EFFECTIVE COACHING IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION
TRAINING MANUAL

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SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO
EFFECTIVE COACHING

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INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen a renewed focus on improving the quality of child care, spurring a proliferation of new initiatives to enhance child care providers' practices, enrich curriculums, and improve caregiving environments.

The growth of quality interventions in an era of vastly reduced budgets has brought an essential question to the surface: Which interventions have the most lasting impact on child care quality? Recent research on teacher preparation and professional development converges in a similar theme: Child care providers' practices are more likely to change – and these changes are more likely to be sustained – when providers receive personalized support, in their unique settings, from a skilled, caring, and knowledgeable professional.[1] As a result, an increasing number of quality intervention and support programs are building mentoring, technical assistance, and coaching[2] into their menu of services.

This growth in coaching intervention has increased the demand for skilled, knowledgeable Early Care and Education (ECE) coaches to provide support on a range of child care issues including early childhood mental health, ECE curriculum, health and safety practices, teacher-child interactions, and program management. However, there are few resources to train coaches in the ECE field. As a result, the few coaches that exist are in high demand, leaving many programs struggling to fill their coaching needs.

To meet the growing demand, we developed the "Effective Coaching in Early Care and Education" training series and this companion training manual. These resources are designed to build and expand the skills of coaches from a diversity of disciplines as they work in the complex and sometimes challenging reality of child care.

We hope this manual will serve as a valuable resource for your child care coaching program. As use of these materials spread, we enjoy hearing from coaches and program managers who have implemented these perspectives and techniques in their programs. Just as coaching is an ever-evolving and adaptive process, so, too, is our training. Please keep in touch – we would love to hear about your experiences and the creative ideas you develop along the way!

Our special thanks to the hundreds of child care providers, child care coaches, child care quality improvement researchers, policy makers, program directors and colleagues with whom we have partnered over the past fifteen years. Our experiences of working with you and engaging in deep, honest conversations about the promise and the challenges of child care are infused throughout this manual. This manual is dedicated to all those who endeavor to support and nurture young children and their families through quality early care and education.

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1. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Toward the Identification of Features of Effective Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators, Literature Review.* Washington, D.C., 2010.

2 "Coaching" is a relatively new term in ECE professional development and there is currently no universally accepted definition of "coaching" versus "consultation." For the purposes of this manual, we define coaching as interventions that are focused on improving program quality by working closely with unique individuals within the context of their programs.

PROJECT HISTORY

First 5 Alameda County (F5AC) has been engaged in child care coaching for the past several years, primarily through its Child Care Quality Counts (QC) program and its Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMH) initiatives.

Quality Counts is an in-depth coaching model which provides relationship-based, outcomes-oriented coaching to a broad diversity of child care programs. Unable to locate experienced coaches – particularly coaches with bilingual skills and familiarity with family child care programs – F5AC developed a series of trainings to build coaching and reflective facilitation skills. F5AC began to receive requests from child care coaching programs throughout California to access our trained coaches, and to use Quality Counts' coaching materials to support coaches in other programs.

F5AC's Mental Health Partnership Grant and the Partners in Collaboration programs were developed in response to a growing need for trained and experienced early childhood mental health consultants. Participants in these programs attended training sessions led by an expert with specialized experience and expertise in both child care and early childhood mental health.

Through the experiences of implementing these coaching programs, First 5 Alameda County found that coaching proved particularly impactful.[3] These successes, and the growing demand for coaching, lead to an increased interest in making coaching more accessible for child care programs.

In response to increasing inquiries and growing interest from other child care quality improvement initiatives, in 2007 F5AC convened a series of *Consultation Forums,* focused on sharing information and resources across the variety of child care coaching programs throughout Northern California. Clients came from a variety of programs and disciplines including environmental rating scale coaching, facilities and business technical assistance, early childhood mental health, and ECE college practicum instruction. These stakeholders identified training to build child care coaching skills as a pressing and primary need in the field.

Simultaneous to these trends, coaches began to report challenges in serving sites that were also receiving professional guidance from a variety of other sources, including other coaches. Often providers would feel stretched by working on several improvement activities simultaneously. Some providers reported that they were receiving conflicting and sometimes contradictory instruction from these various sources.

In 2010 F5AC developed the cross-discipline "Effective Coaching in ECE" training and this companion manual in response to these issues. The training and materials are designed to increase the number and diversity of ECE coaches, to build a common language and approach to ECE coaching, and to serve as a platform for future coordination of ECE quality improvement activities.

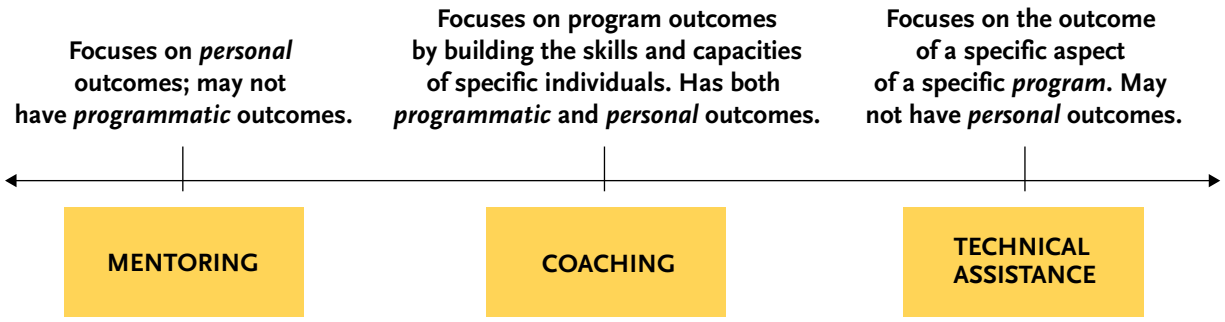
3. Client reports for all three programs indicate that the majority of clients perceive an improvement in child care quality. Quality Counts' efficacy has also been documented through third-party, longitudinal assessments using the Harms-Clifford Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales.

COACHING, MENTORING, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: **WHICH IS WHICH?**

There are multiple terms that are applied to the process of one professional supporting another to learn new information and engage in new behaviors. There is currently no standard definition for any of these terms, and while some in the social service field assign very different meanings to each term, others use these terms interchangeably.

This training focuses on *coaching*, which we generally define as an intervention partnership that is designed to develop the skills and capacity of individuals to achieve specific programmatic outcomes.[1] We distinguish this from mentoring, which we define as more focused on the development of specific individual(s), regardless of the programs or roles they work within. We also distinguish this from technical assistance, which we define as more focused on a specific aspect of a specific issue within a specific program, with minimal consideration of the individual needs of the people involved. Please note that these are somewhat artificial distinctions, and coaching will at times employ aspects of Mentoring and Technical Assistance as specific strategies to address an overall coaching goal. However, we think it is helpful to reflect on the fundamental differences of these approaches.

We position Coaching as a midpoint between two theoretical extremes:



Questions for Reflection

1. Using the above definitions, what are some issues that would be best addressed by Mentoring?
2. What are some issues that would be best addressed by Technical Assistance?
3. What are some issues that would be best addressed by Coaching?

1. For the purposes of this training, our use of the word coaching also encompasses the activities of early childhood mental health programatic consultation.

REFLECTION SCENARIO

Which types of partnerships are in use in the following scenarios?

A. Sendre Supervisor oversees three employees, including Matthew Manager. Matthew is responsible for developing a new grant proposal for an existing project. Matthew recently shared that he didn't know how to complete the Funder's mandatory letter of intent. Sendre and Matthew set aside an hour to review the grant guidelines, the letter of intent form, and Matthew's first draft. Sendre walked Matthew through the process of completing the form according to the Funder's guidelines. Sendre noticed that on a few instances Matthew had not answered a question according to the funding guidelines. He highlighted those areas and indicated to Matthew what was missing. Matthew completed a second draft, which Sendre reviewed and approved for submission.

B. Sendre Supervisor also oversees the work of Pietra Project Assistant, who recently joined the agency. Pietra is new to the field, and though she is in an entry-level program position, she eventually would like to work on high-level policy issues somewhere in the field. Sendre has invited Pietra to join him as he attends various policy meetings, as Pietra's program schedule permits. After each meeting, Sendre meets with Pietra to discuss what was covered and to answer her questions about the people at the meeting, the issues discussed, and why certain topics were more controversial than others. Sendre follows up with suggestions for further reading and names of colleagues at other agencies that Pietra may want to meet.

C. Sendre's third supervisee is Maki Manager. Maki is developing a new program that is designed to help parents incorporate literacy activities into their families' everyday lives. Maki is feeling a little overwhelmed and isn't sure where to begin. Over the course of several meetings, Sendre discusses the project with Maki, first helping Maki identify within the broad program goal which areas Maki feels most confident about taking on. Sendre then guides Maki in considering the challenges that the program might face, and acts as a sounding board for Maki's brainstormed solutions. At subsequent meetings, Sendre asks Maki questions to help them both gauge how the project is progressing. This process continues for several weeks, resulting in the creation of an interwoven set of strategies that are based on Maki's unique skills and talents, and that both Sendre and Maki think will successfully achieve the program's previously established goals.

WORKING TOWARD "QUALITY" **IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

As coaches, our ultimate goal is usually to improve and/or sustain the quality of the programs we serve. However, definitions and views of quality differ and there is currently no consensus among the many stakeholders in child care on a single definition of quality early care and education. While it is likely that you and your clients share the fundamental belief that every family has the right to the highest quality of ECE, it is possible that you may have different opinions on what exactly constitutes a quality program.

As a coach, it is critical that everyone involved in your work be clear about which definition of quality is being applied to the programs you are working with and how improvements in quality will be gauged.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your definition of quality?
2. How would you measure quality?
3. If you work for an agency, what is your agency's definition of quality?
   a. How does your agency determine a child care program's level of quality?
   b. In what ways do your personal beliefs about quality and how it should be measured match your agency's approach?
   c. In what ways, if any, do your beliefs differ? How might these differences impact your work?
4. What is your client's definition of quality?
   a. In what ways does your client's definition match yours or your agency's?
   b. In what ways, if any, does your client's definition differ? How might these differences impact your work?

