

PARENTS TOOLSHOP® ADVISOR TRAINING MANUAL

MODULE 4: COACHING

What Coaching Is and Is Not

As mentioned in Module 1, coaching is a skill set that supports clients in self-exploration, examination of beliefs, and helps them overcome obstacles that prevent them from reaching their goals.

In your role as an Advisor, much of what you will do is ask clients key questions, listen deeply, reflect back what you hear, and help them to become self-sufficient in using the Universal Blueprint®.

Coaching is NOT about helping clients heal from deep wounds from the past, as this crosses over into therapeutic issues. Coaching focuses on what is happening in the present, and helps clients achieve what *they* want in the present *and* the future.

How Coaching Benefits the Client

Sometimes clients have limiting beliefs and are unaware of behavior patterns that are roadblocks to getting what they want. They need an outside, objective person, such as a coach, to help them look at their situation with new eyes.

For example, a client may learn about the Universal Blueprint® in depth, and still find themselves frustrated because they are stuck in the same negative parenting patterns.

In other words, they aren't getting the results they want and often aren't sure why. That's where the coach comes in and supports the client in getting clear so he/she can move forward.

Different Coaching Skill Sets and When to Use Them

F-A-X Listening

The number one skill used in coaching is F-A-X Listening.

- Focus on Feelings
- Ask Helpful Questions
- X-amine possible options

In Module 3, you used F-A-X Listening for the task of problem-solving. Remember, however, that F-A-X Listening can be used for several other important purposes, such as:

- De-escalating emotionally-charged situations or conversations.
- Reducing defensiveness.
- Helping to identify the “real issue” at the core of “the onion,” (using Toolshop® terminology)

- Resolving that core issue, which will usually then make any behaviors or emotions that were *symptoms* of that issue simply disappear, because they are no longer needed.

In fact, coaching essentially *is* F-A-X Listening in its most advanced use, for deeper issues that need *healing*, rather than quicker solutions. There are many nuances and skill subsets in F-A-X Listening. This section identifies several from which you can choose, depending on factors such as where the client is in the 1-2-3 problem-solving process (remember the diagram from Module 3 and Chapter 7 of the *Parent's Toolshop®* book) or whether the client is aware of an issue or needs to figure it out.

Cultivating Curiosity

It can be easy to believe that you know what's best for your clients. After all, you have a strong background in how to use the Universal Blueprint®. This isn't always the case. Clients will often come to you because they want help with a parenting issue (such as their child's tantrums), and may not realize the "deeper" issue or pattern that is keeping them stuck.

If you approach their situation from a place of curiosity, you will help your client feel safe in sharing information with you. Curiosity also helps you stay open to what the client says, rather than assuming that you already know.

Asking Powerful Questions

As you can imagine, cultivating curiosity and asking questions go hand in hand because questions cause the client and you to think. As the Advisor/coach, questions cause you to be curious about your client and ask questions that will empower them to move forward.

In fact, according to Tony Stoltzfus, author of *Coaching Questions: A Coach's Guide to Powerful Asking Skills*, "Questions hold the power to cause us to think, create answers we believe in, and motivate us to act on our ideas. Asking moves us beyond passive acceptance of what others say, or staying stuck in present circumstances, to aggressively applying our creative ability to the problem."

Here are more benefits to asking questions:

1. **All the information is within the person whom you are coaching.** They know themselves best. Asking questions draws out this information and helps the client connect with it.
2. **Asking creates buy-in**, and buy-in creates forward movement; and forward movement creates results. With buy-in, people are more motivated to carry out their own solutions.
3. **Asking Empowers.** Self-confidence is a huge factor in positive change. When you ask your client's opinions, you are sending the message, "You have great ideas. I believe in you. You can do this." This prevents you from being the "sage on the stage" and instead lets you be the "guide on the side."
4. **Asking develops leadership capacity.** Instead of *telling* a client what to do, you can ask them, "What could *you* do about that?" or "What does your intuition tell you your next step is?" Instead of depending on you, the coach, for answers, the client learns to trust him or herself.
5. **Asking creates authenticity.** As Tony Stoltzfus says, "There is no greater relational gift than to have someone see the real you and value it. The art of asking creates a bond between us and those we coach, because by asking we honor and value them. When we talk about the things our clients really care about, they make changes that are truly transformational."

Open Versus Closed Questions

One of the biggest mistakes that many coaches make is asking closed questions. These kinds of questions can shut a client down and cause them to stop thinking. A closed question is one that can be answered by a simple "yes" or "no." Here are some examples of closed questions:

- "Can you try that and make that work?"
- "Do you think that's possible?"
- "Is there a way you can try this toolset in the Universal Blueprint®?"

