



TRELLIS SOCIETY

Reflective Practice Mentorship

Companion Guide

For the Reflective Practice Mentor

Prepared for the Trellis Society
Catamount: A Fellowship for Emerging Changemakers
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A Note on This Guide

This document was produced as part of the Catamount Fellowship for Emerging Changemakers at Mount Royal University, in community partnership with the Trellis Society and under the faculty mentorship of Dr. Leda Stawnychko. It is a companion document to the Reflective Practice Mentorship Pilot Program's Design Framework and Implementation Guide "**Program**").

The author, Ayden Osvath, has a Bachelor in Communication, major in Information Design and minor in Social Innovation. This Companion Guide and the recommendations that follow are not drawn from personal experience as a social service practitioner. They are grounded in a structured literature review and a review of best practices on reflective practice, mentorship, burnout, and early career support in social work and other social service fields. This document also incorporates feedback collected during a May 12, 2026, Trellis community engagement session.

A key feature of the proposed Program is that it is designed to meet the organizational realities of Trellis while remaining adaptable and scalable to meet not just existing but also future needs of Trellis. Trellis' own knowledge of its organization, workforce, and culture will shape the implementation and management of the Program.

On Methodology: Adapting Appreciative Inquiry

This Program adopts a modified version of the four-phase Appreciative Inquiry cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny), originally developed to initiate and support organizational change but has been applied to reflective supervision in UK social work practice. The Trellis adaptation is deliberate and significant. In the UK model, managers in supervision sessions focused on case decisions deliver the cycle. In this Program, you are structurally separate from the Mentee's administrative supervisor, and it is you who will deliver the cycle. The four phases are also reframed entirely around your Mentee's development as a professional instead of case management. As RPM, you never decide what the Mentee should do in a case. That remains the jurisdiction of the administrative supervisor. This separation is the design innovation of the Trellis framework.

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A Note Before You Begin

You are asked to take on the role of the Reflective Practice Mentor ("RPM") because it is recognized that you have an ability to listen without rushing to fix, to remember what it was like to be new to this work, and to bring genuine care to that memory.

As RPM, your role is not supervision in the traditional sense. You will not be evaluating the Mentee you are paired with, commenting on their performance, or carrying any information from your conversations into administrative channels. Your role is much simpler, but it may be much more impactful because you will be a consistent and trustworthy presence in the working life of someone who is just beginning to learn what it means to practice in the field of social work.

What You Are Not

You are not a therapist. You are not a manager. You are not a case consultant. You are not a performance evaluator. You are an experienced practitioner who has navigated the terrain your Mentee is navigating now, and who is willing to be a thoughtful, present companion as they find their way through it.

Research suggests that mentorship benefits both the Mentee and you. Social workers who participated in formal mentorship relationships, as either a mentee or mentor reported measurable improvements in career success and satisfaction, with the strongest outcomes for those who were first mentees and later became mentors themselves. The role you have taken on is meant to provide you with reciprocal benefits as you work with your Mentee. [1]

Part 1: Administrative Supervision vs. Reflective Practice Mentorship

Understanding the distinction between administrative supervision and reflective mentorship is the most important conceptual foundation for this role. Some experienced practitioners may have only encountered supervision in its administrative form, and any mentorship may have been informal, casual, and outside of work. This RPM role asks something different from you.

Research from multiple countries documents a recurring pattern in which organizational governance, administrative supervision, and the structural pressures of caseloads, audits, and reporting demands, drifts toward case management and output review at the expense of the developmental and emotional functions new workers are often missing but require to thrive. In contrast, reflective and relational practice builds capacity, supports resilience, increases emotional reserves, supports wellbeing, and improves both job satisfaction and quality of practice when embedded within an organization's culture. The RPM role is designed specifically to fill this gap. [2, 3, 4, 9]

The Two Roles, Side by Side

Administrative Supervisor	RPM (You)
• Caseload management & oversight • Documentation & reporting compliance • Goal setting • Performance evaluation • Policy & procedural guidance • Risk management & client safety • Accountable to the organization	• Emotional processing of difficult cases • Relational skill development • Sitting with uncertainty • Personal activation & self-awareness • Meaning, values, & professional identity • Accountable to the Mentee

How Case Reviews may Differ

The Mentee may raise the same case in both supervision and mentorship, but the questions, focus, and outcomes will be entirely different. This is what we ask you to remember:

Administrative Supervision asks:

- What happened in this case?
- What is the plan going forward?
- Are documentation requirements met?
- What risks need to be managed?
- How is the worker performing against standards?

