



THE BEHAVIOURAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

MENTORING

Policy and Criteria to develop, award, monitor and revoke professional designations for Coaches and Mentors as required by Section 31.i.i of the South African Qualifications Authority Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act, Act 67 of 2008, as amended January 2023.

Mentoring Behavioural Standards Framework

The Mentoring Behavioural Standards Framework (MBSF) recognises competencies in ten key areas within three categories that span the three levels of credentialed mentoring to support mentors in understanding the requirements of each level. The competencies and examples given are indicators of the behaviours or principles the mentors should be displaying to meet each competency level.

The following three categories and ten competencies are recognised:

Standards Related to the Mentoring Process

1. Session Agreement & Contracting
2. Relationship — Rapport & Trust
3. Communication
4. Creating Awareness for Learning

Standards Related to the Mentor

5. Sharing Knowledge & Experiential Wisdom
6. Network & Resource Sharing
7. Creating Independence & Empowerment
8. Own Personal Growth & Development

Standards Related to the Context of the Mentoring Session

9. Meeting the Mentee in Their Context

10. Managing Diversity & Values

Three levels of mentoring designations are recognised for COMENSA credentialing:

- CCM COMENSA Credentialed Mentor Designation Level 1.
- CSM COMENSA Senior Mentor Designation Level 2
- CMM COMENSA Master Mentor Designation Level 3

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SECTION A: STANDARDS RELATED TO THE MENTORING PROCESS

1. Session Agreement & Contracting

The Mentor must be able to:

- Set up a clear, safe, and agreed-upon session that focuses on the mentee's real needs.
- Establish confidentiality, safety, and session boundaries, and confirm the focus before moving forward.
- Adapt the contracting style to the mentee's readiness and renegotiate agreements when priorities shift.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Sets up clear session boundaries and confirms confidentiality and safety at the start — so the mentee feels safe to open up. • Works with the mentee to agree on the session focus and confirms the goal before moving forward. • Stays non-judgmental throughout and brings up any mentoring agreements when needed.	• Adapts the contracting style to suit the mentee's communication style, emotional readiness, and current state. • Balances immediate needs with longer-term growth themes — and brings in what's happened in previous sessions, without being prescriptive. • Notices when the mentee hesitates, manages confidentiality thoughtfully, and adjusts the focus if something more important comes up.	• Creates agreements that are both structured and responsive to what's happening in the moment — holding the stated goal, the mentee's growth edge, and the broader context all at once. • Names patterns in how the mentee typically contracts (e.g., avoids emotion, stays surface-level) and builds shared responsibility for safety. • Openly explains own contracting choices and shows nuanced judgment about when to honour or renegotiate agreements.

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2. Relationship — Rapport & Trust

The Mentor must be able to:

- Build a genuine, warm, and reliable connection with the mentee based on real trust.
- Establish and maintain trust through consistent presence, authentic connection, and following through on commitments.
- Notice and repair shifts or ruptures in the relationship, and balance warmth with appropriate challenge.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Builds trust through consistent presence — good eye contact, attentive listening, appropriate body language, and mirroring the mentee's communication style. • Shows authentic connection by validating the mentee's experiences without judgment, staying genuinely curious, and sharing relevant personal experiences when helpful. • Follows through on commitments, respects the mentee's right to make their own choices, and repairs misunderstandings gracefully when they occur.	• Balances warmth with appropriate challenge to deepen trust — and shows cultural humility by acknowledging own limitations and learning from the mentee. • Notices and addresses shifts in the relationship as they happen — tracks non-verbal cues and names relational patterns that may get in the way. • Stays empathetic without rescuing, uses personal disclosure strategically to normalise struggle, and stays congruent — words, tone, and body language all match.	• Creates trust through a grounded, responsive presence — reads subtle cues and adjusts in real-time, holding the paradox of being both challenging and supportive. • Turns relational ruptures into opportunities for deeper connection, openly addresses power dynamics, and co-creates trust through shared vulnerability. • Uses the trust built to invite the mentee into uncomfortable growth with safety — and creates the conditions for a truly transformational relationship.

