



Learning Outcomes

Mentoring

Core & Specialized Credentials

International Certification Alliance

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LICENSING INFORMATION

The work in this document was facilitated by the International Certification Alliance (ICA) and done through the contributions of various experts and practitioners. These learning objectives are intended to help the growing Tomorrow-Ready™ community worldwide.

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HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document outlines the learning outcomes that accredited member organizations must address to offer ICA's Mentoring certification. To achieve the certification, a learner must complete the core credential plus at least two specialized credentials.

Each learning outcome (LO) follows a particular pattern, described below.

O.O Learning Outcome Name

Additional Context, describing why this Learning Outcome is important or what it is intended to impart.

The learning outcome's purpose further describes what is expected to be imparted to the learner (e.g., a key point, framework, model, approach, technique, or skill).

CORE CREDENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Mentoring Core

Mentoring is an 8-hour Core Credential for professionals who want to build the foundational capability to support another person's development through inquiry, reflection, and relevant experience sharing while preserving the mentee's ownership and choice. Learners develop practical skills in understanding the purpose and boundaries of mentoring, establishing clear expectations for the mentoring relationship, understanding mentee goals and context, holding purposeful mentoring conversations, sharing perspective without prescribing action, and supporting mentee-owned development.

1. Purpose and Boundaries of Mentoring

1.1 Purpose and Boundaries of Mentoring

Mentoring is more than informal advice. Effective mentoring has a clear developmental purpose and uses relevant experience to support learning while preserving the mentee's ownership and choice. Clear boundaries help distinguish mentoring from other ways of supporting or directing development.

Develop learners' understanding of mentoring as an intentional developmental relationship in which relevant experience and perspective may be shared without transferring ownership or accountability from the mentee. Build learners' ability to distinguish mentoring from advice-giving, sponsorship, teaching, coaching, and management, including how expertise, authority, advocacy, and decision ownership differ across these approaches.

2. Mentoring Conversations and Development Goals

2.1 Mentee Needs and Development Context

Useful mentoring reflects the mentee's goals, strengths, constraints, identity, context, and readiness. Generic advice can miss what the mentee actually needs to learn, decide, or experience.

Develop learners' ability to understand the mentee before offering perspective or experience. Build learners' capacity to explore goals, strengths, development needs, constraints, identity, context, readiness, and aspirations; distinguish the mentor's assumptions from what the mentee actually wants; and identify where experience sharing, inquiry, exposure, or another form of support may add value.

2.2 Mentoring Conversations

Effective mentoring balances listening and inquiry with relevant experience and perspective. Mentoring becomes overly directive when the mentor's experience replaces rather than expands the mentee's thinking.

Develop learners' ability to establish clear expectations for the mentoring relationship and hold mentoring conversations that combine curiosity with relevant experience sharing. Build learners' capacity to clarify purpose, development goals, roles, expectations, confidentiality, and relevant boundaries; listen before offering perspective; seek permission when sharing personal experience or guidance; connect what they offer to the mentee's goals and context; and return interpretation and choice to the mentee rather than prescribing what they should do.

3. Mentoring Growth, Choice, and Inclusion

3.1 Supporting Mentee-Owned Action

Mentoring supports development when insight leads to action the mentee understands and chooses. Mentor suggestions can expand options, but responsibility for deciding and acting remains with the mentee.

Develop learners' ability to support mentees in translating insight into development choices and actions they own. Build learners' capacity to help mentees clarify what they want to do, consider options and trade-offs, identify support or opportunities that may help, and define action that reflects the mentee's priorities rather than the mentor's preferred path.

3.2 Power, Access, and Inclusion in Mentoring

Mentoring relationships are shaped by power, identity, access, bias, and informal networks. These factors can expand opportunity or reinforce existing inequities.

Develop learners' ability to recognize how power, access, identity, and bias can shape a mentoring relationship and the opportunities available to the mentee. Build learners' capacity to examine positional and informal power, access to networks and opportunities, and assumptions about potential; consider how mentoring can widen access to perspectives, relationships, and opportunities without creating dependency or favoritism; and recognize when using influence or advocacy on the mentee's behalf moves beyond mentoring toward sponsorship.

4. Mentoring Effectiveness and Relationship Lifecycle

4.1 Mentoring Effectiveness and Learning Transfer

Mentoring activity does not necessarily mean development is occurring. Effectiveness is better reflected in learning, behavior, capability, opportunity, or other meaningful changes that the mentee can carry into their work.

Develop learners' ability to evaluate whether mentoring is contributing to meaningful development and learning transfer. Build learners' capacity to look for evidence of new insight, increased capability, changed behavior, expanded opportunity, stronger decision-making, and application of learning in the mentee's context; and avoid attributing development to mentoring when the evidence does not support that conclusion.