Reflective Mentorship asks:

- What did this case stir in you?
- What are you noticing about the relationship?
- What did you carry home with you?
- What assumptions are you bringing?
- What does this work mean to you right now?

Reflective supervision and mentorship encourage exploration and unpacking of complexity emotions and provide tools to develop insights to deal with and address challenging emotions. This is the gap between the social worker's formal education and what they learn through lived experience as a practicing social worker. Helping to navigate and fill this gap is what will increase the social worker's resilience and emotional reserves, ensuring a therapeutic and sustainable approach to practice. [3, 9]

Part 2: Structuring a Mentorship Session

This section is the structure for what happens inside a mentorship session. It draws on published methodologies, Appreciative Inquiry and the Positivity Principle, deliberately adapted for this non-evaluative mentorship context.

Session Length and Frequency

- Sessions are 60 minutes long, and up to 90 minutes if required.
- Sessions should occur at least every four weeks with additional meetings scheduled at the request of either the Mentee or the RPM.
- Monthly meetings are the minimum acceptable frequency.
- Both parties spend five minutes preparing before the session.
- Time and space is protected meaning the meeting is in a confidential location, no interruptions and no using this time for formal case reviews.

The Foundation: The Positivity Principle

Reflective conversations that focus only on difficulty, deficits, or what is going wrong tend to exhaust and drain both parties over time. Academic research suggests that sessions should be grounded in the Positivity Principle where attention is also devoted to reflecting on what is going well, what strengths the Mentee is building, and what is possible. These positive reflections are parallel to and do not replace attention or focus on what is hard. [5]

This does not mean you should avoid difficulty. Difficulty, building capacity and strengthening resilience is the very reason this Program exists. But there should be a deliberate balance in the conversations so that the Mentee is able to leave a session with a sense of their own capacity and direction, not just an exhaustive map of what is wrong or what is not working.

The Session Structure: A Four-Phase Cycle

The four phases of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle are used as a framework within this Program. Each phase is reframed entirely around the Mentee's own development instead of case decisions. Case decisions will remain within the jurisdiction of administrative supervision. You will not decide what the Mentee should do in a case. Instead, you will help the Mentee: Discover what they are noticing, Dream about who they want to become as a practitioner, Design how they might grow, and carry this forward as their preferred Destiny. [6]

The Core Reframing

In supervision, the cycle answers: 'What should we do about this case?' In Reflective Practice Mentorship, the cycle answers: 'What is this work doing in me, and who am I becoming through it?' The structural separation between you and the administrative supervisor is what permits and allows this reframing to happen. You do not carry case authority, and this frees you to attend to the inner life of your Mentee as an early career social worker.

The Session Structures will Evolve and Adapt Over Time

The structure of the sessions is not meant to be overly rigid or prescriptive. The proposed structure will help guide the Mentee's initial reflections on their practice, what they are learning, what they can build upon, and what may need to change. As you and your Mentee develop your own relationship and as the Mentee builds capacity and resilience, the structure of the sessions may begin to look quite different. What should not change is the incorporation of the Positivity Principle and the ongoing exploration of the difficult and the positive. As the Mentee matures in their practice, you may not focus as much on the Appreciative Inquiry cycle and its four phases. This is simply an evolution of the Program. However, there may be value for you to come back to this cycle every few sessions to allow the Mentee to continue their exploration of the four phases.

Before the Session: Ten Minute Preparation

You should spend ten minutes preparing for a session. The preparation is not meant to be onerous. The preparation time recognizes that with busy schedules you run the risk of simply moving from one meeting straight into a reflective session. The ten minutes of preparation time is a deliberate pause and reset in your schedule before the conversation begins with your Mentee.

Your preparation might include reviewing any notes from the prior session; reflecting on themes that have been emerging; or considering what kind of presence the Mentee might need today. As you move forward in this role, you and your Mentee will develop your own rhythm, and you will know what you will be best positioned to identify how to utilize your preparation time.

