



Cards for Mentoring Conversations (1)

Changing Identities

Conversation type	The idea	What's needed	Card side	Timing
Return to work mentoring either 1-1 or as a paired activity in a return to work workshop	This activity is an opportunity to explore the changing sense of identity and help someone bring together the home / parent identity with their workplace identity	One set of Cards for Mentoring Conversations per pair Pen and paper for notes / actions if required by the returner(s)	Photographic images	Post return to work or in the lead up to a return to work

Background

When we become a parent for the first time, everything changes. At a fundamental level, that sense of self – the person we believed we were, now has an added dimension – that of a being mother, or father. What does that mean to someone? What happens when we later merge this new identity with our work identity? How might a mentor help someone embrace this new sense of self, an identity which incorporates both work *and* parenting?

For some returners, the resumption of work can feel a more straightforward transition than becoming a parent. In many respects, work represents a return to a known world: a world of linear activity e.g. When I ask for X, it generally happens; there is predictable structure and order to the day / week; I get positive reinforcement for a job well done; there is opportunity for adult conversation and intellectual challenge; time and space for a hot drink even. In the days away from work, at home with a small baby, there is likely to be much less structure to the day, the routine is emergent, fluid, ever changing. Not surprising then that some working parents tell us they find it easier to be at work than at home!

Becoming a parent is a journey not a destination. These life transitions take time and experimentation, with change a part of everyday: what's possible – or not (this week, next week); learning about ourselves; our child and who we are becoming by the life we are creating. As one returner shares: *'I was torn between desperately wanting to stay at home with my son and feeling a huge sense of loss at not being at work every day. I think in those early days you're in transition from one identity to another – you just want some sort of familiarity'*



The activity

1. Invite your mentee to select a card which represents who they feel they were (their working identity) pre-children. Ask questions to encourage exploration of this point, e.g.

- What made you select this particular image?
- What does this image suggest to you?
- What was important / what did you value?
- What roles did you play?
- What did you enjoy doing that gave you most energy?

2. Now invite them to select another card which might represent who they are as a parent. Again, encourage exploration of this point, e.g.

- What made you select this particular image?
- What words come to mind when you look at this picture?
- What sort of a parent are you?
- What's important in this new identity?
- What's the best thing about being a parent?

3. Invite them to put both images alongside each other and consider the two in partnership. Ask questions to explore how they are feeling, e.g.

- What do you see when you put these two identities alongside each other?
- Where are you most comfortable and why?
- What's your greatest concern / challenge?
- What are you avoiding?
- How might you help yourself more?
- What will it take to bring these two identities together?

4. Invite your mentee to look to the future and ask if there is a single image (or if they have another metaphor in mind), which represents the best combination of these identities. What might this look like? Explore this as a future goal, considering what will help this most.

5. Draw out learning and reflections.