4.2 Ending or Restructuring a Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring relationships may end because goals are achieved, needs change, fit is poor, or the relationship is no longer supporting meaningful development. Continuing by default can create dependency or waste development opportunities.

Develop learners' ability to recognize when a mentoring relationship should continue, change, pause, or end. Build learners' capacity to consider changes in goals, fit, development needs, boundaries, and circumstances; communicate the transition clearly; and bring the relationship to a close or restructure it in a way that preserves learning, mentee ownership, and respect.

SPECIALIZED CREDENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Coaching and Mentoring Conversations

Coaching and Mentoring Conversations is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to use coaching and mentoring stances intentionally within developmental conversations. Learners deepen their ability to recognize what the client and situation need, distinguish coaching from mentoring based on the use of expertise and ownership, notice when they drift unintentionally between stances, and shift deliberately when doing so serves the client's development. Through practice and reflection, learners strengthen their ability to use and shift between coaching and mentoring stances while preserving the client's agency, choice, and ownership.

1.1 Coaching and Mentoring Stances

Coaching and mentoring share many conversational skills but use expertise differently. Coaching primarily supports the client's own thinking and discovery, while mentoring may draw more directly on the practitioner's experience, knowledge, perspective, or guidance to support the client's development.

Develop learners' ability to recognize when a conversation calls for a coaching stance, a mentoring stance, or an intentional shift between them. Build learners' capacity to consider what the client needs, where relevant expertise sits, and how it should be used, and whether drawing on the practitioner's knowledge, experience, or perspective would expand or narrow the client's thinking and choice. Reinforce that neither stance is inherently better; effectiveness depends on choosing deliberately while preserving client ownership.

2.1 Stance Drift

Practitioners can shift between coaching and mentoring stances without consciously choosing to do so. Unexamined stance shifts can change ownership, create dependency, or reduce the value of the conversation.

Develop learners' ability to notice when and why they are drifting from an intended coaching or mentoring stance. Build learners' capacity to distinguish a deliberate shift made in service of the client from a reactive shift triggered by urgency, discomfort, habit, the impulse to rescue, or the desire to demonstrate expertise or be useful. Build awareness of how stance changes affect client ownership, thinking, trust, and the direction of the conversation.

3.1 Using Coaching and Mentoring Stances Intentionally

Developmental conversations do not always stay within one stance. Effective practitioners shift intentionally between coaching and mentoring when doing so better serves the client's development.

Develop learners' ability to use and shift between coaching and mentoring stances intentionally within a developmental conversation. Build learners' capacity to support the client's thinking when coaching, seek permission before drawing on relevant knowledge, experience, or perspective when mentoring, and return interpretation and choice to the client after sharing. Build skill in making stance changes transparent so the client understands what is being offered and remains free to accept, adapt, or decline it.

4.1 Reflection on Stance Choice

A conversation can feel helpful while still becoming overly directive, withholding useful perspective, or shifting ownership away from the client. Reflection helps practitioners evaluate the effect of their stance choices.

Develop learners' ability to reflect critically on their use of coaching and mentoring stances after a conversation. Build learners' capacity to examine where their stance choices served the client's development, where they shifted intentionally or unintentionally, how their own reactions influenced those choices, and what they would sustain or change in future conversations. Reinforce that effectiveness should be evaluated through the effect on the client's thinking, agency, and ownership rather than through practitioner comfort or conversational smoothness.

Mentoring Programs and Matching

Mentoring Programs & Matching is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to design mentoring programs that enable meaningful and equitable mentoring relationships. Learners develop the ability to define a clear program purpose, make thoughtful matching decisions based on development needs, participant preferences, and relationship conditions, and create enough structure and support for mentoring relationships to establish clear expectations, navigate difficulties, and change or end when needed. Learners also evaluate program health using evidence of relationship quality, development outcomes, sustainability, and equitable access.

1.1 Mentoring Program Purpose

Mentoring programs lose focus when they are launched without clarity about who they serve and what development needs or broader outcomes they are intended to support.

Develop learners' ability to define a clear purpose for a mentoring program before choosing program structures or matching approaches. Build learners' capacity to clarify who the program is intended to serve, what development needs or broader outcomes it is intended to support, what meaningful outcomes would look like, and how the program purpose should influence later decisions about participation, matching, support, and evaluation.

2.1 Matching Criteria and Relationship Fit

A mentoring match can look appropriate on paper and still fail relationally or developmentally. Matching based only on seniority, role, or shared background can overlook the goals, expectations, power dynamics, and conditions needed for a useful relationship.