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3. Communication

The Mentor must be able to:

- Listen deeply, ask powerful questions, and reflect back in ways that help the mentee think more clearly.
- Listen actively, use silence effectively, and ask open-ended, non-leading questions one at a time.
- Paraphrase and summarise to confirm understanding and to deepen the mentee's insight.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Listens actively — lets the mentee finish, uses silence effectively (5–10 seconds), and checks understanding when something is unclear. • Asks open-ended questions using 'what', 'how', and 'when' — one at a time, without leading the mentee. • Paraphrases key points to confirm understanding and summarises themes at natural moments in the conversation.	• Builds question sequences that deepen exploration, notices patterns and contradictions in the mentee's story, and tells the difference between clarifying questions and questions that spark new thinking. • Uses paraphrasing strategically to shift perspective, adjusts question intensity based on the mentee's emotional readiness, and connects questions to values, beliefs, and identity. • Summarises in ways that lift understanding beyond the surface — uses metaphor and reframing to help the mentee see their situation differently.	• Crafts questions from deep listening that touch the edge of the mentee's awareness — follows the mentee's emerging insight rather than a preset agenda. • Paraphrases in ways that crystallise implicit meaning, asks from multiple levels at once (practical, strategic, identity), and integrates complexity seamlessly. • Uses silence strategically to create space for breakthroughs, times interventions with precision, and uses communication to help the mentee discover their own wisdom.

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4. Creating Awareness for Learning

The Mentor must be able to:

- Help the mentee discover their own insights, take ownership of their growth, and shift how they see themselves.
- Create space for self-discovery by asking reflective questions and holding back from providing answers.
- Maintain accountability by capturing commitments and inviting the mentee to reflect on their learning.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Creates space for self-discovery by asking reflective questions, holding back from providing answers, and helping the mentee tell the difference between what they genuinely want and what they feel they 'should' do. • Maintains accountability by capturing action commitments clearly, revisiting them in follow-up sessions, and inviting the mentee to reflect on their learning at the close of each session. • Models self-awareness by acknowledging own reactions when relevant, and records key discoveries and decisions for continuity.	• Facilitates deeper awareness by linking current situations to underlying belief patterns, helping the mentee separate external circumstances from internal responses, and inviting exploration of their growth edge. • Creates 'aha moments' through strategic pauses and powerful questions — challenges self-limiting stories while remaining supportive, and gently names blind spots or incongruence. • Uses accountability as a growth tool — holds the mentee to their own stated values and commitments without judgment, distinguishing between compliance and genuine growth.	• Facilitates awareness across multiple layers — behaviour, emotion, thinking, and identity — and creates conditions for profound insight by holding space for what wants to emerge. • Distinguishes between the mentee's strategies and their deeper intentions, holds accountability as an invitation to radical self-ownership, and helps the mentee notice and shift between reactive and responsive states. • Models continuous self-examination in real time, creates space for transformational insight that shifts the mentee's self-concept, and demonstrates mastery of awareness facilitation.

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SECTION B: STANDARDS RELATED TO THE MENTOR

5. Sharing Knowledge & Experiential Wisdom

The Mentor must be able to:

- Share experience and knowledge in a way that serves the mentee's thinking — not as advice they must follow.
- Distinguish between sharing experience and giving directive advice, and check the mentee's readiness to hear it.
- Connect any sharing of experience directly to the mentee's learning and growth.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Shares relevant personal experience in plain language that connects to the mentee's current challenge — including lessons from failures, shared with appropriate openness. • Clearly distinguishes between sharing experience and giving directive advice — checks whether the mentee wants to hear more before launching into stories, and points to other resources when own knowledge has limits. • Connects any sharing of experience directly to the mentee's learning — not for the sake of telling a story, but to serve the mentee's growth.	• Shares wisdom from lived experience that addresses multiple layers of the mentee's situation — uses stories and metaphors to illustrate principles, without prescribing what to do. • Balances sharing knowledge with drawing out the mentee's own thinking — distinguishes between what worked in the mentor's context and what the mentee actually needs in theirs. • Offers multiple perspectives based on broad experience and times knowledge-sharing based on the mentee's readiness to receive it.	• Shares wisdom that emerges organically from deep listening — not prepared teaching — and distils complex experience into core principles that apply across different life contexts. • Demonstrates real-time integration of knowledge, experience, and intuition — shares from multiple levels of knowing (practical, relational, systemic, philosophical). • Invites the mentee to extract their own meaning from the mentor's shared experience — and models ongoing integration of new learning, demonstrating wisdom in action.

