAL, WHICH IS FOCUSED ON WORKING IN A SYSTEMATIC WAY TOWARDS AGREED GOALS. COACHING CAN ENHANCE PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE, FOSTER ONGOING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING, INCREASE PERSONAL SATISFACTION AND GROWTH.

Coaching is a **formal** arrangement which is planned to bring about benefits for both individuals and organisations. Different coaching arrangements can include **peer** coaching, **internal** (inside the organisation) and **external** (outside of the organisation) coaching.

- Coaching is typically short term and measured by the achievement of the specific skills agreed.
- Coaching can be arranged externally, or incorporated within the management practice of an organisation, for example when managers adopt coaching practices in supervision, appraisal and day to day activities.
- Coaching can focus on work performance, leadership and personal development, new role induction, succession planning, interview preparation and career coaching.
- Coaching typically involves three parties: the coach, an individual and the organisation.

MENTORING TYPICALLY INVOLVES AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP OF SUPPORT FOR SIGNIFICANT TRANSITIONS IN KNOWLEDGE, THINKING AND SKILLS TO ENABLE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT.

Like coaching, mentoring can be a formal arrangement which focuses on both the individual and the organisation. Work colleagues can support each other through **peer mentoring** arrangements, while **functional mentoring** can assist in the completion of a project or task.

- Mentoring can also be more **informal**, for example where an individual seeks out a mentor, or where a team of mentors may be involved in supporting an individual.
- Mentoring focuses on future career management and development, by offering information and signposting.
- Mentoring should sit outside of the line management relationship.
- Mentoring typically involves two parties, the mentor and the mentee.

A table at the end of this summary explains the differences between coaching and mentoring, and how they complement existing organisational practices.





Key messages from research

There is extensive evidence to show the benefits of coaching and mentoring in a variety of settings, from sports through to youth work, school and academia. They are particularly effective in helping practitioners to learn and adopt new behaviours and practices.

Both coaching and mentoring can improve work performance, help staff to adjust to and implement change and strengthen the capacity to integrate new practices and to learn from experience. Practitioners who avail of mentoring also report personal benefits such as increased self-confidence, career advancement and enhanced professional networks.

While research on coaching and mentoring is still at an early stage, three key messages emerge:

1. It is the quality of the relationship, rather than the model, that matters in coaching or mentoring

Both coaching and mentoring work best when there is a high level of trust, and communication between those involved. Good mentoring relationships require trust, empathy, respect and confidentiality.

2. Coaching and mentoring can help practitioners to implement new skills and practices

Coaching has been found to be beneficial in improving implementation of new practices and programmes in frontline services. A review of studies involving teachers in the US found that when they took part in training alone, none of the teachers implemented their new skills in the classroom. When coaching was introduced after training, 95% of teachers used the skills they learned in their teaching practice.

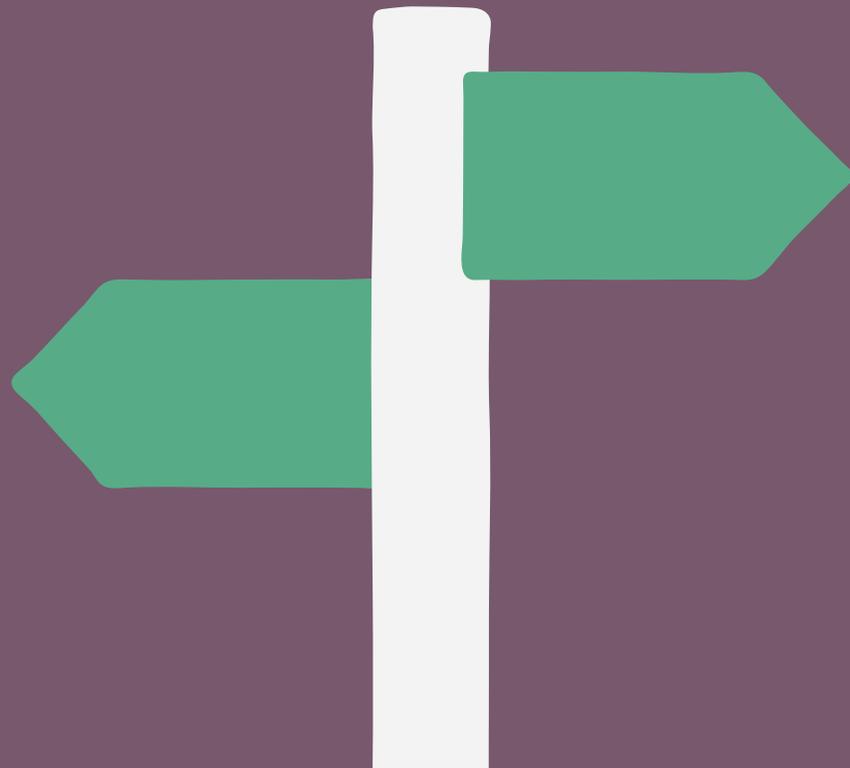
3. Organisations need to think carefully about how to implement coaching and mentoring