Phase 1: Discovery

15–20 minutes: What's happening, both the good and the not so good?

Discovery is the opening of the session. Its purpose is to understand what the Mentee has experienced since the last session with attention on both what is working and what is hard. This is where the Positivity Principle is most active. You should ask about growth and difficulty in parallel instead of approaching these as a sequence. In this phase you may be able to identify strong emotions, both positive and negative, that are emerging or developing. This is also the phase where you need to focus on the Mentee's wellbeing and whether there are any positive or negative changes in the Mentee's wellbeing since the previous meeting.

In Discovery, you are actively listening, slowing the Mentee down, and helping the Mentee see what is actually present in their experience right now. Remember, some sessions may require more prompts and nudges than other sessions. The following are some questions that may help you, in your first few sessions, or during sessions where your Mentee is hesitant or resistant.

Discovery Questions

"How are you doing, for real? And not simply good or fine but how are you feeling sitting here, right now?"

"What's been on your mind since we last talked? Is there anything you've been trying to wrap your head around?"

"Tell me something that went well in the last couple of weeks? Doesn't have to be anything big, every small win adds up."

"Tell me something that went well in the last couple of weeks? Doesn't have to be anything big, every small win adds up."

"Is there a specific case that has impacted you in a positive way? In a negative way?"

"Where do you feel like you're growing right now? Where are you feeling stuck?"

"Are there any specific conversations, a specific case, or something that happened that you want to explore?"

"Have you experienced any emotions that may have impacted how you make decisions?"

What You're Doing

- Listening without an agenda.
- Making space for both what is working and what is hard.
- Resisting the urge to move toward action prematurely
- Reflecting back what they hear so the Mentee can hear it more clearly.

Phase 2: Dream

15–20 minutes: What do you want to be?

Dream is the imaginative phase. Its purpose is to help the Mentee picture what good practice would look like for them, how might they make better decisions, how might they make more impactful connections, how might they rephrase difficult conversations, or how might they improve their wellbeing. While current or past cases are used as examples and ground the conversation, this phase is not about ideal case outcomes, but about who the Mentee wants to become as a practitioner. Remember, assessing what an ideal case outcome may look like is part of the administrative supervision process.

Dream may be the phase where a Mentee is surprised by their thoughts and ideas. Early career social workers may spend much of their time reacting to their work with little time left over to imagine who they want to become professionally. Your role is to create a space for the Mentee's imagination.

Dream Questions

"Imagine how you would handle this case as your vision of an ideal social worker? What would you do differently? Is it the outcome that would change or how you deal with the outcome?"

"What would 'good practice' or a 'good outcome' look like in your example?"

"Have you worked with someone or watched someone manage this kind of problem in a way that resonates for you? Is there something you would borrow or try out?"

"Have you encountered a similar problem that you think you handled well? What did you do that worked for you?"

"Imagine yourself one year from now. What do you hope is different about how you'd manage this?"

"If you had a chance to redo a conversation with the family, a colleague, or even yourself, how would you like the conversation to be different?"

What You're Doing

- Inviting expansive idealism instead of realism.
- Drawing on the Mentee's past competence to demonstrate the possible.
- Listening for values to guide the next phase.
- Resisting the urge to inject their own vision because the Dream belongs to the Mentee.

Phase 3: Design

15–20 minutes: What could you try right now?

Design is the pragmatic phase. Its purpose is to help the Mentee move from the imaginative Dream toward something they can try within their real constraints, their actual capacity, the support available to them, and the work they are already doing. Its goal is to allow the Mentee to understand how they may work within constraints to still make a difference for the families they work with and for the Mentee.

Design is not about you telling the Mentee what to do. You are providing guidance to the Mentee as they identify what they can realistically experiment with. When required, you will guide the Mentee in identifying any needed supports for their wellbeing that should be accessed. Your questions are meant to help the Mentee discover their own options and understand what supports they might need.

Design Questions

"From what you just imagined in the Dream phase, what do you feel is doable right now?"

"What's one small thing you could try as a first step towards change? Where would you start?"

"What do you need to have in place for you to try this?"