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6. Network & Resource Sharing

The Mentor must be able to:

- Generously share relevant contacts, resources, and opportunities that help the mentee grow.
- Make purposeful introductions and share resources matched to the mentee's actual learning needs.
- Teach the mentee effective networking principles and follow up to ensure connections create value.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Connects the mentee with specific people in own network who can genuinely help — makes introductions with clear purpose while respecting boundaries on both sides. • Shares relevant resources — articles, books, tools, events, programs, communities — matched to the mentee's actual learning needs. • Guides the mentee on how to use networking opportunities effectively, teaches basic networking principles, and follows up on connections to make sure they create value.	• Strategically uses own network to create specific growth opportunities for the mentee — facilitates multi-perspective connections and identifies gaps in the mentee's network. • Coaches the mentee on building and maintaining their own network, shares access to relevant communities of practice, and helps the mentee integrate diverse perspectives. • Models generous networking that creates value for everyone involved — and balances making direct introductions with teaching the mentee to access networks on their own.	• Creates strategic networking opportunities that accelerate the mentee's long-term trajectory — facilitates connections that generate value beyond just this one mentee. • Guides the mentee in building networks aligned with their evolving identity and purpose — models network stewardship and generosity as a leadership practice. • Creates conditions for the mentee to contribute value back to the mentor's network (true reciprocity) and teaches the mentee to orchestrate their own network for ongoing learning and impact.

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7. Creating Independence & Empowerment

The Mentor must be able to:

- Help the mentee think for themselves, trust their own judgment, and grow beyond needing the mentor.
- Resist giving solutions, framing the role as a thinking partner rather than a problem-solver.
- Build on the mentee's strengths and gradually reduce support as their confidence grows.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Resists giving solutions — instead asks questions that help the mentee find their own answers, and consistently frames the role as a thinking partner, not a problem-solver. • Celebrates the mentee's independent thinking and decision-making, builds on their existing strengths, and gently redirects when the mentee is looking for answers rather than exploring options. • Gradually reduces support as the mentee's confidence grows, and opens up conversations about eventually completing the formal mentoring relationship.	• Facilitates the mentee's sense of internal authority and agency — challenges dependency patterns when they appear, and builds the mentee's capacity for self-coaching and self-reflection. • Teaches frameworks and tools the mentee can use on their own, invites the mentee to evaluate their own progress and decide next steps, and celebrates moments of independent thinking. • Creates conditions for the mentee to develop confidence in handling ambiguity — balances support with appropriate challenge to build real resilience.	• Facilitates the mentee's shift from seeking external validation to trusting their own internal authority — and helps them develop and own their unique voice and approach. • Models empowerment through own relationship to uncertainty and not-knowing — invites co-creative partnership, and helps the mentee see how they create their own constraints and possibilities. • Supports the mentee in developing authentic power (not borrowed expertise) and creates conditions for the mentee to become a mentor to others — demonstrating mastery of empowerment.

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8. Own Personal Growth & Development

The Mentor must be able to:

- Commit to growing as a mentor through ongoing learning, supervision, and honest self-reflection.
- Engage in regular CPD and participate in supervision or peer learning.
- Seek feedback, manage own emotional reactions, and reflect on each session to track growth.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Engages in regular continuing professional development (CPD) and participates in supervision or peer learning to reflect on mentoring practice. • Actively seeks feedback from mentees, manages own emotional reactions within professional boundaries, and is aware of personal triggers, biases, and blind spots. • Reflects on sessions after they happen to identify learning and improvements — and tracks own professional growth over time.	• Engages in consistent supervision that deepens self-awareness and practice quality, actively seeks developmental stretch, and integrates feedback from multiple sources. • Demonstrates sophistication in managing own emotional landscape during sessions, pursues learning that addresses real gaps, and contributes to the mentoring community by sharing insights. • Stays current with relevant thinking and research — and models a learning mindset and growth orientation in sessions with mentees.	• Lives development as a philosophy and way of being — uses supervision as a sophisticated tool for exploring complex dynamics and growth edges, and contributes to advancing the field. • Demonstrates exceptional self-management and presence even under complexity — generates insights through reflective practice that benefit the broader mentoring community. • Models lifelong learning as a core professional value, mentors other mentors, and contributes to the evolution of the profession — demonstrating mastery of personal development.