Individuals who are concerned about their own professional performance and who are in need of coaching are less likely to seek it out, and may even avoid it. Organisations should focus on promoting the benefits of coaching and mentoring in developing an individual's performance. Coaching should never be compulsory, as it will not be effective if an individual feels coerced to participate.



Implications

Both individual practitioners and organisations need to prepare for the introduction of coaching or mentoring initiatives. The following points can assist in planning coaching and mentoring initiatives, and in ensuring that they benefit both individual practitioners, along with the wider organisation.



Implications for practitioners

What do frontline practitioners need to think about when seeking out coaching or mentoring?

- Be clear on the purpose of coaching or mentoring arrangements. Frontline practitioners should first identify their professional development needs, to assess if coaching or mentoring is appropriate. A training needs analysis can help, or managers can help practitioners to identify their needs. Coaching works best when there is a need to use a specific skill or behaviour.
- Allocate time to coaching or mentoring. Practitioners may be required to spend time preparing, reflecting and giving feedback on their participation.
- Organisational policies and contracts can help frontline practitioners to deal with issues that may arise when participating in coaching or mentoring. Contracts may clarify issues such as client or service user confidentiality, conflicts of interest, professional standards, legal requirements and performance management.

Implications for organisations

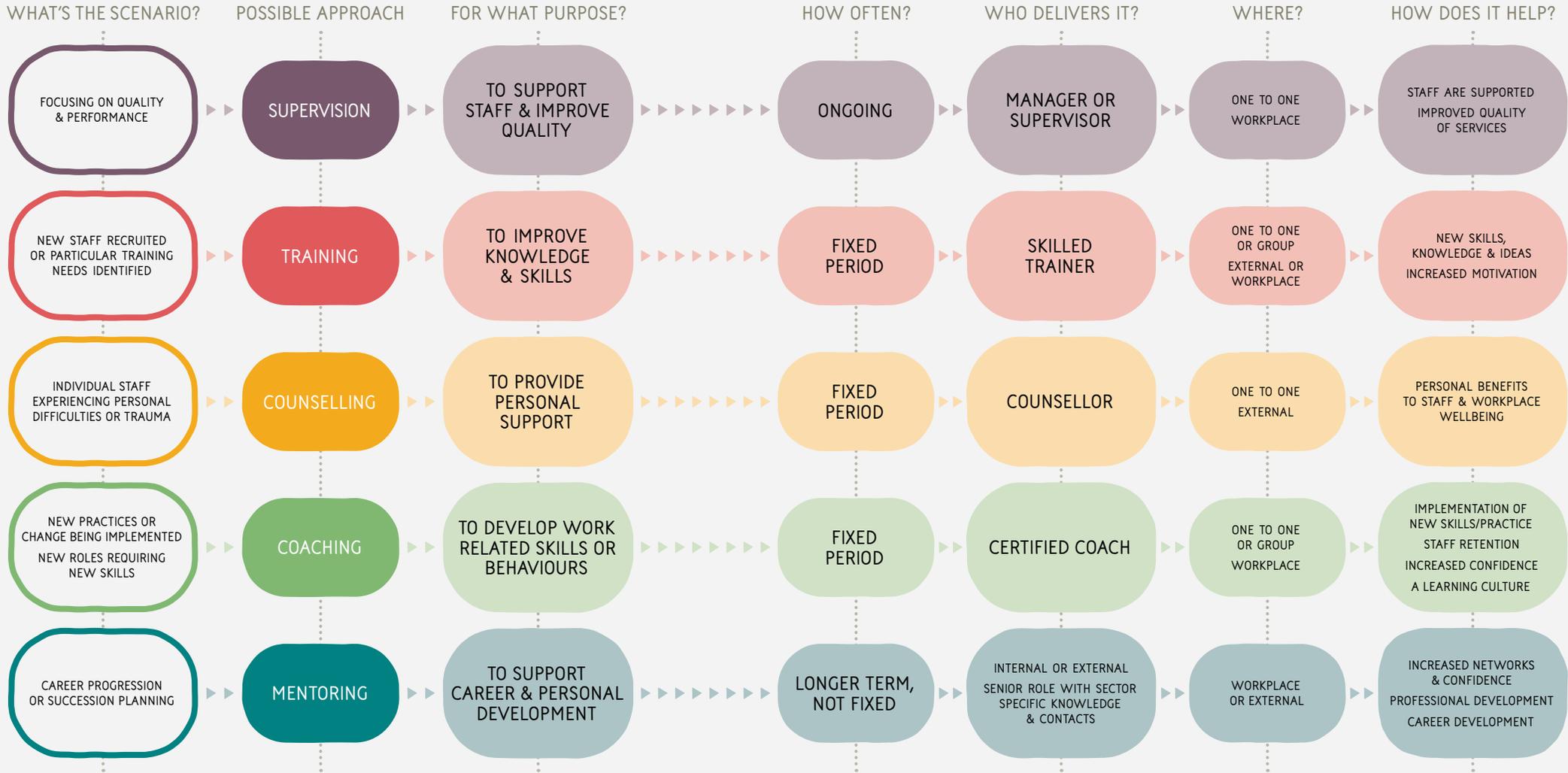
What do organisations need to think about before introducing coaching or mentoring?

- Coaching and mentoring initiatives need to be promoted with care. Staff may not be familiar with these interventions, and may lack confidence in engaging with them. Consultation with staff in advance of its introduction and promoting the benefits of participating throughout the organisation may increase interest and engagement.
- Good relationships between coaches or mentors and practitioners are a common feature of successful initiatives. Relationships between mentors and practitioners should be based on trust, empathy and respect. Listening to and supporting practitioners is crucial, as is the ability to question and challenge.
- Clarify roles and compatibility with existing arrangements such as management and supervision and establish boundaries. This should be reflected in contracts and policies. Where managers or supervisors take up coaching or mentoring roles, organisations should clarify and attend to any overlap in these roles.
- Plan how coaching and mentoring initiatives can be monitored. Feedback can generate valuable insights for managers, supervisors and organisations. Surveys may be conducted with practitioners, but supervision and support for coaches and mentors may also be required.



Professional development approaches in frontline practice

All the approaches presented here aim to help people to do their job better in some way. This table outlines the primary purpose of these approaches, what's involved and the unique contribution they can make to practice. Some of the terms and language used to describe these approaches can vary according to the particular context or organisational setting. For more information visit www.effectiveservices.org.