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KEY PRINCIPLES

We have identified seven key principles of effective coaching, listed below. To illustrate how these abstract principles can be put into action, we have provided a few samples of the principles in practice.

1. CLIENT-DRIVEN SERVICES

Effective coaching is grounded in the interests and needs of the client within her/his unique environment. Change is more likely to occur and to be sustained when professionals have the opportunity to reflect on their current practices and develop their own improvement goals.

Principle in Practice

- Identify areas of agreement among client, program leadership (if different from client) and coach on areas of need and strengths.
- Cultivate authentic collaboration between client, program leadership, and coach to develop specific and attainable improvement goals.

2. SYSTEMIC APPROACH

ECE program quality results from the interaction of several systemic factors, including: program philosophy, policies, procedures, personnel, and the families and communities being served. Effective coaching supports clients in taking a systemic perspective when considering and instituting change.

Principle in Practice:

- Services begin with a thoughtful assessment of needs and strengths, with a global-context perspective that takes into account the many factors that impact care.

3. PRAXIS

Effective coaching not only assists ECE professionals in the acquisition of new theories and perspectives, it also provides support as professionals put these theories into practice in their complex, unique settings.

Principle in Practice:

- Coaches assist clients in translating their quality vision into a prioritized work plan of specific goals and related activities.
- Coaches observe clients as they attempt new practices and provide specific feedback on their efforts.

4. RESULTS-FOCUSED

Effective coaching is based on achieving clearly defined goals through an adaptive process. With results-focused coaching, coaches help clients reflect on their progress toward goals, identify successful strategies, and maintain their progress despite unexpected challenges.

Principle in Practice:

- Create clear, mutually-accepted rubric to measure the effectiveness of strategies and progress toward stated goals.
- Periodic assessments of overall coaching program's efficacy, including client reports, coach self-reports, and some form of objective pre- and post-coaching measure (pre- and post- tests, third-party observations, etc.).

5. INTENTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Impactful coaching takes place within an intentional framework that includes a clearly articulated coaching philosophy and a well-defined coaching protocol.

Principle in Practice:

- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for coach and client (and, if relevant, other child care program staff and administrators) in implementing strategies.

6. ONGOING SUPPORT FOR COACHES

Coaching can be complex and intense work. To maintain efficacy, coaches need a supportive infrastructure that provides reflective supervision, peer support, and periodic professional skills training.

Principle in Practice:

- Coaches participate in monthly case-conference meetings led by a knowledgeable advisor or supervisor.
- Periodic assessment of coach's performance (including self-assessment, client assessment, and third-party assessment).

7. RELATIONSHIP-BASED CAPACITY BUILDING

The overall goal of effective coaching is to build a client's capacity to lead change. Effective coaches build relationships that foster a client's own abilities and lessen her/his need for coaching.

Principle in Practice:

- Coach regularly reflects on work and project progress to ensure s/he is not unintentionally undercutting client's leadership and fostering dependence on coach.

CHALLENGES IN APPLYING KEY PRINCIPLES **TO EVERYDAY PRACTICE**

The key principles are fundamental to quality coaching services. However, it can be challenging to adhere to these abstract principles in the day-to-day practice of coaching in the sometimes chaotic world of child care. Anticipating challenges prior to starting services can help you prevent some challenges from arising and can prepare you to react constructively when road-blocks appear.

The following "Real Life Scenarios" illustrate potential challenges to the first principle: ***Client-Driven Services.***

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO #1

Mariposa Child Care Center recently asked Carrie Coach to work with the program on a variety of issues impacting its quality of care. At the first meeting, Carrie was greeted by the center's director and spent the majority of her visit speaking with the director and the three lead teachers in the three classrooms.

Today is Carrie's second visit.

> ***Carrie Coach:*** *"Last time we met, we talked about age-appropriate curriculum as an issue your program would like to work on. There was a lot of conversation about the circle time, and how some of the younger children don't seem to be engaged."*
>
> ***Teacher:*** *"That's really true. Kids that age just can't handle sitting still that long. They just start fighting with each other. It's really, really frustrating. In fact, the only thing that got me through it yesterday was knowing that we were going to talk today about how we can eliminate it."*
>
> ***Director:*** *"15 minutes is really not too long for kids that age. I think we need to look at how we are using that circle time so that they are more engaged. Anyway, we talked about that a lot last time, and we can talk about that more internally, at staff meeting, if needed. While we have you here, I'd like to spend our time today talking about how we communicate with parents. We received a complaint from a parent yesterday about comments she heard one of the teachers make to another parent about her son. This is the second time this month I have received such a complaint, and I think we need to deal with this right away."*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If you are implementing client-driven services, but you are working with more than one representative at an agency, who is the client that gets to "drive" the discussion?
2. What steps could you take prior to starting services that might help avoid such a situation?
3. If you were the coach in this scenario, how might you approach the situation?

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO #2

Carrie Coach has been working with a small family child care program on business and fiscal management practices.

Coach: *"I got your fax yesterday with a copy of the notice you received from the IRS last month. I noticed that the due date for you to respond is tomorrow."*

Child Care Provider: *"Tomorrow?! I just don't have time to deal with that right now. It will just have to wait. It's the government, right? They always make* ***me*** *wait. I wanted you to help me figure out how I am going to get Kyle's parents to pay on time. I am sick of getting their check a week late, and this time, it bounced! I had to pay a big fee to my bank, and I have* ***had it!*** *I am going to talk to his mom when she picks him up in an hour."*

Coach: *"Sounds like you have a lot going on right now and I'd be happy to talk about enforcement of parent fees. It's definitely a big issue. But I feel I should tell you that in my experience, IRS notices are quite serious and there can be significant penalties if you don't respond. Would it be helpful if we looked at the notice together?"*

Child Care Provider: *"That is just going to have to wait. I'm serious. Right now I need to focus on getting my money. I have been so patient with them because I know times are tough, but now my whole account is messed up because of them! I am so angry. How dare they take advantage of me like that? I take care of their child, I give him everything, and they can't pay me? My fees are really low already. I need you to help me figure out what I should do. Should I give them a written warning? What should I say? Can I charge them more to cover the cost of the bounced check? How about a late fee? Should I set up an installment plan, or should I just tell them I can't afford to care for Kyle anymore? I love him, but I won't let their drama mess up my money!"*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What do you do if the client seems to be setting the agenda, but you strongly disagree with her choice?
2. If you were the coach in this scenario, how would you address this situation?
3. Knowing that a situation like this might occur, is there anything you would do at the beginning of services to address this possibility?

▶ ACTIVITY

Take each of these seven key principles and think about the real-life challenges that may arise when implementing each one.

1. What obstacles might you encounter?
2. What might you do prior to starting services to minimize these obstacles?
3. If these obstacles do arise during services, how might you address them?

COACHING'S
KEY PLAYERS

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ECOLOGY OF **CHILD CARE**

Child care programs can vary significantly on a range of aspects, including fundamental philosophy, daily practices, and children and families served. However, almost all programs experience a complex mix of resources and challenges. Effective coaches act in part as cultural anthropologists who look at program practices within the context of an overall program and its environment. While it can be tempting to see issues as discrete "problems" requiring a specific "fix," effective coaches often find that even the simplest issue can't be addressed until its relationship with other factors is considered and incorporated into planning.

Similar to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of influences on child development, we can look at child care from an ecological perspective, viewing child care programs *in relationship* to their physical and social environment. Just as Bronfenbrenner's theory looks at multiple levels of a child's environment, the Child Care Ecology Model looks at many layers of a child care program's environment, which are referred to as the *micro-, meso-* and *macro-systems.* In the Child Care Ecology Model, the *micro-system* includes the immediate social environment of the families, staff, and children; the program's philosophy; and the physical environment of the child care. The *meso-system* encompasses the local community, including neighborhood demographics, neighborhood institutions such as churches and local resources such as child-appropriate recreation areas and accessibility of nutritious food. The *macro-system* encompasses the broader economy, state and national politics, state licensing regulations, business laws, etc.

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Though distinct, these three layers interact in various ways that impact the daily reality of caregivers' work and their relationships with the children in their care. Effective coaches learn about the ecology of their client's program and use this information to inform their understanding of a current practice or situation. These coaches are also mindful of the ecology when helping to craft new strategies.

For example: A teacher's work with challenging children is viewed not just through her/his interactions with particular children, but also in the context of the physical environment; the child care program's philosophy and curriculum; the needs and demands of the community of children, teachers and parents; and legal and regulatory mandates.

▶ ACTIVITY: REAL-LIFE SCENARIO #1

Read the following anecdote and then follow the instructions below.

Carrie Coach is working with Selena, owner and provider of the Shining Stars family child care program. In Carrie's initial observations, she notes that the children spend very little time outdoors in the home's ample backyard. When Selena does allow the children into the yard, she encourages them to engage in activities such as painting or gardening. If the children become more active, or begin to shout, Selena redirects them to more sedate activities.

1. Take three minutes to brainstorm all of the possible reasons for Selena's actions.
2. Once you have completed your brainstorm, review Selena's explanation, below.

Selena's Explanation

Carrie shares her observation with Selena, and asks her how she feels when the kids run, jump, and are more active.

Selena responds that she really wishes she could allow the kids to "let loose" in the yard, but she has to be careful. Since she and her family moved in last year, her neighborhood has shown significant opposition to her child care program. Her immediate neighbors have repeatedly complained about the amount of noise coming from Selena's property when the children are outside. She mentions that she was already concerned about her family being accepted into the neighborhood since her family's ethnicity is different than most of the neighbors' in the tight-knit, long-standing community. She says she doesn't want to "give them a reason to dislike us or, worse, complain to the city about my business. We need this home and the income my program brings."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Did any of your initial hypotheses consider the community's concerns (part of her program's ecology) as a contributing factor in Selena's practices?
2. In addressing this situation, what strategies might you consider? How would these strategies take into account Selena's program's ecology?