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SECTION C: STANDARDS RELATED TO THE CONTEXT OF THE MENTORING SESSION

9. Meeting the Mentee in Their Context

The Mentor must be able to:

- Understand and work within the mentee's real-life situation — their world, their constraints, their reality.
- Ask questions to understand the mentee's specific context and adapt language and examples accordingly.
- Acknowledge real constraints without dismissing them, and respect the mentee's pace and readiness.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Asks questions to understand the mentee's specific situation — adapts language and examples to their context, and explores who, what, when, where, and how to get the full picture. • Acknowledges the mentee's real constraints without dismissing them, adjusts the developmental focus to suit the mentee's current life stage, and respects their pace and readiness. • Openly acknowledges when own experience differs from the mentee's context — and helps the mentee examine assumptions about what's possible in their situation.	• Demonstrates nuanced understanding of how context shapes the mentee's options and limits — helps them see the situation from multiple angles, and tailors approach to their way of making meaning. • Balances honouring the mentee's reality with inviting them beyond self-limiting narratives — explores broader dynamics that influence the mentee's experience and helps them navigate competing priorities. • Distinguishes between what the mentee cannot change and where they do have real agency — and facilitates exploration of how their context connects to their deeper purpose and values.	• Reads subtle contextual cues and their impact on the mentee's choices and sense of self — helps the mentee examine how they participate in shaping their own context. • Supports the mentee's development across multiple dimensions (cognitive, emotional, interpersonal) — and creates conditions for the mentee to move beyond context-imposed limitations. • Invites exploration of identity in relation to changing contexts — facilitates the mentee's growing capacity to shape and influence their own environment, demonstrating mastery of contextual navigation.

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10. Managing Diversity & Values

The Mentor must be able to:

- Navigate differences in background, culture, and values with respect, curiosity, and ethical clarity.
- Stay aware of own cultural identity, biases, and assumptions, and respect the mentee's values even when they differ.
- Use inclusive language, avoid assumptions, and address ethical concerns or value conflicts directly.

CCM	CSM	CMM
• Is aware of own cultural identity, biases, and assumptions — respects the mentee's values and perspectives even when they differ, and asks questions to understand the mentee's cultural context. • Avoids assumptions based on visible aspects of diversity, uses inclusive language, and openly acknowledges when own background differs significantly from the mentee's. • Maintains confidentiality and ethical boundaries consistently — and addresses ethical concerns or value conflicts directly when they arise.	• Explores how identity dimensions (gender, race, generation, culture, etc.) shape the mentee's experience — stays genuinely curious about differences, and navigates value differences without imposing own framework. • Recognises and addresses power dynamics related to diversity, helps the mentee examine their own biases with care, and maintains ethical clarity while holding complexity. • Invites dialogue about diversity-related challenges the mentee faces — and models ongoing learning about dimensions of difference and inclusion.	• Creates space for exploring how multiple identity dimensions intersect and impact the mentee — demonstrates sophisticated awareness of systemic privilege and oppression, while holding genuine space for the mentee's different values. • Facilitates the mentee's examination of how culture and identity shape their worldview — navigates ethical dilemmas with nuance, holding multiple perspectives simultaneously. • Models the integration of social awareness with an authentic individual relationship — helps the mentee develop the capacity to bridge across difference in their own context.

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HOW THIS EVALUATION WORKS

This framework gives evaluators, mentors, and mentees a clear, practical way to assess mentoring quality across the three credentialing levels. It covers all ten core mentoring competencies organised across three categories — and for each competency, there are three observable behavioural indicators per level (the CCM, CSM, and CMM columns set out in the framework above).

Each indicator is marked as either Demonstrated (D) or Not Demonstrated (ND). A mentor is considered proficient in a competency when they demonstrate at least two of the three indicators at the level being assessed. Overall, a mentor needs to demonstrate proficiency in at least nine of the ten competencies to pass.

CATEGORY	COMPETENCIES
SECTION A — The Mentoring Process	• I. Session Agreement & Contracting • II. Relationship — Rapport & Trust • III. Communication • IV. Creating Awareness for Learning
SECTION B — The Mentor	• V. Sharing Knowledge & Experiential Wisdom • VI. Network & Resource Sharing • VII. Creating Independence & Empowerment • VIII. Own Personal Growth & Development
SECTION C — The Mentoring Context	• IX. Meeting the Mentee in Their Context • X. Managing Diversity & Values

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EVALUATOR TOOL — ONE BEHAVIOURAL QUESTION PER COMPETENCY

The following questions are directed to the evaluator after observing the mentoring session. Each question targets the core observable behaviour for its competency. Answer Yes or No — and note specific evidence to support the judgment.