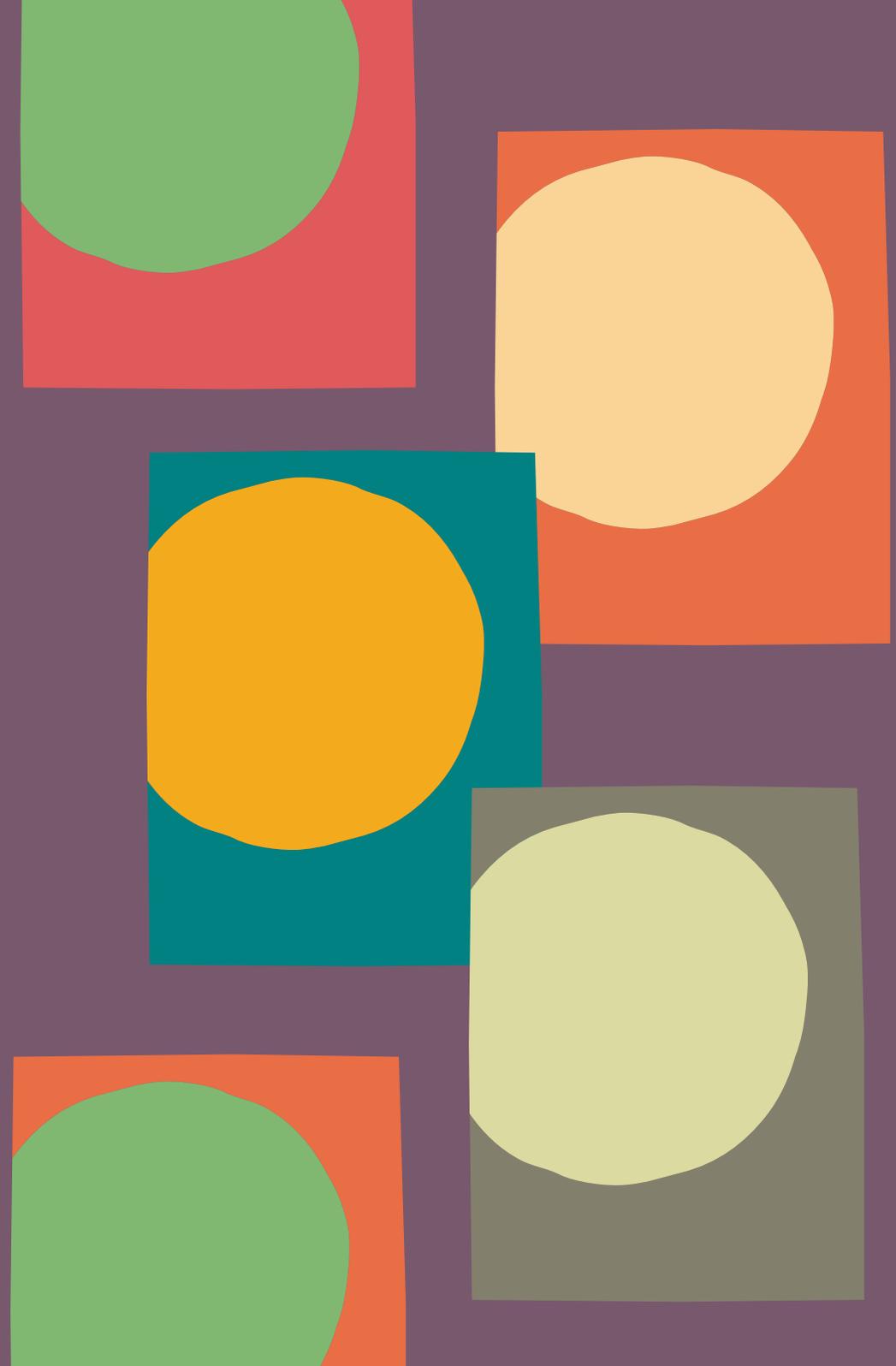


This summary is based on a more in-depth literature review which CES completed in 2017.

Practice implications were developed by CES together with a Practice Advisory Group. Practitioners on this group included youth workers, teachers, early childhood care and education professionals, Gardaí, social workers, psychologists and researchers.

The longer literature review includes a number of additional resources and further reading material that may be of interest to practitioners, and is available from the CES website.

To read the literature review and access further resources on **coaching** and **mentoring**, visit www.effectiveservices.org.



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