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO #2

Carrie Coach is working with an infant/toddler classroom at Pineville Children's Center, a government-funded child care program. Carrie and Pamela, the lead teacher, have met several times to discuss ways that the program can build trusting relationships between teachers and parents. Carrie shares a strategy that she has seen work in other programs –"dinner night," one night a month when a center invites parents to stay for a free dinner with the staff. Carrie explains that the dinner can be very simple and low-cost, and that the events usually don't last longer than 90 minutes, as parents usually need to get home. As Carrie speaks, she notices Pamela start to shake her head from side to side. Carrie stops and asks, "It looks like you aren't thrilled with this idea?" Pamela responds, "I love the idea. It would be really nice for both the parents and the teachers. But there is no way the HR Department and the union are going to let me have my teachers stay late."

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you respond in such a situation?
2. What questions would you have for Pamela, if any?

CHILD CARE ECOLOGY: **THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION "FIELD"**

The work of Early Care and Education (ECE) providers is related to the work of elementary education and health care professionals. However, despite working with similar populations and on related issues, ECE differs in a key way from elementary education and health care: ECE is not a clearly defined field with standardized practices and a widely-recognized, clearly-defined professional development system.

The lack of definition and recognition may be due, in part, to unresolved societal debates including:

- ambivalence about children being cared for by someone other than a relative,
- conflicts between vastly different views of the role of young children in society and how best to support their development, and
- fundamental disagreements regarding the basic role of ECE as primarily focused on fostering children's development versus primarily serving as a support for working families.

The lack of definition and recognition as a professional field impacts the extent to which resources are allocated and regulation is provided to ECE, as well as the perception of ECE providers as professionals.

As a result, coaches who are not experienced with the wide range of child care environments sometimes experience "culture shock" when beginning work in child care. Even experienced ECE coaches who have worked extensively with programs such as Head Start and college-based lab schools can be surprised to learn that these programs only represent a small portion of licensed child care, and that many programs have much less regulation, significantly less resources and far fewer organizational supports. This variability is a key aspect of the state of ECE.

Additional challenges facing the child care field include:

- Significant differences in regulations across program types
- Reduced funding for publicly-funded programs due to governmental budget cuts
- City, county, and state budget cuts reduce public resources such as safe public parks and accessible libraries
- Low wages and minimal, if any, health and retirement benefits
- Difficult working conditions: Long hours, few breaks (if any)
- Frequent staff turnover
- Aging workforce
- Limited literacy of workforce
- Community violence
- NIMBY ("Not in My Backyard") resistance from neighbors regarding child care
- Complex employment and funding regulations
- Immigration issues (for both child care providers and child care clients)
- High home foreclosure rates (family child care providers losing their own homes, child care programs losing clients who have to move out of the area due to foreclosure)
- Aging facilities and/or facilities not appropriate for child care
- Complex land use regulations, fire department regulations, etc.
- Limited time for professional development

The *California Early Care and Education Workforce Study*[1] provided information about the status of the ECE workforce in Alameda County. According to the demographics, the typical licensed family child care provider is in her mid-forties and has been taking care of children in her home for ten years. Child care center teachers and assistants are younger, on average, than family child care providers and have typically been on the job for less than five years. The average annual salary for a child care center's highest-paid teacher with a BA or higher degree is $34,382, nearly $16,000 less than that of the average California public school kindergarten teacher. The average wage for a center's highest-paid assistant teacher ranges from $9.28 to $11.21 per hour.

The annual ECE teacher turnover (22 percent) is twice that of California public school K–12 teachers (11 percent). The ECE assistant teacher turnover is 26 percent and director turnover is 18 percent. There is no documentation of family child care provider earnings or turnover.

California's ECE workforce is ethnically diverse, far more closely reflecting the ethnic distribution of the state's young children than K–12 public school teachers. Family child care providers and assistant teachers are more likely to be women of color than are schoolteachers, who in turn are more ethnically diverse than child care center directors. State preschools and Head Start typically employ the most ethnically diverse staff. Licensed family child care providers and assistant teachers in child care centers are more linguistically diverse than the California adult population, 64 percent of whom speak English only.[2] Close to half of the family child care providers and assistant teachers are able to communicate fluently with children and families in a language other than English. Seventy-two percent of centers have at least one teacher who can speak a language other than English.

The daily work of supporting young children and their families, though emotionally rewarding, can also be very taxing. Child care providers work with a very diverse population of children and their families, each of whom brings a unique mix of traits, values, and needs. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 37 percent of California kindergarteners speak a language other than English. Families with young children are often struggling to balance the needs of their young child(ren) with work and other family demands, as well as the impact of medical, housing, transportation, and other needs.

Additionally, many providers struggle to support children with challenging behaviors. Children may be in unstable home environments or living with caregivers who face multiple stress and risk factors such as poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health issues. These challenging home circumstances often translate to challenging behaviors in the care setting, such as tantrums, crying, fighting, biting, and inability to focus. Providers have limited time, resources, and energy to provide for children with higher needs. When these needs go unattended, the behaviors often escalate.

Given these challenges, it is not surprising that many providers operate in "crisis" mode, looking for a "quick fix" and just trying to "get by" day to day.

1. California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Providers, Statewide Highlights, July 2006. 2006. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California at Berkeley; and California Child Care Resource and Referral
Network, San Francisco, CA. http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/2006/california-early-care-and-education-workforce-study

2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS FOR CHANGE: **CLIENTS AND COACHES**

Coaching is inherently relationship-based work, and the individual characteristics of both the client and the coach can play an important role in the ultimate success of a coaching project. Without these baseline items/characteristics in place, change will be very difficult and is less likely to be sustained.

BASELINE CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS:

- Sincere Commitment to Change
  - Both the client and the other decision makers in her/his child care program **desire** change.
  - Client and her/his client's program are committed to doing the work necessary to **implement** change.
    - Able and willing to engage in self-reflection.
    - Willing to engage in collaborative problem-solving processes.
    - Able and willing to try new practices.
- Patience and Persistence
  - Understanding that sometimes there is no "quick fix" and that change may be incremental.
- Basic Resources
  - Client and child care program have basic resources, including sufficient time and programmatic flexibility, to engage in change.
  - Child care program's structure supports implementation and sustenance of change. For example, staff meetings are held at least monthly and staff is empowered to fully participate in change implementation.

BASELINE COACH CHARACTERISTICS:

- Able to work with a diversity of individuals within the same program.
  - "Diversity" includes racial and ethnic identity, personal beliefs regarding child rearing, learning needs, communication styles, language abilities, educational background, professional experience and agency position.

- Able to foster client's capacity-building.
  - Able to assume a strengths-based perspective.
  - Able to facilitate the client's own problem-solving process.
- Able to build a positive relationship while maintaining professional boundaries.
  - Able to establish credibility as a resource worthy of the client's respect and trust.
  - Able to establish and reinforce clear roles and responsibilities.
- Able to maintain a project timeline and monitor progress toward goals.
  - Able to respond creatively and strategically to unique challenges.
- Willing and able to engage in honest self-reflection about coaching progress and her/his contributions to the process.
  - Aware of her/his professional abilities.
  - Aware of her/his own biases and limitations.
  - Aware of her/his needs and able to appropriately communicate these needs.

CONSIDERING THE FIT **BETWEEN THE CLIENT AND THE COACH**

Once you have explored the client's situation, including her interests, individual characteristics and her program's ecology, you can determine whether your coaching expertise is the most appropriate fit for a particular child care program. Depending on the type of coaching you provide, you may find that positive change will be better supported if the child care program first pursues a different strategy than what you or your coaching program can offer.

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Carrie Coach has been contacted by several classrooms in three of the local school district's state-funded child development programs. All of these classrooms report a similar need: Each recently lost a teacher who was reassigned to a different campus, and the remaining children and staff are struggling with the transition. In speaking with one of the directors, Carrie learns that sudden staff transitions are a frequent practice in the school district. Another site director says, "We go through this every semester. In fact, we could keep you working here permanently just to help the staff and children deal with these constant transitions."

After eight weeks of working closely with the classrooms, Carrie is glad to hear teachers report that they and the children are making some progress. However, Carrie is mindful that the classrooms will likely face another round of transitions in a few months. Carrie wonders about the long-term impact of her work: She feels as if she is treating "symptoms" rather than the structural and policy issues that cause these frequent staff transitions. She considers whether just treating the symptoms without addressing the cause may actually do more harm than good. It is possible that the school district finds it easier to rely on Carrie's services – to have her address the consequences of the district's policies – rather than to spend time reexamining the policies. Though her work addresses an immediate need, is it also enabling the district's dysfunction? Carrie thinks about all the other non-school district child care programs that have been waiting for years for her services.

Carrie and her supervisor discuss whether the current situation is the best use of scarce coaching resources. They discuss whether they should meet with the district decision makers and explain that, in their professional opinion, the constant staff transitions are creating a continual state of crisis, and although Carrie's services can help reduce some of the negative impact, her coaching is not a solution to the problem.

Carrie's supervisor considers whom she could refer the district to if the district would like assistance in redesigning its staffing practices.

As illustrated above, coaches should carefully consider the impact of their coaching in light of the child care program's overall ecology. This may require nuanced examination of the various factors at work. Given the multiple needs of many child care programs, it is likely that the program will find some benefit from your coaching services. The question, then, is not "Will the program benefit from my coaching?", but rather "In terms of the overall ecology, will my coaching address the root causes of the issues facing the program?" This question can be challenging to answer. It requires honest reflection about the limits of one's coaching expertise, acknowledging the possibility that one may be enabling a dysfunctional situation, and facing the possibility that by recommending that a program access other resources, one may be giving up paying work.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is my ethical obligation toward a client/program?
2. How do I address my very human needs to feel competent and needed, and to have a secure position without compromising this ethical obligation?
3. In cases where I feel that a program would be better served by another coach, program, or resource with different expertise, how could I communicate this to the client/program?