"What kind of supports would help you right now? From me, your supervisor, your colleagues and even yourself?"

"What might get in the way? What is in your control and what is outside your control?"

"What do you want to keep learning to continue to grow and thrive as a social worker?"

“Would it help to do a deeper dive into something specific.”

What You’re Doing

- Helping the Mentee change the focus from many possibilities to one or two realistic experiments.
- Asking what support is needed, including support from the RPM.
- Identifying organizational or systemic constraints honestly without using them to dismiss possible outcomes.
- Resisting the urge to prescribe a design which needs to be discovered by the Mentee.

A Note on Unmet Need

Sometimes the Design phase will reveal that what the Mentee needs to grow is not within the power of the Mentee, you, or the organization to provide because there is a structural or organizational resource that is missing. Being honest about this has significant value. If it is appropriate, you may encourage the Mentee to explore any unmet needs or deficits with their administrative supervisor or other appropriate individual. Except in special circumstances, you do not become an advocate for the Mentee. Instead, you help the Mentee identify when they may need to advocate for themselves.

Phase 4: Destiny

10–15 minutes: What will you carry forward?

Destiny synthesizes what is discovered in the first three phases. The objective is to bring the Mentee back to their present state, identify what they discovered in the session, what they are going to take from this session, and what they are going to work on or implement in a specific case or their daily practice between now and the next meeting.

This is not a goal setting exercise, and it may not even be about creating a plan of action. That is the jurisdiction of the administrative supervisor. Instead, your focus is on helping the Mentee ask themselves how their thinking shifted and have they thought of something new they can try. Help the Mentee think in terms of what they want to hold onto from the session, what is their new possible, and what might they do to make the possible their new reality? In other words, it is about the Mentee

committing to try something new, experimenting with an original approach, or finding a way to change a mindset.

Destiny Questions

"What are one or two ideas that have you thinking or intrigued right now?"

"Is there anything that you would like to try out before our next meeting? This can be an experiment, and it doesn't have to be big."

"How are feeling now compared to when we sat down? Has anything shifted in your mindset, or emotionally?"

"Is there anything specific from today that you want to hold onto, think about and further reflect on?"

"What do you need between now and our next meeting, from yourself or from anyone else?"

"When should we meet again?"

What You're Doing

- Helping the Mentee process what was talked about.
- Making the conversation's value visible by identifying specific shifts in thinking.
- Setting goals is not essential but a commitment to try something new or different is important.
- Identifying any supports that may be needed before the next session.
- Setting the next meeting, especially if you or the Mentee feel an accelerated meeting would be helpful.
- End on a positive note to reinforce the relationship.

Part 3: The Relational Skills of a Mentor

Research with experienced social work supervisors and mentors finds that the relational skills needed to support the early career social worker is also a learnable skill. Effective mentors develop proactive awareness of stress signals, create non-judgmental brave spaces, model self-care, and build supportive relationships through unconditional positive regard. [4]

Active Listening

Active listening is more than silence. It means following what the Mentee is saying, what they are not saying, and listening between the lines of what is being said. In conversations an instinct is to plan your response while others are still speaking. You need to resist this impulse. It is important for the Mentee to know that you are really listening and that you and the Mentee are not just going through the motions.

Working in the Positivity Principle

As the RPM, you carry responsibility for ensuring that the session does not end up focusing only on what is wrong, on what does not work, on skill deficits. You need to be disciplined to avoid the trap of negativity. It may look like this:

- Always ask what is working alongside what is hard, in every session.
- Draw on the Mentee's own past competence as evidence of what they can do now.
- Notice growth and say it out loud, especially small growth the Mentee may not see.
- Name strengths as accurate observations and not just flattery.
- Hold open the possibility that things can be better, even when the present is hard.

Note that you are not denying a difficulty or a problem. The Discovery phase makes space for discussing difficulties. Your self-discipline in how you approach a session is not letting difficulty claim the narrative of the whole session.

Normalizing Without Minimizing

Because there is a gap between the social worker's formal education and what is learned through the lived experience of the professional social worker, the experiences of early career social workers are normal and developmentally expected. One of the most powerful things you can offer your Mentee is the assurance that what they are experiencing is a known feature of this work, this profession. Be careful, however, that normalizing does not slide into minimizing.

