



BORDERLANDS

from exclusion to

BELONGING

Guide to Remote Mentoring

Borderlands (South West) Ltd Registered Charity No: 1143313

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Guide to Remote Mentoring

This guide is aimed at giving Borderlands mentors useful tips, resources and best practice pointers to maintain an effective and active mentoring partnership occurring remotely.

These guidelines are specifically written in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown.

As many people have discovered over the past few months, remote work comes with its own specific set of challenges. You might struggle adjusting to remote communication, feeling isolated from your team, or lack motivation without the camaraderie of the office. But if you're a mentor, things can be especially tricky.

Mentoring isn't just about offering technical advice or methodical suggestions – it's an emotional process, especially when the mentoring is addressed to vulnerable people, like refugees and asylum seekers. So if you're only able to mentor virtually, it can seem as though what you're able to offer is massively compromised. You simply can't offer the same fluidity of contact or connection as in-person support. Moreover, achieving some of the agreed goals might currently be not feasible or a much slower process.

However, there are still ways you can have a fruitful mentoring partnership. Before getting to that point though, I am sharing some of the current obstacles experienced by our members. You may relate to some of these.

Challenges faced by our mentees during Lockdown

Lockdown and the lack of face-to-face support have particularly affected vulnerable people:

- **Digital poverty.** Lack of digital means results in lacking access to relevant agencies and other social and learning activities which are turned remotely (zoom english classes, women's group, exercise classes, schools meeting etc).

- **Impoverishment of support network.** Members can rely less on personal support networks (friends) for peer practical and emotional support and cannot rely on safe welcome places (eg welcome centre, drop-ins) where they can share difficulties and get help.
- **Waiting time and rise of anxiety** to access counselling and other psychological support have become longer and mentees end up in a constant state of “wait”. The same applies to Home Office work which results in prolonged anxiety and depression.
- **Childcare.** Mentees with children have less time to dedicate to the mentoring scheme due to childcare duties or having to homeschool kids.
- **English Provision** for mentees with little or no literacy is very limited and again, very difficult to access.
- **Government updates.** Difficulty in keeping up with government regulations updates and changes of restrictions.

These are just some of the challenges faced by our members and by some of us too.

Despite all the challenges, remote mentoring and support can still be possible. I have certainly noticed that seeming less reachable can force us to think creatively and outside the box, and also more carefully about how we communicate.

*Your role as a mentor is not lost. You can still provide two valuable things: **reliability** and **structure**.*

Reliability

As you all know from your mentoring experience and your training, the lives of refugees and asylum seekers are precarious, unstable and ever changing. Having a person, like YOU, keeping regular contact despite the ever-changing external circumstances, is a valuable stable element in their lives on which they count on.

Structure of remote mentoring meetings

Below are some hopefully useful steps to include in your remote mentoring meetings to make them a bit more structured and boundaried.

1. First, have an honest open conversation with your mentee about how you two prefer to keep in contact and through which digital means, such as phone calls, video calls, whatsapp video calls, zoom? Or you could suggest alternating between these.

If possible - Create a *remote meeting* routine.

2. Start each meeting with a check-in. It could be a simple “How are you” question, or maybe some kind of relaxation/breathing/grounding exercise. If you are not into these types of things, you could ask a question like “tell me about the happiest/most exciting moment in your week”. And then you could do the same.
3. After the check-in, decide how much time you will be able to dedicate to the rest of the session taking into account each other’s commitment.
4. At the start, it’s a good idea to talk about an agenda for the next couple of meetings - so mentees know what they’re going to get out of your contact.
Examples:
 - Is your mentee looking for green and relaxing spaces in Bristol? You might suggest to the mentee to visit an area they don’t know, take a picture and then send it to you and then talk about it.
 - If you are working on interview skills, why not use your phone calls to practice interview skills. Some jobs do use this type of interviews now anyways.
 - Are you mentoring a new mum? Maybe talk about child provision in the Uk and how childcare works in this country (e.g. eligibility for childcare, creche

provision in welcome centres etc.) and work together on practising English words around this topic.

- Are you supporting your mentee's reading skills? You could read together a short story/poem/simple article (depending on your mentee's level) and discuss it at the meeting.
5. Before ending the meeting, evaluate together how the meeting went and think about the topic for next time.

Useful Signposting resources for mentors and mentees

PRACTISE ENGLISH

- Borderlands is still running Zoom english classes. If your mentee is interested, just drop me an email and I will put you in contact with our English teachers.
- If your mentee is a refugee, you can refer them to [IMPACT](#) conversational classes.
- More courses on [Community learning website](#), including employability and digital skills

Women Only

Refugee Women of Bristol run yoga and zumba classes online. Drop me or RWOB an email if you need the zoom links.

Activities and courses in Green Spaces

St.Werburghs City farm <https://www.swcityfarm.co.uk/learn/courses-and-workshops/>



Indoor Meeting spaces in Kingswood

kingsmeadowmade4ever.org.uk is a community hub in Kingswood and they offer an indoor cafe space for essential workers (like mentors). They have a range of activities and volunteers' opportunities. Have a look at their website and contact them for any enquiries.