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS **WITH CLIENTS**

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GETTING TO KNOW **YOUR CLIENT**

Learning about the child care program's ecology is a critical foundation for understanding your client's issues and resources. This contextual information should be joined with an equally deep familiarity with the unique personal characteristics of the provider(s) themselves.

As you begin working with your client, there are several areas you may want to explore together. Use this worksheet to track your notes.

Client's learning style

How does the client best receive and assimilate new information?	

Client's communication style

How does the client usually share her/his thoughts, questions, and opinions?	
What can the coach do to help the client feel comfortable sharing thoughts, questions and opinions?	

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Client's thoughts about partnering with an "outside" professional

What experience has the client had with coaching?	
What are the client's expectations of partnering with a coach? *-Does the client believe the coach is an expert who will solve her/his problems by telling her/him the "right way" to do things?* *-Does the client feel s/he should politely agree with everything the coach says – even if s/he disagrees or does not understand the coach?* *-Does the client feel that s/he must prove him/herself to the coach or risk being labeled unqualified?*	

Client's self-perception about her place in the ECE field

Does the provider view her work as "just a job" or as part of a life-long career in ECE?	
How does the provider refer to herself (e.g. as a "babysitter" or as a "professional educator/caregiver")	

Client's personal beliefs about what young children need, how adults should support children, and the role of ECE in society

How do the client's personal beliefs inform her/his visions for what changes she/he would like to make with the coach's support?	

CULTURAL HUMILITY **IN COACHING**

Cultural humility as a service philosophy is based on the recognition that the diverse, multidimensional cultural identities and backgrounds of children and families make traditional notions of "cultural competence" unrealistic. Rather than striving to reach a discrete end point of *competence* in the complex interplay of racial, ethnic, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, religious, education, health, and citizenship status (to name just a few of the many cultural dimensions) presented by each family and child in child care, First 5 Alameda County's ECE coaching approach embraces the principles of *cultural humility*.

Coaching with cultural humility requires an active engagement in the process of lifelong learning from all clients, coworkers, colleagues, communities, and organizations. This lifelong learning includes self-reflection, client and community collaborations, and institutional consistency, all of which support these principles at the level of policy and practice.

Coaching with cultural humility also underscores the partnership between the coach and her/his client: As a partner, a coach learns about her/his client's unique perspectives and mix of cultures, and what that mix means to that individual client. A coach who shares many of the cultural *influences* as her/his client does not assume that the client shares a similar *perspective*, but instead creates opportunities for the client to share her/his own values and views through the coaching partnership.

"STRENGTHS-BASED" **APPROACH TO COACHING**

The strength based approach "...operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. Traditional teaching and professional development models concentrate on deficit-based approaches, ignoring the strengths and experiences of the participants. In a strengths-based approach the focus is on the individual's assets. This approach does not ignore problems. Instead it shifts the frame of reference to define the issues. By focusing on what is working well, successful solution-oriented strategies can be developed to address challenges."[1]

Working from a strengths-based stance emphasizes the identification of a client's assets, which can be employed to make positive change. Strengths-based work empowers the client to draw on her/his internal resources and program's strengths to navigate through current challenges, and builds her/his capacity to lead through future situations.

Both new and experienced coaches can struggle to consistently operate from a strengths-based perspective. You may find that challenges and deficits are the first things you notice, particularly if the client is deficit-focused. It may take intentional effort to find the strengths within that same situation. The more often you walk yourself through an intentional examination of areas of potential strengths, the more this perspective will naturally integrate into your work.

Practice, knowledge of potential challenges, and continuous self-reflection can help you build this strengths-based approach into your daily work. Keep in mind that even seasoned coaches can fall back into a deficit perspective, so it is helpful to periodically revisit your approach to situations.

APPLYING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH: POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Self-reflection is an important tool toward building your strengths-based perspective. Knowing your own potential challenges around strengths-based work allows you to plan your work to avoid or minimize the negative impact of those challenges. Below are some issues that some coaches have faced as they attempt a strengths-based approach.

Shock at the level of need. This may occur at your initial visits. If a client's or program's needs are greater than you anticipated, you may find it difficult to take in the whole picture.

Fear. Some need(s) may feel particularly dire, and may instantly engage your emotions. For example, if you fear that the program's needs may result in serious harm to a child, you may feel a surge of protective feelings and urgency. In these moments, it is vitally important that you follow your agency's reporting procedures to ensure your legal and ethical obligations are met. Though challenging, it is possible to maintain a strengths-based perspective even while engaging the appropriate legal and oversight mechanisms.

Additionally, many coaches struggle with the fear that they won't be able to help effectively address a site's needs, and are concerned that this will reflect poorly on their perception as an effective coach.

1. http://lifeworkslearning.com/html/philosophy.html downloaded 3.14.11

Anger. Some needs may engage a sense of outrage, which can take several forms: How could the program subject children/families/providers to such dire challenges? Why do you have to be the one to address them? Why isn't the client moving faster to address these needs?

Ego. Most of us enjoy the feeling of being able to help another; this feeling can boost our feelings of efficacy and worth. In pursuit of this feeling, a coach may unconsciously conceive of the client in a degraded position of need, and position her/himself as the expert and "savior."

Conflict Avoidance: In an effort to maintain a positive relationship with a client, the coach may focus only on strengths and avoid pointing out or pursuing problemating issues. Maintaining a strengths-based stance does not preclude dealing with areas of challenge and contentious topics.

Despair. You may feel that the depth and complexity of need is so great that an effort to improve the situation is doomed to fail. If you are feeling this, you may find it difficult to complete the coaching process and resort to "going through the motions." A coach's despair can be contagious, as clients can sense her/his lack of confidence in achieving any significant success.

It is very important to remember that having these reactions can be a normal part of the coaching process. If not identified and addressed, these reactions can undermine the building of a collaborative relationship with your clients. However, when handled appropriately, these reactions can help fuel your work and focus your commitment to the change process.

SUPPORTS

The more aware you are of these potential pitfalls, the less likely you will become stuck in one. However, it is not always easy to perceive your own thoughts, particularly when they are attached to strong emotions. Peer and supervisory supports can be invaluable in this process, providing you with an objective yet empathetic venue and structure for your own thinking about these situations. It is important that you have ongoing access to someone who can help you honestly process these feelings.

Reflective journaling can also help you acknowledge and examine the mix of feelings and emotions you experience. Writing down your thoughts, unedited, can provide you with an outlet to express your anger, fear, etc., while creating an opportunity for you to review – on paper – the various issues that arise. Like supportive supervisors and peers, journals can also provide an historical perspective: Over time, you may notice certain patterns and be able to identify certain events or situations that "push your buttons."

Remember, the goal is not to eliminate these feelings, but to channel the energy they produce into constructive modes that fuel your coaching work.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Thinking about your own work, what are some other potential challenges you might encounter?
2. What are some supports that could help you make constructive use of your reactions?

90 SECONDS – REACT!
REFLECTIVE EXERCISES

Examining our own reactions and thought processes can be a bit tricky – in daily life we are often required to move immediately from thought to action, without much consideration of our assumptions and emotions, and how they are influencing our perceptions. Becoming aware of one's own reactions and thoughts, prior to acting, can take practice.

In this exercise, you will imagine that you are a coach who encounters each of the following scenarios.

1. Read the first scenario.
2. Quickly jot down your first, unedited thoughts and feelings as you have them. You can write phrases or single words – whatever captures your raw feelings. You have 90 seconds to do this.
3. Once the 90 seconds have passed, review your notes. Think about what you wrote:
   a. Where are these thoughts coming from?
   b. How does your reaction to what you observed impact your opinion of your client?
4. In moving forward with this situation:
   a. What questions do you have for yourself?
   b. What have you learned about yourself that you will want to monitor as you work with your client?
   c. What questions do you have for your client?
5. Repeat these steps with the second scenario.

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90 SECONDS – REACT! SCENARIO #1

While you are visiting a child care program, you observe three-year-old Sara crying inconsolably after another child took her doll, which Sara had been holding for most of the day. You hear the head teacher say to the assistant, "Sara can be such a spoiled brat! You can tell she is an only child. In here she had better learn how to share her toys."

Your unedited reactions/thoughts:

90 SECONDS – REACT! SCENARIO #2

At your client's request, you have agreed to arrange a site visit for your client to observe how a similar program is addressing some of the issues his program is facing. Over the course of the next two weeks you spend several hours identifying a list of potential sites; confirming dates and times that work for you, your client, and the model site; coordinating the parent approval; and obtaining a small thank-you gift for the model site.

At today's meeting, you provide your client with a small packet of materials that you compiled to prepare him for the visit. Your client puts the packet aside, saying he decided that he is too busy to visit anybody else's program and that he has already scheduled a different meeting during the scheduled site visit.

Your unedited reactions/thoughts:

RESPONDING TO CRISES **AT ECE SITES**

ECE providers are used to working in challenging and stressful environments. Programs may be short-staffed, dealing with budget issues, or managing challenging behaviors in the classroom. However, sometimes providers are faced with a crisis situation – an overwhelmingly negative and potentially traumatic event that impacts a large number of the children and/or staff. During these times, providers may need additional supports and services to address the specific incident or trauma.

Examples of crisis situations include:

- Death of a teacher, child, parent, or family member
- Serious illness or injury of a teacher, child, parent, or family member
- Sudden and unexpected departure of a teacher or child (teacher fired, child pulled from child care center)
- Extreme vandalism or burglary at site
- Fire at site
- Violence at or near site
- Closure of a site

It is important that a coach be aware not only of her/his role in these situations, but also of additional resources that providers may need and how to access these resources. The following are some guiding questions that may be helpful for coaches to consider when working with a site experiencing a significant crisis.

- What is your role in this situation?
- What are the needs of the site? Of particular individuals? How do these needs impact your work with the site?
- What are your next steps in working with the site?
  - Should/Can you continue to provide the services you have been providing? Given its current situation, will the site benefit from these services?
  - Should/Can you change the services that you provide to this site?
- What additional services or accommodations are you able to provide? What are you not able to provide?
- What resources can you offer to the site?
- What follow-up might you need to provide?