"That's completely normal" can provide the Mentee relief or the Mentee may see you as dismissive of the difficulty, or worse dismissive of the Mentee and their

development. How the Mentee reacts to 'normalizing' a difficulty will depend on how you say it, the context you say it in, and the timing of when you say it.

Confidentiality

The Mentee needs to know, and to experience, that what they share with you stays with you. Never share the content of your sessions with administrative supervisors, team leads, or colleagues. Equally as important your Mentee needs to know that there is a limit on confidentiality **if** there is a disclosure of potential harm to the Mentee, a client, or third party.

Knowing When to Refer

You are not a therapist, and this relationship has real limits. When a Mentee's distress exceeds what can be meaningfully discussed or worked on in a mentorship relationship, your role is to gently and clearly encourage the Mentee to seek additional assistance, whether through Trellis supports or third party supports.

Part 4: Warning Signs and When to Escalate

Because you meet with your Mentee regularly in a non-evaluative context, you may see signs of distress that others do not. One of the most crucial functions of your role is to notice, and make your Mentee aware, when your Mentee may be approaching a negative threshold, that the Mentee cannot see for themselves. Compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and early burnout develop gradually and are frequently invisible to the person experiencing them.

Research with social work supervisors and mentors identifies the proactive noticing of stress and burnout signals as a core function of effective relational support. But when the administrative supervisor's focus is on monitoring performance, reviewing caseloads and outcomes, and goal setting the administrative supervisor may not have the capacity to also focus on potential warning signals. This is a key part of your role, where a trusting relationship is being built and your attentive presence may help your Mentee identify warning signs much sooner than others may be able to. [4]

What to Watch For

- Increasing cynicism about clients, families, or the organization.
- Consistent difficulty finding anything positive or meaningful in the work.
- Physical descriptions of depletion including persistent fatigue, sleep issues, appetite changes.
- Withdrawal from colleagues, social activities, or social supports.
- Hyper-vigilance about cases.
- Unusual lack of emotion about cases.
- References to feeling trapped, or boxed in.
- Increasing dread about coming into work or meeting with families.
- Difficulty being present during mentorship sessions
- Statements that minimize the Mentee's own needs: "I'm fine. This is just the way it is. Others have it worse."

Understanding What You're Seeing

Term	What It Is	What It Sounds Like
Compassion Fatigue	Emotional exhaustion arising from sustained exposure to others' trauma. Gradual onset.	"I feel numb to it." "I don't feel as much as I used to."
Secondary Traumatic Stress	Acute stress symptoms arising from indirect exposure to traumatic events experienced by clients.	"I can't stop thinking about what that child described." "I had nightmares about a case."
Moral Injury	Distress arising from acting against one's values, or being unable to prevent harm, due to systemic constraints.	"I know what that family needs and I can't give it to them."
Early Burnout	Chronic exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy from prolonged occupational stress.	"I don't care anymore." "I'm just going through the motions."

See [4, 7, 8]

Language for Raising Concern

If you are concerned about how to raise any concerns you have, with the Mentee, consider a variation of the following:

"I've noticed over the last few weeks that you seem [more tired / less connected / harder on yourself than usual]. I don't want to assume anything, but I wanted to let you know what I'm observing, check in with you directly, and let you know that this is a safe place for us to talk about this. So how are you, really?"

"I want to be careful not to assume too much, but over the last few sessions, I've noticed [specific observation]. I'm not worried in a way that needs action right now, but I wanted to check in with you directly. How are you, really?"

When to Escalate

Circumstances in which you should encourage a Mentee to access formal support beyond the mentorship relationship:

- Any disclosure of suicidal ideation or self-harm.
- Indications that the Mentee's distress is affecting client safety.
- Sustained secondary traumatic stress symptoms that do not resolve over two sessions.
- Requests from the Mentee for referral to more formal support.

Encourage the Mentee to access the organizations existing supports if they are applicable. In some cases, you may have to encourage the Mentee to seek assistance from a third party clinical resource. What is critical, is that you must frame the seeking of help or support as a sign of professional strength and wisdom.