Instead, use open-ended questions so to inspire clients to think and give you (and themselves) thoughtful answers. Here are the above closed questions converted to open questions:

- "How can you try and make that work?" or "What do you need to make that work?"
- "What needs to change to make that possible" or "What would you need to tell yourself in order for that to be possible?"
- "What's one small step you can try to practice using this toolset in the Universal Blueprint®?"

There isn't one "right" question that will give your clients the results he or she is seeking. This puts needless pressure on you as the coach to "fix" their situation. As you may already know, the Parent's Toolshop® approach is not based on "fixing" anything, because clients and their children aren't "broken." As you build rapport with your client and ask questions from a place of curiosity, your clients will uncover the roadblocks that are standing in their way, and set goals that help them get the results they want.

If you find yourself in the middle of a coaching conversation, searching for just the right question to ask, do the following:

- Stop and take a breath.
- Say, "Tell me more" or "What else?"
- "Please expand on that..."

By doing this, you will keep the ball in their court and invite them to share more. As they do, the layers will peel away and may reveal something formerly under the surface that brings an "aha moment."

When asking effective questions, you are deeply listening while keeping the ball in the clients' court. When they feel heard, it moves them forward and empowers them to "connect their own dots." And when they do *that*, they essentially answer their own questions! With those answers, they can more easily break free of limiting beliefs, behavior patterns, and apply the Universal Blueprint® in planning healthier responses.

Imagine, from the client's perspective, how amazing it feels to be deeply heard, have someone be there in a supportive, empathetic, empowering role, to allow release, healing and growth to occur. In our culture, there are very few places where parents can experience such deep understanding from others --- and what great modeling that is for the parent, of effective skills they can use to empower their children.

Redirecting and Positive Interrupting

As you talk with clients, you will find a "flow" of conversation that works for both of you. Sometimes, in answering a question, a client may start to get into a "story." This "story" may start off as an answer of insight that is relevant to the conversation, and then may morph into a rambling of details about the problem that actually detract from the conversation.

This doesn't serve the client, because it causes the energy in the coaching conversation to shift away from the real issue that was about to bubble up to the surface. It's up to you, as the coach, to gently but firmly interrupt and redirect. Think of it as a gift to both you and your client.

Example:

A client may say, "I just don't know what to do when Johnny talks back to me. I've gone through the Universal Blueprint® and tried everything I know to do. I've also tried several other things, and none of them have worked. In fact, this reminds me of the time when I taught school, and my students talked back to me. I tried everything I knew to get it to stop, and was so frustrated that it never did. My husband and I don't agree on how to handle it, and, come to think of it my parents didn't, either. One book said to...."

In this case, you could interrupt after the client says, "I just don't know what to do....and none of them have worked." *That* is the gist of what the client needs help with--examining thoughts and beliefs that may be getting in the way, and then help with problem-solving an effective response to the talking back.

Here's what you, as the coach, might say, as you positively interrupt and the redirect the conversation: "I'm going to interrupt you here, because I heard something that you said that was key, and I want to reflect that back to you to make sure I understand correctly. Sounds like you are feeling frustrated with the backtalk, AND with the fact that you've tried many approaches that haven't worked for you. Let's start with_____."

By handling it this way, you are respectfully redirecting clients, *and* serving them. It is in their best interest to stay focused, so they can get the results they want. It's human to focus on what's not working, and to be reminded of other times that were difficult. That's one of the reasons that coaching can be so powerful; it helps clients remain focused on the issue at hand while still receiving validation for their feelings.

Using Silence Wisely--Creating The Space

Another aspect of effectively coaching parents is that of using silence wisely. This means that when you ask the client a question, give ample time for the client to think, and answer when they are ready.

You may be tempted to rush in, to fill an awkward silence. After all, in social conversations, such silences rarely exist! However, in coaching, they show the client that taking time to pause, reflect and *then* answer allows them to find the answers for themselves! It's actually a non-verbal statement of confidence in the client's ability.

Pay attention to the times when you are most tempted to jump in and answer *for* your client (rescuing), rush them, or to repeat the question. Do you notice any patterns? Sometimes these patterns can be your own "buttons" being pushed.

For example, you could ask a client, "What's one belief you could have about positively setting limits that would support you in doing it?" If you are still struggling with positively setting limits yourself and perhaps feel guilty about it, you might feel uncomfortable asking the client this question. It's then that you might be tempted to avoid the silence (wait time) and start giving tips, or repeating the question.

While this is normal for every coach from time to time (we're all human, after all!), it can rob the client of the chance to sit with their feelings and realize that they are in a safe place where they can slow down, and be real about what's really going on for them. The bonus for you as the coach is that you can also learn to be comfortable with whatever feelings come up for you!