SPECIFIC
COACHING TECHNIQUES

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING AND **SUPPORTING COACHING SKILLS**

Many coaching programs provide minimal training and support for their coaches, and what training is provided is often focused on *content* (e.g. developmentally appropriate child care practices, assessment tools, the importance of partnering with parents), rather than *the process* of effectively communicating content so that it is truly integrated into the client's program.

What can happen when you don't take the time to build these coaching skills and provide coaches with ongoing feedback and support? The two most common results are *inaction* and *ineffective action.*

There are a variety of situations that can lead to inaction or ineffective action:

1. The coach and the client build a commiserating relationship that actually fosters and reinforces the client's sense of victimization and/or powerlessness.
2. The coach and the client's communication styles or inflexibility prevent them from coming to agreement on any issues.
3. The coach and the client build a strong rapport and – in a desire to keep the relationship going – are not motivated to solve the issue, which would end the partnership.
4. The coach and the client are both invested in maintaining a pleasant relationship, so steer away from controversial topics.
5. The coach is intimidated by the client, so does not point out the client's challenges. Coaching ends without tough issues being addressed, and the client assumes that her/his skills are now validated. The client is implicitly encouraged to continue her/his actions.
6. The client feels intimidated by the coach, so does not feel comfortable raising questions or expressing a different opinion. The client may agree to and implement all of the coaches recommendations but immediately reverts back to her original practices after coaching concludes.
7. The coach does not have the necessary content knowledge, so makes inappropriate recommendations.
8. The coach feels overwhelmed by the multitude of issues and – instead of identifying the root cause(s) – focuses coaching on more trivial, "symptomatic" issues.

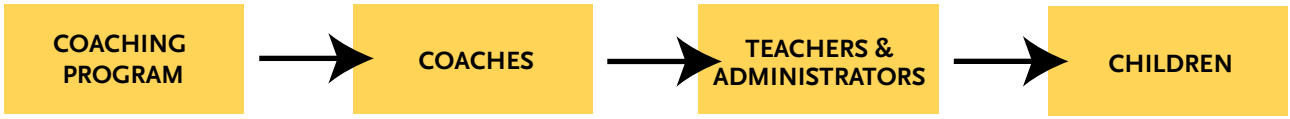
RECOMMENDED **COACHING SUPPORTS**

We have discussed the complex, multilevel ecosystem of child care and the importance of building and maintaining a flexible yet focused approach to fit its realities. While this constant exploration and adaptation makes coaching particularly exciting and engaging work, it can also be quite draining without proper support.

"You Can't Give What You Don't Have"

We believe that child care providers are able to provide more responsive care to children when there is a structure in place for providers to reflect on their practice and receive useful feedback and recognition from their supervisors. If providers are given opportunities and support to expand their creativity and develop their skills, they are better able to support the growth and creativity of the children they serve. The same is true for coaches: When a coach has a safe place to discuss her/his work and reflect upon coaching strategies and techniques, her/his coaching practice will be more effective.

Support given to coaches allows them to support providers who, in turn, are better able to serve children. We refer to this continuum as a *Parallel System of Support*.



Below are a few suggestions for the types of supports coaching programs might want to consider:

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION

Coaches benefit from support from a supervisor who has extensive knowledge about the child care program types being served and the principles and practices of effective child care coaching, and who also has experience providing coaching. Coaches and supervisors should meet regularly to provide the coach opportunities to discuss the specifics of the sites with which they are working, and reflect upon the coaching strategies they are using and their progress toward positive change. In addition to offering feedback and helping brainstorm additional strategies to use with specific sites, supervisors can provide vital support to the coach's own thought process in two key ways:

- **Opportunity to process emotional responses.** Confidential discussions with a knowledgeable, experienced supervisor provide a safe, nonjudgmental place for the coach to discuss her/his emotions about a particular site or client, and to explore how these emotions may be impacting her/his coaching practice.
- **Opportunity to expand thinking.** Although the supervisor will not have detailed knowledge of each of the coach's sites, the supervisor can ask questions that prompt the coach to fully consider the site's ecology.

PEER GROUP SUPPORT

Coaches can spend much of their work hours onsite, providing services, which may limit opportunities for meeting with other coaches. Regular meetings with colleagues provides coaches with the opportunity to share coaching strategies, techniques, and community resources. These meetings may also provide a venue for professional development to take place. In order for these meetings to be most effective, there should be a designated facilitator to provide structure to the discussion and ground rules should be established, covering issues such as confidentiality and providing a safe place for open conversation to take place.

ONGOING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There should be opportunities available for coaches to participate in ongoing training and professional development. Because ECE coaching is complex and challenging work, coaches often benefit from ongoing training on different coaching approaches and techniques. Periodic updates on relevant ECE content might also be helpful for the coaches to remain current in the field so that they can provide new resources to their clients.

ELECTRONIC LISTSERV

This is a cost-efficient and accessible way to offer coaches the ability to share ideas and resources with each other, both on an ongoing basis and across larger geographic areas. With this particular method of support, there should be clear confidentiality policies in place that govern who has access to the listserv and what information can be shared electronically.

SAMPLE REFELCTIVE CONVERSATION: COACHING SUPERVISOR AND A COACH

Coach: *"I am very concerned about the participation level of my site. The teachers continue to show up late for meetings and don't seem to be engaged when they are present."*

Supervisor: *"Have you had the opportunity to check in with them about the overall process and how they feel it's going?"*

Coach: *"The last time we discussed the process was a few months ago, after our intense discussions about the program's strengths and challenges. At that time everyone agreed that the discussions had been tough, but were necessary, and quite a few teachers expressed their excitement that this time things might really change. We haven't had the chance to reflect on how things are going since we have been so pressed for time to get through the items on the Action Plan."*

Supervisor: *"What do you think would happen if you took some time with your site to reflect on goals of the coaching process, and if they have any thoughts on how the process is going?"*

Coach: *"I'm not sure I will get a completely honest response – the teachers are always very polite when they speak to me, so they might be afraid to tell me if they're unhappy about something I've said or done. Or maybe they just aren't interested. I really would like to know, though, if there is something wrong. I don't think we will accomplish much without everyone's participation."*

Supervisor: *"I wonder if there might be other possibilities, too – for example, could there be unanticipated new demands on their time? Have you noticed any patterns in their involvement?"*

Coach: *"They seemed so excited at first, and now they seem to be dragging their feet. I did notice things start to change when we started assigning names to tasks on the Action Plan. I expected the director to be more involved based on her initial enthusiasm. But she was just elected to her school board and she has been missing our meetings to attend the emergency school budget meetings. I wonder if the staff feel like the director signed them up for this quality improvement process, but now they have to do all the work without her."*

Supervisor: *"That is interesting. That certainly could be a factor. I wonder also if the teachers are hearing more about the dire budget situation because of her involvement and how that might impact them."*

Coach: *"The director definitely seems much more stressed overall, and she did say once in one of our group meetings that the budget is so much worse than anyone anticipated, and that there would have to be drastic cuts across the district. You could feel the anxiety pass through the room when she said that."*

Supervisor: *"It sounds like there are quite a few possibilities for what might be happening with the teachers. Perhaps together we can think of some ways you might be able to get some honest responses about how the teachers are feeling about the process."*

SPECIFIC
COACHING TECHNIQUES

Skilled coaches employ techniques as needed, constantly adapting strategies to take the demands and environment of the moment in stride, while maintaining a clear vision of the intended goal. Consequently, there is no exact "recipe" of which techniques to use and when. However, there are general areas that seem to be better served by some techniques.

The following pages provide a brief overview of basic techniques that are often used in coaching:

- Observation and Feedback
- Modeling
- Small Group Training
- Videos and Tours
- Facilitated Small Group Discussion

OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK

What is it? The client performs a specific activity while the coach observes. After the activity concludes, the coach engages in a private discussion with the client and elicits the client's views of how the activity went, and shares her/his perspective on what s/he observed. The coach offers suggestions of different ways specific aspects of the activity could be implemented, and helps trouble-shoot any issues the client raises.

Example: *After observing a teacher's circle time, a coach will often provide feedback during a private one-to-one discussion with the teacher. This discussion is a frank conversation about what worked and what was challenging.*

How is this technique helpful?

- Provides the opportunity to go in-depth with one client on specific issues.
- Creates the opportunity for a client to share personal feelings, concerns, fears with the proposed changes, or other challenges that s/he is facing.
- Provides the opportunity to learn more about an individual client's understanding of the work so far, her/his conception of the future work to be done, etc.

Points to keep in mind

- A client may not feel comfortable speaking one-on-one and may prefer the comfort of a group.
- Conversely, a client may crave individualized attention, and may use this opportunity to vent about issues in her/his private life that may not be directly relevant to the issue at hand.
- Other clients may become concerned about what is being discussed in your individual conversations.
- Before starting the discussion, the coach should be clear about which issues can be kept confidential and which issues may need to be shared with others.

MODELING

What it is: A coach demonstrates, in the client's setting, how to perform a specific task or engage in an activity. If appropriate, the coach may narrate her/his actions or verbalize her/his thoughts as s/he goes through the demonstration. The client observes the coach's actions and, either during or after the demonstration, engages in a conversation about what the client saw and any questions the demonstration raised for her/him.

Example: *In discussing literacy practices that promote children's learning, a coach may read a book to a child in the client's program, specifically demonstrating the practice of asking open-ended questions. The client will sit near the coach and child, observing both the coach's actions and the child's reactions. The coach may occasionally address the client, to draw her/his attention to a particular aspect of how the coach is holding the book in relation to the child, explain why she is allowing the child to choose her own book, etc.*

How is this technique helpful?

- Modeling is particularly helpful when presenting a very new concept or a complex practice.

Points to keep in mind

- Discuss the purpose and process of modeling before engaging in it and ascertain that the client is comfortable with this strategy.
- Ideally, model the practice more than once.
- Encourage client to reflect on what s/he observed.
- Encourage client to be critical of what you did.

SMALL GROUP TRAINING

What it is: A mix of lecture, audiovisual materials, and interactive activities organized around the principles of adult learning, and led by one or two "trainers" for up to 20 attendees.