Understanding when help is required is part of the capacity and resilience building journey. Seeking help or support should never be framed as professional weakness.

Taking Care of Yourself

The work of guiding another person through distress or trauma or creating a safe place to explore distress or trauma, also creates demands on you personally. You should have your own support structures and feel empowered to raise concerns about the Program or your own sustainability within the Program. You are meant to also benefit reciprocally from the Program, and you should not feel depleted over the course of the Program.

Sources and End Notes

Evidence based claims in this guide is marked as end notes. For a summary of the source and its relevance to this problem please refer to the Research Dossier prepared for Trellis.

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APPENDICES

Practical Tools

Appendix 1: Example Ground Rules for the First Session

Appendix 2: Guiding Question Bank

Appendix 1: Example Ground Rules

Ground rules should be agreed to during your first meeting with your Mentee. This may be an informal get to know you session or your very first mentorship session. You want to make sure you have a set of shared expectations for what the relationship will and will not be. The list below is a starting template. You and your Mentee are encouraged to adapt, add to, or rephrase any of these to fit your working styles.

Ground rules only need to be agreed to once, but they can be revisited and amended if either party feels a revision is needed.

How to Use This Appendix

At the first session, go through this appendix together and discuss what needs to be adjusted. The very process and act of being able to agree to a set of rules is one of the first steps in building the trust and relational foundation the rest of this Program will be based on.

Suggested Ground Rules

1. We mutually decide what we will discuss. The Mentee will usually bring the topic, but we shape the conversation together. Either one of us may suggest something to explore.
2. It is okay to avoid a topic if either party does not feel ready to discuss it. Acknowledging that you are not ready is a positive. Pushing through when someone is reluctant, is not.
3. We both listen actively. That means concentrating fully on the conversation and not checking phones or thinking about other work.
4. The feedback in these sessions will be about development and not evaluation. The RPM offers observations, questions, and guidance, not assessments of the Mentee's competence. The Mentee may ask for feedback at any time.
5. There are no wrong answers. This is not a test. The purpose is to support and develop the Mentee's practice and wellbeing.
6. In a relationship built on trust, especially when difficult topics may be addressed, disagreements are inevitable, but our disagreements must always be respectful. We can disagree without making the relationship feel unsafe.
7. We can speak openly, without fear of reprisals. The Mentee may share concerns about the organization, their supervisor, their work, or themselves and these concerns will stay in this space.

8. Confidentiality is held by the RPM, with one exception: any disclosure that implicates the safety of the Mentee, a client, or a third party may need to be acted on. Beyond that, nothing leaves this space.
9. Session content is never shared with the Mentee's administrative supervisor or used in performance evaluation. The RPM will not provide reports, references, or feedback about the Mentee to anyone in the Mentee's administrative chain.
10. Either party can request a rematch through the Program Coordinator if the relationship is not working or stops working. This is not a failure. This will happen and has been specifically built into this Program.
11. Frequency: we will meet at least once every 4 weeks for 60 minutes, or up to 90 minutes if either one of us requests a longer session. We can meet sooner, if either one of us requests that. To be effective, we will build this time into our schedules, and we will not double book during the time we set aside for us.
12. We will use the four-phase session structure (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) as our shared rhythm, at least during our initial sessions. However, neither of us will treat the four phases as a rigid script.

Pairs are encouraged to add, modify, or remove items above to fit their relationship. The ground rules are a living agreement, not a contract.

Appendix 2: Guiding Question Bank

This Appendix provides an inventory of questions that are organized by possible emotional terrains that an early career social worker may experience in their practice. You can draw on these questions during any phase of the session, based on the cues that you receive from your Mentee.

Keeping in mind the Positivity Principle, the prompts focus on exploring the difficult experiences as well as drawing out what is working well. Providing the Mentee the opportunity to explore the good along with the difficult may help the Mentee develop a better understanding of their emotions, their strengths, and what may need to be strengthened.

Note that you can use these prompts even if you are running a session that is not using or focused on the Appreciative Inquiry cycle.

1. When you don't know what to do.

For when the Mentee feels unprepared or unsure of the right call.