Short-Term Coaching Versus Long-Term Coaching

Clients will usually come to you initially because something in their parenting isn't working. It's not likely that they will say, "I want to coach with you so that I can examine my thoughts and beliefs and how they are affecting my behavior, my child's behavior, and my overall life."

Some parents will be aware of how they are stuck, but many will not. Most parents will begin coaching focusing on the parenting problem that is keeping them up at night. After all, your training in the UB® means that you have the skills to help parents problem-solve their way through specific challenges. Clients know that, and are eager to receive your support.

In a crisis situation, use the Universal Blueprint® to ask them questions, and guide them to a solution. When they get results, focusing on only one problem, ask them, "What will you do for the next problem?" You want them to begin to see that they don't *have* to continue to rely on you for the answers. Instead, they can:

- Learn the Universal Blueprint® (which is solution-focused on parenting problems).
- Get to deeper issues (the long-term vision of their parenting, their strengths, areas of self-growth, etc. which are not so solution focused).

Short-Term Coaching

In these sessions, the coach helps the parent build confidence in using the Universal Blueprint® to solve their parenting challenges. Because this occurs within the context of 1:1 coaching, the parent practices how to apply the UB to *their* specific situation. As the coach, your questions, at this point, focus on taking the parent through the PASRR system, and guiding them to come up with the solutions to their challenges. The coaching is more focused on the UB® and how to apply it to a specific situation. You are, in essence, using F-A-X Listening to help parents problem solve (Module 3).

If, when working with a parent, you discover that the parent has some limiting beliefs that are keeping them stuck from achieving their parenting goals, you could say the following to the parent: "Based on your dedication to using the UB® to achieve your parenting goal of _____, I can tell that you really want to move forward. I'm hearing, however, that there are some beliefs that may be getting in the way of your reaching those goals. That's really normal, and many parents find they need more personalized support. By working together longer, we can help you overcome those obstacles."

You would then continue to ask them questions like the ones you ask in a Strategy Session (fully explained in the Module 5). In essence, you will be doing a quick strategy session so the parent can see how working with you on a longer term basis can help them.

Briefly, these questions get at:

- a. Where they currently are right now with their parenting (the remaining problems and issues.)
- b. What other parenting challenges they currently have for which they want support. Help them list the current challenges and then ask, "What do you think is getting in your way of solving these?"
- c. What **long-term** parenting outcomes do they want? Help them go beyond the current parenting challenges listed above, and help them look more into the future. You will need to help them "think bigger" by helping them articulate what kind of parent they want to be now (refer to the Parenting Styles in the Foundation Building Toolset). Also ask them how they want their child to remember their parent(s).
- d. What positive feelings they would feel if they were to reach their long-term parenting goals? (i.e., "If you *were* that balanced parent who was calmly setting limits, had a close relationship with your child and enjoyed your life more, what would that do for you? How would you feel? What would you be saying to yourself?") The key is to help the parent tap into how great it would feel to achieve those things.
- e. If they are willing to move forward with long-term coaching, you are now ready to work to help them go deeper.

Long-Term Coaching

The number of sessions it takes for the parent/client to achieve their desired results may vary. As the coach, you may offer packages of varying length, depending on how much the client wants to address.

Before you and the client begin long-term coaching, have the client fill out a "[Getting to Know You Form.](#)" The purpose for this is for you, the coach, to get a brief overview of what the client wants to work on. It also serves as a way for the client to get clear and to get motivated about the work you are about to do with them! [You can access by clicking here.](#)

Briefly, the form covers any demographics that you might not have covered yet: names and ages of children, etc. It also asks questions such as, "At the end of our time together, what do you want to have accomplished?" What is standing in the way of your reaching those goals now?" "How will you know when you've accomplished your goals in our coaching relationship?"

Preparing for Each Session

Before each session, be sure to take some time to set your intention to support your client. Some coaches find it helpful to relax, do some energy-balancing techniques, pray or meditate, drink tea, listen to calming music, etc.

The key is to get grounded and centered, so you're showing up as fully present and listening deeply to what your client is saying. Also prepare either a notepad and pen or a computer to take notes during your coaching session. It's helpful to refer back to these notes often.

Sample of a Long-Term Coaching Series

Here is a sample of 7 coaching sessions and what you might address at each one. By looking at them in this way, you can see the progression each session takes in supporting the client around setting goals, clearing the blocks to those goals, and formulating a plan to achieve the goals.

First Session

The goal of this session is to go over the "Getting To Know You Form."

You want to establish rapport with the client by saying, "Hi, I'm excited to work together." The above-mentioned form will serve as a guideline as to what you will ask your client.