Example: *A Health and Safety coach may lead a group of ten teachers through a presentation on the importance and principles of effective infection control, and then engage the attendees in an activity where they practice safe diapering on plastic dolls.*

How is this technique helpful?

- Imparting theoretical or abstract principles such as theories of child development.
- Provides opportunities for peer support in grasping complex concepts.
- Provides the opportunity to go in-depth on a single topic
- Provides opportunity for a "pretend" practice (e.g., role-playing, practicing on dolls, etc.) away from classroom.
- Creates the opportunity for team building.

Points to keep in mind

- Used sparingly, trainings can be an effective way to provide the theoretical context for recommended practices.
- Trainings can help ensure that everyone involved shares a baseline level of knowledge and a shared understanding of basic concepts.

VIDEOS AND TOURS

What are they? Commercial DVDs, internet videos, or "homemade" video clips, as well as onsite tours that provide images of the practices being discussed.

Example: *A tour of local family child care homes can provide multiple visual examples of how an appropriate caregiving environment can be set up within a family home.*

How is this technique helpful?

- Can provide a visual example of theories in actual practice.
- Can also provide shared fodder for discussion, with the comfort of being a third-party observer.
- Can demonstrate the many ways the same concept can be implemented in different settings.

Points to keep in mind

- Tours require planning and coordination, including identifying and scheduling demonstration sites.
- Although two people may see the same event, they can come away with different impressions. Allow time for discussion after the video or tour to share what participants observed and to explore their thoughts about what they saw.
- Whenever possible, find videos or arrange tours of sites that are similar to your client's program. For example, if a video or tour consists only of sites or agencies that have many more resources than your client's site – or serves a different population than your client's program – your clients may question whether the new practices could work in their program.

FACILITATED SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What is it? A coach facilitates a discussion among two to five program staff members.

Example: *In addressing a program's desire to improve communication with parents, a coach may facilitate a triad discussion among a lead teacher, an assistant teacher, and the program director. The coach ensures that the conversation stays on topic, engages all of the participants, and progresses toward the intended outcome.*

How is this technique helpful?

- Provides the opportunity for teams and close colleagues to delve into issues in more depth.
- Creates the opportunity for colleagues to learn more about each other's perspectives on the issue.
- Creates the opportunity to overcome communication challenges to get at the "heart of the matter."
- Provides the opportunity for colleagues to listen, with focused attention, to each other.
- Creates a safe space for shy or quiet individuals to share their perspectives and be fully heard.
- Creates the opportunity to develop collaborative solutions.

Points to keep in mind

- Organizational hierarchies and power issues can still be present, even in dyadic (two-person) discussions.
- Small group discussions can devolve into complaint sessions, focused only on commiseration and blaming of staff who are not present.
- Some clients may find it difficult to openly and honestly discuss their concerns with their colleagues, especially if their concerns include a colleague who is present. You will need to monitor this and provide support as needed.
- Some clients may find it difficult to openly and honestly discuss their concerns about their own performance, skills, and beliefs in front of others.

DISCUSSION **FACILITATION**

Merriam-Webster defines the word facilitate as "to make easier: help bring about." This definition is helpful when we think about client-centered coaching in ECE settings, where there are multiple roads to quality improvement and various approaches for educating and caring for young children (i.e., there is no one solution or single "right way"). In client-centered coaching, the coach's role is often one of a facilitator, making it easier for the client to envision a solution to a particular problem and what it will take to bring about positive change.

Working as a coach in a child care setting may involve working with providers individually, and/or with a group of providers and administrators. For example, you may facilitate a discussion with the group to prioritize goals for improvement and strategies to reach these goals. Each provider and administrator may have very different ideas of what issues have priority and how best to implement change once the goals are selected. In this situation, your role is to not only lead the discussion, but also to ensure that the discussion is staying on track and progressing, and to encourage participation by all group participants.

When a coach is engaged in this type of group facilitation, the following skills will contribute to success:

Set and Maintain Ground Rules

Prior to beginning the discussion, the coach should help clients develop a list of key ground rules for participation. Once consensus is reached on the rules, the coach may emphasize that the group is responsible for helping each other keep within the rules.

Remain Neutral

The coach should remain neutral during discussions, being conscious of her/his own biases and values and ensuring that these biases do not lead the group in a particular direction. The coach should be aware of any "hidden agendas" s/he may have when doing this work and should not allow her/his own agenda to influence the group dynamic or decision-making process. Also, when there is disagreement within the group, the coach should be sure not to take a particular side, but to focus attention on guiding the group toward a mutual understanding and agreement.

Stay On Track

The role of the coach is to ensure that the group is clear about the goal of a particular discussion or meeting, and that the group remains on track toward reaching its pre-identified goal. This involves developing and agreeing upon an agenda both before the meeting and during the meeting, and adhering to a specified time frame for particular agenda items. This may require that the coach move the group to the next agenda item when the discussion is over the time limit, or allow the group to adapt the agenda to allow for more time.

Summarize

When there are many different viewpoints presented in a discussion and it is unclear if the group has reached an agreement and/or consensus, it is helpful for the coach to summarize what has been discussed and then ask the group to confirm if the summary is accurate. Summarizing enables the group to better follow what has happened, as well as remind everyone of any decisions/action items that have been made. It also assists the group in reaching consensus. For example, when there are conflicting viewpoints within the group, the coach might summarize each viewpoint for the group and ask the group to list the pros and cons. This helps everyone remember what was discussed and provides the group an
opportunity for deeper analysis of the issues presented.

Reflect on Group Dynamics

In order for the coach to ensure that the group participants are participating equally within the group and that all viewpoints are represented, the coach should be particularly attentive to the group's dynamics. There are a variety of factors that may influence the dynamics of a group, including: the power differential between supervisors and their staff, gender, culture, age, and personality differences. Coaches should listen carefully to the conversations taking place and closely observe not only who is speaking and who isn't, but also the nonverbal language of the group.

Encourage Participation

The coach must first be aware of who in the group is participating and if some are sharing more than others. If the coach does observe that there is an issue, s/he should formulate a plan to address it. There are various techniques that can be used to encourage participation, including small group discussions, written feedback, and asking that everyone in the room comment on a particular topic or issue. Encouraging participation might also require that the coach give "equal air time" to the clients. For example, if the coach notices that one participant is doing most of the talking, the coach might quickly summarize what s/he is saying and then move onto another individual's comment.

Question

One of a coach's most important skills in ensuring productive facilitation is to ask effective questions of the group or of an individual. Questions can be used to clarify what has already been said. To further encourage critical thinking and enrich the group's deliberations, the facilitator may also use questioning to challenge the group to delve deeper into a particular issue.

Listen

Active listening is crucial to employing all of the skills listed above. For example, the coach must follow the conversation and/or comments carefully in order to summarize what has been said. S/he must also actively listen, in order to formulate appropriate questions. Active listening requires that the coach remain focused throughout the conversation, not simply hearing what the individual is saying, but also analyzing what is being said. When the coach truly understands what s/he has heard, s/he will be able to relate the comment to what others in the group have said and determine areas of conflict. Without active listening from the coach, the success of the group may be impeded. If the coach fails to truly grasp what is being said, s/he will find it almost impossible to assist the group in coming to a consensus, and to identify action items for the group.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A **COACHING PROCESS**

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BUILDING BLOCKS:
ORIENTATION TO THE PROCESS

The introductory period, or entry process, sets the tone and expectations for the coach's work with a client. Although it can be tempting to just "dive in" to the work, experience has shown that carving out time for an introductory discussion can make a critical difference in the development of an effective coaching relationship.

We strongly recommend that coaching begin with an introductory meeting, in which the sole focus is getting to know each other, clarifying goals and expectations, and honestly sharing any questions or concerns. This meeting ideally takes place in person, but could also be conducted over the phone. As with all conversations, it is helpful to follow up with a written acknowledgement of any decisions made in the conversation.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- It is common for clients to have some level of anxiety or uncertainty about your work together. This may be the first time the client has had an outside individual spend a significant amount of time observing and offering feedback regarding her/his work and/or program. In other cases, a client may have had negative experiences with consultation. By acknowledging potential concerns from the outset, you will be able to alleviate some of these fears. The introductory meeting, where providers are encouraged to offer their past experiences with receiving feedback or working with a coach, will hopefully elicit some of the client's concerns.
- The client might assume that this is an "expert" consultation model where the coach will provide opinions and advice based on her/his expertise. Although the coach will be sharing expertise, equal emphasis will be placed on the client's perspective and knowledge. This orientation provides an opportunity to emphasize that the provider will be an **active** participant throughout the coaching process – encouraged to reflect on his/her practice and develop strategies to address identified challenges.
- It is important to reemphasize that change often takes time and effort, and that it is vital that the client is able to fully commit to the process.

REAL-LIFE ENTRY PROCESS SCENARIO

Entry process: You receive a coaching request from a service agency director. The director would like you to find a mentor for Ellen, a parent volunteer coordinator who "just doesn't understand that yelling at these overworked parents doesn't work." The director states that she has told Ellen several times to stop yelling, but "she doesn't seem to get the message." The director recently heard about your coaching program and hopes you can assign Ellen a coach who will "be able to get through to her."

1. What are your next steps?
2. What issues will you consider?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What information do I want to know about my client(s)?
   a. Did the client seek out coaching, or is coaching being assigned?
   b. Has the client had previous experience with coaching? If so, how did that go? What did the client like? Dislike?
   c. Why is the client in this profession or position? What does the client like about it? What does s/he find challenging?
   d. What is the relationship between the client's position and the rest of the agency? What is the decision-making process?
   e. How long has the client been with the agency? What does s/he perceive as strengths? Challenges?
   f. What does the client hope to get out of coaching? What are her/his concerns?
   g. What would "success" look like to the client?
2. What information would be helpful for my client(s) to know about me?
3. What information would be helpful for my client(s) to know about the coaching process?
4. What questions or concerns might my client(s) have about me, my agency, or the coaching process?
5. What are some ways I can ask for information, or answer questions, that will convey respect and a desire for honest and open communication?
6. What questions and/or concerns do I have? What would be the most strategic way to approach these issues?