When it's hard:

- "If you are feeling stuck or unsure, why do you think you feel this way? Is it because you are still learning new skills or do you feel that you can't handle this problem?"
- "Do you believe that there is a difference between being uncertain versus being incapable? Do you know whether you can tell the difference between the two?"
- "If you feeling unsure, stuck or lost do these feelings ever affect you physically? What is it that you feel?"
- "Nobody is perfect so what do you think 'good enough' would look like in this case?"

When it's working:

- "Can you think of an example where not knowing something ended up leading you to a positive result?"
- "Do you know anyone here, or in any other part of your life that appears to deal with uncertainty well? What do they do that you notice?"
- Can you turn your uncertainty into a learning experience?"

2. When you carry the work with you.

For when the Mentee's difficult cases are following them home.

When it's hard:

- "What are the specific cases or families that you continue to think about when you leave at the end of the day? Is there anything in common with these cases or families?"
- "Do you think you can recognize when you take on or absorb a client's problems as your own problem? What do you think the signals might be?"
- "Are you carrying something right now that you haven't had a chance to put down?"

When it's working:

- "When you do manage to leave your work at work, are you doing anything specific to set aside your work? What does this look like? What stops you from doing this at the end of each day?"
- "Have you had a stretch lately where your work time and your you time feel balanced? What were you doing or feeling when you felt in balance?"

3. When power dynamics with families feel uncomfortable.

For when the Mentee is trying to navigate any authority over families or individuals.

When it's hard:

- "When does having power in this relationship feel uncomfortable to you? What is the discomfort trying to tell you?"
- "Has there been a moment recently where the power dynamic shifted in a way you didn't expect? What happened?"
- "How do you balance the authority that comes with your role and who you are? What makes this difficult?"

When it's working:

- "Can you think of an example or a time when you felt that you successfully balanced your authority and who you are? How did you do that and what did it feel like?"
- "On a good day, how do you think a family might experience your role? What do you think they may see in your role and in you?"

4. When cases hit close to home.

For Mentees who feel a specific case or family is triggering something personal to them.

When it's hard:

- "Is there a case right now that's affecting you more than others? Why do you think this case is doing that to you?"
- "Have you caught yourself reacting more strongly than usual to a particular client?"
- "Are there client stories that remind you of something from your own life? How are you handling that?"

When it's working:

- "Is there an experience or experiences from your own life that you believe actually helped you connect with a client in a positive way?"
- "Is there someone you go to or talk to when work touches or triggers something personal to you? What is it about this person or what you talk about that you find helpful?"

5. Setting boundaries without withdrawing or shutting down.

For Mentees struggling with setting limits without becoming detached.

When it's hard:

- "Have you caught yourself pulling back emotionally from someone recently? Why do think this happened?"
- "Do you see a difference between wanting to protect yourself shutting down? Can you tell which one you are doing?"
- "What happens when you're too open with a client? What happens when you're too closed?"

When it's working:

- "From your own experience, not the textbooks, what does a healthy boundary actually feel like?"
- "Is there an example of a time when you were able to successfully stay present in a difficult or hard case without feeling consumed or swallowed by it? What do you feel helped you successfully navigate that situation?"

6. When your values and your job are not aligned.

For Mentees who experience a gap between what they believe is right and what the system or organization allows.

When it's hard:

- "Have there been moments lately where what you thought was right and what this job requires pulls you in different directions? How did you react, what did you do?"
- "When the system can't give a family what you believe they actually need, how do you handle that?"
- "If the organization could hear one thing about what early career social workers are actually going through, what would that be?"

When it's working:

- "Has there been a recent moment where your values and your work were in sync? What was that situation?"
- "What drew you to this career in the first place? Can you still see those reasons in what you are doing day to day?"

7. Finding meaning when progress is slow.

For Mentees who struggle to stay motivated when outcomes are slow, invisible, or not what you hoped for.

When it's hard:

- "What do you hold onto when a case doesn't go the way you wanted it to?"
- "How do you tell the difference between actually failing and something just being hard?"
- "What would it take to still be doing this work in five years? What needs to be true?"

When it's working:

- "Can you think of a moment since our last meeting where you felt like you made a difference, even a small difference? How did that make you feel?"
- "What does progress actually look like in this work? Has your sense of "what counts" or "what matters most" changed since you started your career?"