Develop learners' ability to make thoughtful matching decisions based on the purpose of the program and the needs of the people involved. Build learners' capacity to consider development goals, relevant experience, expectations, availability, communication preferences, identity, power, psychological safety, potential conflicts or dependencies, and appropriate participant choice in the matching process. Reinforce that no matching process can guarantee chemistry or success, so matching should support fit without pretending to predict the relationship completely.

3.1 Mentoring Program Structure and Support

Matching alone does not create an effective mentoring relationship. Participants need enough structure, clarity, and support to establish expectations, navigate difficulties, and sustain useful development without making the program overly bureaucratic.

Develop learners' ability to design lightweight supports that help mentors and mentees create healthy, purposeful relationships. Build learners' capacity to consider onboarding and expectations, working agreements, role clarity, confidentiality, developmental goals, resources or prompts, check-ins, support when a relationship is struggling, and clear ways to pause, rematch, or exit. Keep program structures proportionate so they support the relationship rather than becoming compliance exercises.

4.1 Program Health and Equity of Access

A mentoring program can have strong participation numbers while still producing uneven relationship quality, development outcomes, or access to opportunity. Program health therefore requires looking beyond activity counts.

Develop learners' ability to evaluate whether a mentoring program is contributing to meaningful and equitable development. Build learners' capacity to examine relationship quality, participation and continuation, development outcomes, access to mentors and opportunities, representation in who participates and benefits, matching and rematching patterns, dropout patterns, and whether particular groups face barriers to entry or a lower-quality experience. Connect evaluation to the original program purpose rather than treating every possible metric as equally important.

Peer and Reverse Mentoring

Peer and Reverse Mentoring is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to create mentoring relationships in which learning and value flow in more than one direction. Learners explore the distinct dynamics of peer and reverse mentoring, including how differences in experience, role, identity, and organizational power can shape participation and learning. They develop judgment about whether value, responsibility, and learning are genuinely shared; establish clear agreements that support voluntary participation, confidentiality, and psychological safety; and practice peer and reverse mentoring in ways that preserve mutual ownership and agency.

1.1 Peer and Reverse Mentoring

Developmental value does not have to flow from a more senior person to a more junior one. Peer and reverse mentoring can create mutual learning across differences in experience, role, generation, identity, or perspective. While both can be reciprocal, reverse mentoring may involve more pronounced differences in organizational power.

Develop learners' understanding of peer and reverse mentoring as distinct approaches that can create reciprocal development rather than simply reversing traditional advice-giving. Build learners' capacity to recognize how both participants can contribute knowledge, perspective, challenge, access, and learning; distinguish peer mentoring from reverse mentoring and both from traditional hierarchical mentoring; and preserve shared responsibility for the relationship without assuming that participants bring the same kind of power or experience.

2.1 Mutual Value and Shared Responsibility

Reverse mentoring can become tokenizing or extractive when one participant is expected to represent a group, educate a more powerful colleague, or carry most of the learning burden without meaningful development in return.

Develop learners' ability to assess whether peer and reverse mentoring relationships create meaningful development for both participants without assuming equal or identical contributions. Build learners' capacity to examine what each participant hopes to learn or contribute; who is expected to do the emotional, educational, or relational work; whether one person is being treated as a representative of an identity or group; and whether the relationship supports mutual learning without making one person responsible for another's awareness or development.

3.1 Psychological Safety and Confidentiality

Peer and reverse mentoring can involve unusual or uneven power dynamics, particularly when a reverse mentor has less organizational power than the person they are mentoring. Clear expectations about purpose, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and boundaries help both participants contribute honestly and make informed choices about the relationship.

Develop learners' ability to establish peer and reverse mentoring relationships that support candor, psychological safety, and shared ownership. Build learners' capacity to clarify purpose, mutual expectations, confidentiality and its limits, voluntary participation, how differences in organizational power will be handled, what each person is and is not responsible for teaching, and how either participant can raise concerns, change the relationship, or step away without undue consequence.

4. Peer and Reverse Mentoring in Practice

Effective peer and reverse mentoring require more than good intentions. Participants need to listen and inquire across differences, contribute perspective without dominating the exchange, and notice how power affects who speaks, challenges, teaches, or defers.

Develop learners' ability to engage effectively in peer and reverse mentoring conversations that create mutual learning and preserve agency. Build learners' capacity to listen and inquire across differences, contribute relevant perspectives without dominating the exchange, notice how power affects participation, share responsibility for learning, and preserve each participant's ability to challenge assumptions, set boundaries, and choose what they take from the conversation.

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