BUILDING BLOCKS:
CLIENT-DRIVEN IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS, STRENGTHS, AND NEEDS

Conducting a thorough needs/resource assessment is a key way to gather more information about a program's challenges and resources, and to place these factors in their unique context prior to attempting change. This process can uncover unexpected resources and potential pitfalls before time and energy is invested in what may seem, at first glance, to be the most obvious "solution." The information gathered in this process will inform the goals and strategies developed in the subsequent action plan.

For a client to be a true partner in the change process, s/he should be fully engaged in the needs assessment process. However, many service providers are unfamiliar with how to engage in needs/resource assessments and structured reflection practices. This process can feel particularly foreign for providers who work in busy settings with large caseloads and multiple demands, and who are forced to spend much of their day reacting to events rather than reflecting on and planning them. Because needs/resource assessment is a fundamental strategy to gain information, it is worth the investment of time and resources to build this skill with your client(s). Mastering these skills increases providers' internal capacity to address problems even after your coaching partnership concludes.

Information about many ECE issues, including program structure, program environment and materials, program curriculum, teacher/child/parent relations, and health and safety practices can be gathered through planned observation. The scope of the observation depends on the issue under consideration. For example, if the client has a concern about a specific issue – such as how to better conduct an intake process for families – observation will likely be limited to that specific practice. Larger issues, such as how to better serve diverse families, will require a more global perspective and significantly more observation.

An overall goal of observation and assessment is to come to a common understanding of the program and its functions, to identify strengths and challenges, and to inform the development and implementation of improvement strategies.

When done well, observations and assessments can be very helpful in identifying key issues, their contributing factors, and their context. When done haphazardly, they can miss critical pieces of information or even be misleading.

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Carrie Coach learns from the director of Sunny Days Preschool that parents have been complaining about how some of the teachers communicate with them during pick-up time. Carrie thinks it would be helpful if she could observe the teachers "in action" and asks the director to set up time for Carrie to observe the teachers one afternoon during pick-up. The director agrees and follows up with an email letting Carrie know that she can come by Thursday afternoon and observe the teachers in the Zebras classroom.

On Thursday, Carrie arrives at the center fifteen minutes early so she can set up. As she walks into the Zebras class, Teresa, the Zebras' lead teacher, is walking out. Teresa smiles but seems surprised to see Carrie, saying, "I thought we weren't meeting until next week?" Carrie explains that she is here to observe the end-of-day routine. Teresa says, "It would have been nice if someone had told me that you were coming. Give me a minute to tell the other teachers." Carrie watches as Teresa calls the teachers together and whispers to them. Carrie can't hear what is being said, but she does notice two of the teachers look over at her with anxious looks on their faces. After talking with the teachers, Teresa pulls out a chair near the middle of the classroom

Shortly after Carrie sets up, a father arrives to pick up his daughter. From Carrie's seat, she can easily see the doorway where he is standing. However, her chair is far enough from the door that she can't really hear his conversation with Teresa. At one point Carrie notices him looking in her direction, and hears Teresa say something about "she is here to see how things are going with the children." Meanwhile, a mother arrives and steps past Teresa into the classroom. She appears to be in a hurry, but she and her daughter seem to know the sign-out routine. As the mom and her daughter turn to head out the door, they seem surprised when one of the teachers runs across the classroom and proclaims rather loudly, "Come on in! I'd like to share with you what we did today in class." Judging by the mom's reaction, Carrie gets the feeling that this is not something the mom expected.

OBSERVATIONS: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Some assessments may employ observation of staff practices and interactions with children, parents, other staff, and the physical environment. The following are some questions to consider when using this form of assessment.

Coach's Observation

- What information do I want to get from an observation?
  - Why am I observing? What information do I need?
  - Who (staff, parents, children) will be informed about the observation? Who informs them? How are they informed?
  - What will I be observing? The program? The staff?
  - When will I be observing? What days and times?
  - Where will I observe? All parts of the site? Where will I sit?
  - How will I observe? Will I interact with staff, children, or parents if they approach me?
  - Is there an appropriate tool to guide my observations?
    - Am I comfortable with the tool?
    - Does the observation tool take into account the needs, structure, and the children and families of the provider's site?
    - How will this tool help me? What might this tool miss?

- How will my clients feel while being observed? Are they familiar with observation?
- How will I handle requests from the provider's agency to view my observation notes?
- Will parents and/or children be observed? If so, what protocols are needed to protect them, or to get their consent?

▸ When will be the best time for me to observe?

- Which would be the better way to get the information I need: a series of brief observations? Or one longer observation (three hours or more)?

Client's Observation

▸ What information should be gathered from the client's observation?

- Is there an appropriate tool to guide the client observation?
- Is the tool accessible for the client (e.g., language and literacy level)?
- Is there a need to conduct a training for the client, either on how to conduct an observation, or on the specific observation tool selected?

BUILDING BLOCKS: **FACILITATED DISCUSSION AND STRATEGIZING**

Observations and information gathered by the coach and client(s) are shared through focused and honest discussion aimed at reaching authentic consensus on needs, resources, and quality improvement goals. The coach provides structure for this process by facilitating perspective-sharing and discussion, ensuring that client(s) are actively engaged in the discussion and noting areas of consensus and areas of disagreement.

This facilitated discussion has the potential to provide a rich resource of insights and perspectives on the issues at hand. In many programs, this discussion may be the first opportunity that longtime colleagues have had to delve into an issue in a collaborative setting. This process can be powerful for the creation of a shared understanding of the issue and its contributing factors, all of which foster a sense of teamwork that will be essential in changing practices.

This process is often intense, and there are some potential points and pitfalls to keep in mind as you prepare for the discussion:

- Clients may not always feel comfortable sharing their honest observations for a variety of reasons, including fear of angering or embarrassing a superior and/or the desire to protect colleagues' feelings.
- If a "scored" assessment tool was used (such as the Harms-Clifford Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales), focus should be placed on discussing observations rather than actual assessment scores. It is important to not get bogged down in the particulars of the scoring process, but rather to emphasize the content and rationale behind the assessment indicators.
- Strong facilitation is essential for an effective discussion of observations. Be sure to use open-ended questions to encourage reflection and to summarize themes or agreements for the group.
- Monitor your own urge to "jump in" and provide a solution. Strategies for addressing the identified challenges will come later when developing the Action Plan.

- It is highly unlikely that everyone will agree with each other on every issue. However, clients may be reluctant to acknowledge this. If necessary and appropriate, share your observation of any conceptual conflicts that emerge throughout the discussion. If conflicts are not addressed, genuine consensus might not be reached, which could inhibit the improvement process. In other words, if staff does not agree with a challenge that has been identified, they may be less likely to follow through with a plan to address it.
- When disagreement occurs and remains despite discussion, you may want to note all the divergent points of view and revisit them when developing the Action Plan.
- Pay attention to how clients use key words and concepts. Does everyone have a shared understanding of these words and concepts? If not, help the group come to a consensus on definitions.
- Periodically sum up the discussion points raised so far. This will help keep the discussion on track.
- Observe the group dynamics: Are some participants more vocal than others? Are some voices missing? What might account for this? Are there ways you can safely encourage quieter clients to join in more?

AFTER THE DISCUSSION: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Did the client(s) actively participate in the discussion? If not, how might you encourage more discussion at the next meeting?
2. Did you observe any particular power dynamics within the group? If so, how might these dynamics influence the change process?
3. Did you feel the group reached genuine consensus? In other words, were all of the clients in agreement with all of the strengths and challenges identified?
4. How comfortable were the client(s) with reflecting on her/his agency and/or work? If the client(s) were not particularly comfortable, how might you encourage more reflection and/or analysis at the next meeting?

BUILDING BLOCKS:
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTION PLAN

The goals developed through facilitated discussion form the foundation for the adaptive Action Plan, which guides the coach and client(s)' work together. During this stage, the overall program improvement goals are finalized and strategies to attain these goals are identified. The client determines who will be responsible for implementing the strategies, and when they will be complete. In order for the Action Plan to be an effective tool for quality improvement, it is crucial that all individuals who may be involved in implementing it are included in its development, and that they agree upon the identified goals and strategies.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- The Action Plan will be the tool used to guide and document your client's quality improvement efforts for the duration of the coaching process.
- Developing the Action Plan is a collaborative process. Together, you'll identify goals and strategies to address challenges.
- Goals should be broad, while strategies will be more specific.
- The Action Plan should be a fluid document. Strategies and dates may change throughout implementation.
- Goals and strategies should be feasible and attainable.
- Goals and strategies should be prioritized based on the highest need and/or ability to implement the change.
- You may want to consider prioritizing some items that can be accomplished quickly. This can reinforce clients' feelings of efficacy and inspire them as they work on longer-term strategies.

BUILDING BLOCKS: **SUPPORTED IMPLEMENTATION**

As the client begins to implement the Action Plan, the coach provides technical assistance and support for reflection and adaptation.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- The time allocated for implementation support activities will likely vary based on program needs.
  - Limited-issue coaching may be completed in as little as a few weeks.
  - Coaching that addresses systemic issues and practices will likely require **at least** a few months.
- After the Action Plan is developed, the level of support needed for each item will be more evident. However, keep in mind that this may change as some items are resolved more quickly than anticipated, while addressing others may uncover deeper, longer-term issues.
- Change support activities will likely include the following components:
  - Discussion
  - Hands-on activities
  - Observation and feedback
  - Group training
  - Written and video materials
  - Referral to other resources
  - Ongoing reflection
  - Encouragement and support with problem-solving
- Consider maintaining a coaching journal. After each implementation visit, note what issues were worked on, what methods were used, what worked, and what remains to be addressed. Also, note any reflections, thoughts, hunches, and questions you have. This information will be very helpful to review periodically. Keep in mind that you do not want to track every mundane detail, but that the more substantive information you record after each visit, the better prepared you will be for the next visit.