#	COMPETENCY	EVALUATOR QUESTION — Did the mentor...?	Y / N
I	Session Agreement & Contracting	Did the mentor clearly establish confidentiality and session boundaries at the outset — and co-create a shared session focus with the mentee before moving forward?	
II	Relationship — Rapport & Trust	Did the mentor establish a foundation of trust using appropriate body language, warm tone, and by genuinely mirroring the mentee's communication style?	
III	Communication	Did the mentor listen without interrupting, ask single open-ended questions, and paraphrase meaningfully to deepen the mentee's thinking?	
IV	Creating Awareness for Learning	Did the mentor create space for the mentee to arrive at their own insights — rather than providing answers — and capture action commitments with clear ownership?	
V	Sharing Knowledge & Experiential Wisdom	Did the mentor share relevant experience in a way that served the mentee's thinking, without imposing or directing — and check whether the mentee actually wanted to hear it?	
VI	Network & Resource Sharing	Did the mentor identify and offer relevant connections or resources that genuinely matched the mentee's growth needs — with clear purpose and respect for all parties?	
VII	Creating Independence & Empowerment	Did the mentor consistently hold back from solving the mentee's problems — and actively encourage the mentee to trust and act on their own thinking?	
VIII	Own Personal Growth & Development	Did the mentor demonstrate genuine self-awareness in the session — acknowledging own reactions, limitations, or biases when relevant, without losing focus on the mentee?	
IX	Meeting the Mentee in Their Context	Did the mentor show real understanding of the mentee's specific situation — adapting language, examples, and focus to where the mentee actually is right now?	
X	Managing Diversity & Values	Did the mentor demonstrate respect for the mentee's values and background — avoiding assumptions, using inclusive language, and addressing any ethical concerns that arose?	

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MENTOR SELF-CHECKLIST — ARE YOU READY TO MENTOR EFFECTIVELY?

Use this checklist before and during each mentoring session. It is based on the core behavioural indicators across all ten competencies. Go through each item and ask yourself: 'Am I doing this?' Tick the box when you can say yes with confidence.

This checklist is your personal quality check — not a scoring tool. Use it to make sure the critical essentials are woven throughout your entire session.

Competency 1 — Session Agreement & Contracting ☐ Set up clear session boundaries and confirm confidentiality before we begin. ☐ Co-create the session focus with the mentee and confirm the goal together. ☐ Stay non-judgmental throughout and reference the mentoring agreement if needed.	Competency 2 — Relationship: Rapport & Trust ☐ Build trust through consistent, attentive presence and appropriate body language. ☐ Validate the mentee's experiences without judgment and stay genuinely curious. ☐ Follow through on commitments and repair any misunderstandings gracefully.
Competency 3 — Communication ☐ Listen without interrupting — use effective silence and check understanding. ☐ Ask one open-ended question at a time (what, how, when). ☐ Paraphrase key points and summarise themes at natural transition points.	Competency 4 — Creating Awareness for Learning ☐ Create space for the mentee's own insights — hold back from providing answers. ☐ Capture action commitments clearly and follow up on them in the next session. ☐ Model self-awareness by acknowledging own reactions when they are relevant.
Competency 5 — Sharing Knowledge & Experiential Wisdom ☐ Share relevant experience in plain language — with appropriate openness about failure. ☐ Check whether the mentee wants to hear more before sharing extensively. ☐ Connect any sharing directly to the mentee's learning — not for its own sake.	Competency 6 — Network & Resource Sharing ☐ Identify and connect the mentee with specific people who can genuinely help. ☐ Share resources (articles, events, tools) matched to the mentee's actual needs. ☐ Teach the mentee effective networking principles — and follow up on connections made.

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Competency 7 — Creating Independence & Empowerment ☐ Resist giving solutions — ask questions that help the mentee find their own answers. ☐ Celebrate independent decision-making and build on the mentee's existing strengths. ☐ Gradually reduce scaffolding as the mentee's confidence and capability grow.	Competency 8 — Own Personal Growth & Development ☐ Engage in regular CPD and participate in supervision or peer reflection. ☐ Seek feedback from mentees and manage own emotional reactions professionally. ☐ Reflect after each session to identify learning and track growth over time.
Competency 9 — Meeting the Mentee in Their Context ☐ Ask questions to understand the mentee's specific situation before offering anything. ☐ Acknowledge real constraints without dismissing them — and respect the mentee's pace. ☐ Acknowledge own unfamiliarity with the mentee's context openly when relevant.	Competency 10 — Managing Diversity & Respecting Values ☐ Check own biases and assumptions before and during the session. ☐ Use inclusive language and avoid assumptions based on visible diversity dimensions. ☐ Address ethical concerns or value conflicts directly and maintain confidentiality.

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