

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

TOP 10 TIPS FOR COACHES



1 BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP: IT WILL BE TIME WELL SPENT.

A trusting, supportive relationship will be key to the success of coaching. Take time to get to know the coachee and their learning environment. This will make your coaching more relevant and more salient for the coachee. Be willing to pitch in and be an extra set of hands when needed. Coaching is a partnership and the more you know and understand the learning environment, the more you can support the coachee. And all of this contributes to building the supportive relationship that will be the context for your coaching.

2 SHARE SUCCESSES: BUILD ON THE POSITIVE.

We all like to feel encouraged! Notice what is going well, comment on it, and then build on it. Using a strengths-based approach to coaching prevents coachees from feeling their coach is going to “fix” them. Instead, the goal is to work together to become more fluent in existing practices and learn new skills.

3 MAP IT OUT: USE AN ACTION PLAN AS A ROADMAP FOR YOUR COACHING JOURNEY.

Work with the coachee to create an action plan to help guide your coaching. What practices would he or she like to work on first? What steps are needed to put the targeted practice into place? Breaking new practices into smaller steps can make the process of change less overwhelming.

4 PROVIDE SUPPORTS: GIVE MATERIALS AND IDEAS TO SUPPORT COACHEE NEEDS.

Sometimes offering a material such as a rules poster or sample questions to ask a caregiver at a coaching meeting is the jump start for getting a good strategy in place. Be sure to model what to do with the material you provide ...or it may end up in a drawer instead of being used. Avoid providing too many materials or ideas at one time, so the coachee can focus on what is most important to implement.

5 BE TRANSPARENT: HIGHLIGHT COACHING AS PART OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RIGHT FROM THE START.

It is important that coachees are prepared for coaching. Everyone involved should know the expectations and goals of coaching, before coaching begins. If coaching follows a training or workshop, discuss how the content delivered might become the focus of action plan goals. Present coaching as the “bridge” between hearing about new practices and implementing them with children and families.

6 BE PREPARED: KEEP SOME HELPFUL PHRASES HANDY.

Being a coach can leave you at a loss for words at times! Having a few key phrases handy can really help when you are not sure what to say next. Some tried-and-true favorites include: “Let’s just give it a try,” “Tell me more about...,” “What can we do to make this practice easier to implement?,” “How do you think [the activity] went today?” and “What have you tried so far?”

7 ANCHOR IT: USE DATA TO ANCHOR YOUR OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK.

Using data is a way to be objective when providing feedback. You can use assessments that your program is already using, such as the CLASS, HOVRS, ECERS, ITTERS, or FCCERS; or consider collecting data on specific behaviors, such as child engagement or parent’s positive comments to the child. Having something to base your coaching on gives you focus and makes feedback more objective and meaningful. Regardless of your tool, using data to provide some concrete evidence of progress can be very rewarding. It takes some getting used to, but data can be very powerful—many times coachees start asking to see more!

8 BE PATIENT: CHANGE TAKES TIME.

When the goal of coaching is changing coachee’s behaviors—it takes time. In order for meaningful change to occur and maintain, ample time is needed not just to learn a new skill, but to practice using it. Some behaviors are easier than others to change. Depending on the coachee’s beliefs or years of experience, some practices may take a greater time commitment from both the coach and coachee.

9 FIND THE RIGHT IT: JUST LIKE WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, COACHING ISN’T “COOKIE CUTTER.”

Know that the strategies you use, approaches you take, and the relationships you build will vary depending on the personalities involved, skills you are building, and the needs of the learning environment. For example, you may have one coachee who wants the coach to mostly observe and offer suggestions, while another wants the coach to do more modeling and demonstration. How you support each coachee will depend on their skills, their needs, and their preferences. This is what makes coaching difficult, but also makes it exciting.

10 CONNECT WITH A COMMUNITY OF COACHES: SHARE SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES.

Network with other coaches to get support along the way. Being able to share “coaching highs” and work through “coaching lows” is crucial. Whether it is bouncing ideas off of each other, sharing materials, or just helping work through an issue—coaches can learn a lot from each other!