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO - IMPLEMENTATION

1. Today you receive a phone message from a child care provider who was eager to have a coach assist her in setting up her outdoor environment. You and the provider have talked over the phone and have met once, at the provider's home. The provider's phone message to you is short and to the point: "I don't need you to come to my program again – I don't think it's going to work out. Thanks anyway."

    1. What are your next steps?

    2. What issues will you consider?

2. You have been asked to assist an agency in adopting a new service model, which will require extensive staff development. As part of your entry process, you observe a staff training that was led by the agency's staff development manager, who has provided staff training for his agency for over ten years. This manager has mentioned to you that he considers himself a "master" trainer. He frequently offers to help coach other staff to be better supervisors and trainers.

    In watching the client lead the training, you note that he was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the topic, but was somewhat disorganized in how he presented the material, frequently pausing to search through his papers to find handouts. He also got caught up in answering some very vocal participants' questions about a wide range of issues, which left him little time to cover the training agenda. You overhear several attendees grumble to each other about how certain staff members always dominate the discussion. You also notice that a few other staff seem completely disengaged. Three of the most vocal participants seemed very pleased with having their individual questions answered, and several of them stand up at the end of the training and publicly thank the manager for the "great training." The manager approaches you with a big smile and says, "That was a great group – I really love giving this training! I think we will be able to start the new model in no time!"

    1. What are your next steps?

    2. What issues will you consider?

BUILDING BLOCKS: **EVALUATION AND DETERMINATION OF NEXT STEPS**

Once the Action Plan is completed or the coaching period has concluded (whichever comes first), a final reevaluation can capture the improvements that have been made and any work that remains.

In most situations, it is helpful to use the assessment method that was utilized in the beginning of the coaching process. So, if you and your clients initially used a standardized assessment tool, the post-services evaluation should use the same tool to facilitate comparisons.

As in the beginning of the process, it is preferable that both the coach and the client conduct a post-intervention assessment, and then compare notes. Once this information is collected and analyzed, update the Action Plan with notations on what has been completed and what remains. Hopefully the Action Plan will serve as an ongoing, adaptive document for the child care program, so it is entirely appropriate to add new items to the plan even if coaching is concluding. Strategies for these new items can include referrals to other community resources and supports.

EVALUATION OF COACHING

This stage is also an opportunity to receive in-depth feedback from your client about how s/he felt about the coaching process, what worked, and what was challenging. By proactively asking for this feedback and receiving responses in an open, non-anxious way, coaches not only gain valuable information but also model the reflective process.

There are a variety of ways a coach can receive this feedback. Some may be more comfortable than others, and it may be helpful to tailor your approach based on your client's preferences. For example, some clients may prefer to fill out a written document. Others may prefer to provide feedback verbally and in person. Some coaches do both.

Be aware that some clients are concerned about being "disrespectful" to the coach who has worked closely with them over the course of weeks or months. This concern can prevent some clients from sharing their full opinions of both the positive and negative experiences. In this case, collecting feedback through a third party can be particularly helpful: Clients sometimes feel more comfortable sharing the full range of their thoughts with a neutral party.

FOLLOW-UP

Many sites benefit from periodic check-ins after intensive coaching has concluded. These check-ins can be as simple as a brief phone call to ensure that the changes are being sustained and that simple questions can be addressed. If issues have arisen that are beyond the child care program's current capacity to address, the coach may be able to refer the program to additional training, written resources, or peers who may be able to serve as a resource.

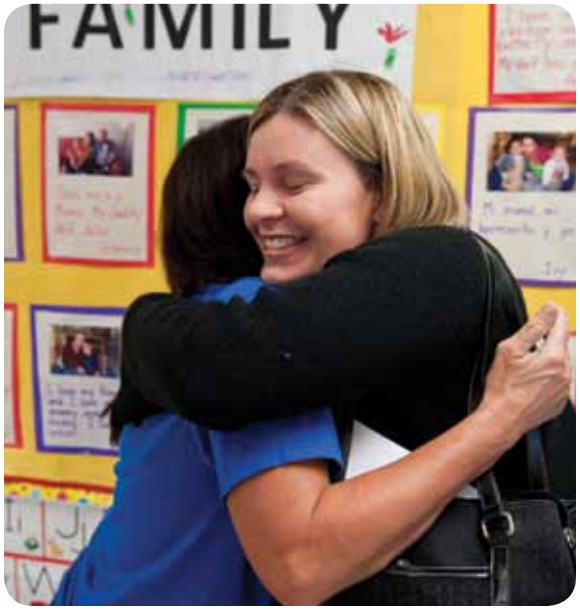
CONCLUDING SERVICES: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

At some point in the coaching relationship, the issue of when to conclude services emerges. With some coaching programs, a pre-established timeline for the beginning and ending of services already exists. With others, the timeline is more open-ended. In either case, termination is something all parties should be aware of. It is helpful to consider the following points when thinking about termination:

1. Why are coaching services concluding?
2. Who was involved in this decision?
3. What is the timeline to conclude services?
4. Are staff members aware of this timeline? If not, how will they be informed?
5. Does the site have remaining needs?
    - If yes: Are there other resources available to meet these needs? Are you able to assist in linking the site to these resources?
6. Will you (or someone from your agency, if applicable) follow up with the site after services have concluded?

CELEBRATE SUCCESS!

Make sure to acknowledge the hard work and effort that the service providers invested in this change process. Even if work remains, call out the milestones that were reached and help your clients celebrate these accomplishments.



WHAT IS THE NEED **FOR COORDINATED COACHING?**

Child care is a very diverse field, encompassing vastly different program types, program philosophies and approaches, multiple funding streams, and varied regulatory requirements.

Diversity of program types include:

- Federally-funded Head Start and Early Head Start
- Title V state-funded child care centers
- Montessori-certified child care centers
- Faith-based child care centers
- Large family child care programs (for-profit and non-profit)
- Small family child care programs (for-profit and non-profit)
- Licensed programs that accept government-funded Alternative Payment vouchers
- Corporate child care chains
- Employer-sponsored child care programs
- University/college campus child care programs
- Parent Co-Ops
- License- Exempt Family, Friend and Neighbor Care (Kith and Kin Care)

In the move to improve child care quality, a variety of supports are available to address some of these challenges. Some of these supports are:

- Child Care Resource and Referral trainings and events
- National Association for the Education of Young Children national conferences
- Local conferences
- Family Child Care Associations (trainings, conferences, mentoring, etc.)
- AB 212 training
- California Early Childhood Mentor Program
- California Early Childhood Enhanced Mentor Programs (Alameda and San Francisco)
- California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) trainings
- Asthma-related health consultations
- Lead-reduction consultations
- Small Business Associations (for family child care)
- The Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) trainings
- Community college classes (availability varies by campus)
- California State University classes
- Online-learning classes
- Preschool for All coaching and training
- Early Childhood Mental Health consultation
- Literacy consultation
- Local Child Care Planning Councils
- Facilities planning trainings
- First 5 coordinated trainings and programs (CARES, community trainings, etc.)
- Licensing analysts
- School-district transition coordinators
- Head Start trainings
- Private trainers and coaches
- Fire department liaisons (to certify sites are up to code, and to investigate complaints about fire code compliance)
- Curriculum-specific trainings (Montessori, Waldorf, Magic Years, anti-bias and creative curriculums, etc.)
- Video trainings
- Web-based resources (UCSFChildCareHealth.org, ChildCareLounge.com, NeedChildCare.com, etc.)

However, these kinds of supports are often fragmented, with each one focused on discrete areas and issues. This piecemeal approach leads to several dysfunctions:

- **Unequal distribution of services**. Child care programs often operate in isolation from other programs. Program staff frequently report a lack of knowledge of the many programs offered. Those who are "in the loop" receive multiple services, while other programs receive few (if any).
- **Too much of a good thing.** Child care programs that receive simultaneous services from multiple providers may actually experience overwhelm due to the increased demands on providers' time and energy. Making time for meetings and other requirements can add to the stress and lessen the benefits of the services.
- **"Treating the symptom, not the cause."** Overworked providers will often request or attend training on a particular topic in hopes of remedying a specific situation. However, the issue at hand is often the result of another less obvious factor. For example, teachers will often seek assistance with children that they deem "behaviorally challenged." In many cases, the issue stems not from the child, but from that child's normal reaction to a chaotic child care environment. This cause may or may not become apparent to a teacher who is only seeking training and workshops on supporting children with special needs.
- **Thwarted change.** Child care centers are particularly likely to have a small subset of staff attend a particular conference, training, college class, etc. These staff members return from this experience motivated to make changes in the overall program. However, since they are not in a position of authority, they have to work to convince not only their peers but also their superiors to embrace the proposed changes. Teachers often report that it is difficult to bring everyone else "on board."
- **"Ships in the night."** As with the above "thwarted change" issue, child care center staff members who attend different trainings and interventions can become passionate about different issues. For example: In a typical month, a center director might attend a series on literacy, some staff might participate in a project about music and movement activities, and other staff might attend a conference on improving children's food choices. Although these three issues are interrelated, it takes creative planning to integrate these three themes into one coherent, practical curriculum, and many programs lack the resources to do this on a regular basis.
- **Contradictory information.** Providers report that they receive very different and sometimes conflicting information from various child care "experts" from different disciplines, including ECE coaches, mental health coaches, health coaches, licensing, etc. Providers are left on their own to reconcile these different perspectives and approaches, which often confuse and discourage their motivation to change.

To address these issues, we recommend an integrated approach to improving the quality of child care. Some programs, such as First 5 Alameda County's Quality Counts initiative, explicitly address this situation by adopting a caseworker model in which a child care coach not only provides coaching support and assistance, but also helps a program coordinate the integration of the myriad of other supports they may access. Coaching programs that are not able to adopt such a model can still work to alleviate potential conflicts and confusion by encouraging all of the child care support providers to attend interdisciplinary trainings and meetings to build a common language and complementary approaches to service delivery.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FIRST 5
ALAMEDA COUNTY
every child counts

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