As you go over the answers to the questions, your client may expand on their answers. You help them do this by asking questions and making statements such as, "Tell me more," and "When did you first discover that?" Or, "On a scale of 1-10, how motivated are you to solve your problem?"

You also want your client to very clearly tell you about what's NOT working. They are here with you because, in some way, they are stuck and are not getting what they want in their parenting. Your job isn't to solve it. Rather, it's to help the clients clarify, *for themselves and you*, what the problem(s) is/are.

What you're looking for here is a brief introduction to what they want to work on. You will flesh this out in the next session in more detail. For now, it's enough to just ask, "On your form you indicated that _____ brings you to coaching. Is there anything more you want to say about that?

Also say, "Complete the following sentences:

- "I am sick and tired of _____."
- "I am willing to receive support around_____."
- "I wish that _____ were no longer happening and _____ would happen instead."

Even though you're not yet digging deeply into the problem, you are stimulating the client to think about it, so they can continue to gain more clarity and insight as the coaching progresses.

Sometimes, this session can spill over into Session 2 because some clients take longer to talk about their answers on the intake form. Know that that's okay.

Second Session

The goal of this session is to clearly define the most important problem to solve.

Often, clients know they need help with a specific problem, but don't have the tools to dig beneath the surface to find the real issue. This is much like the onion analogy that Parent's Toolshop® uses to help parents look past the overt behavior their child is showing, get to what need the child is trying to meet, and teach the child how to meet it in a healthy way.

Here is where direct questioning comes into play:

- "What is the most important problem you want to solve?"
- "What would make a lasting difference and not just a temporary one?"
- "If making this change were easy, you'd have done it already, and without my help. What is making it difficult?"
- "Step back for a minute and take a birds-eye view of your situation. Is this a one-time issue for you or something you struggle with a lot?"
- "Do you need to change your situation or the way you respond to it? How do you know?"
- "Just for the sake of argument, let's say that your child/husband/other person never changes. What would you do then?"
- "In this situation, what is realistically in your control; what is actually in your power to change?"
- "Is this a one-time problem or a pattern?"

It's very normal for clients to want to work on broad issues such as, "I want to be a better parent" or "I want my child to be better behaved." Help them go deeper, by asking questions such as:

- "What would it look like to overcome this once and for all?"
- "What do you believe about your ability to change in this area?"
- "Imagine that you are handling this situation because you *choose* to do so. What's leading you to make that choice?"

Third Session

The goal of this session is to help the client clearly define the goal.

When both of you know where the client is headed, coaching is much more effective. It also helps the client commit to the change process, because it takes the intangible and makes it tangible. This overall goal is the compass--it guides you and the client to their destination.

This session is *not* about *how to achieve* the goal (that comes later). **The focus is on what the goal is.** Clients will often speak in broad terms about what they want. They may say, "I want more peace in my family" or "I want to be a better parent" or "I want my daughter's tantrums to stop and my son to stop back-talking me." This is a great starting point, but you don't want to land there.

Rather, you want to **ask more questions, to help the client dig deeper into why they want their stated objective,** so they can tap into what they really want. Sometimes what they *think* they want is only part of the picture. Help the client get even clearer by asking questions such as:

- "You said you want more peace in your family: define what you mean by 'more'?"

- "What exactly do *you* want to accomplish, and what *will it look like* when you reach that objective?"
- "Get very specific. What outcome do you *really* want?"
- "Does this goal depend on anyone else's choices? If so, how can you restate it so that it only depends on you?"
- "Why is this important to you?"
- "Rating yourself on a scale of 1-10, how important is this goal to you? What would make it a 10?"

Another way to help clients get clear on what they want is to ***envision their ideal future***. With this technique, it's important for the client to visualize what they want *in great detail* (sights, sounds, etc.). You want them to truly enter into the *sense-a-round movie* as much as possible. This serves to help them get clear *and* it increases their internal motivation to work towards change.

Possible questions include:

- "Imagine it's three to six months from now. What's different?"
- "What's the best possible outcome you can envision?"
- "Let's say you work towards this goal and reach it--it's actually your reality. Take me to that point in the future and describe what it looks like to have reached this ideal."
- "Paint me a picture. What emotions would you experience if you reached this goal?"
- "Imagine you are in that future right now! Envision it in specific detail! What do you see and feel? What are you thinking and doing? "What are you saying to yourself?"
- "What's one step you could take that would bring you closer to your ideal goal?"

By the end of this session, both you and the client should be absolutely clear on the outcome(s) the client is working towards. Have the client restate it in their own words and write it down. As the coach, you need to write it down, too.

Some clients find it helpful to post their goals on the fridge, in their car, and other places, so they are continually seeing it and getting motivated to attain it. Others may want to create a small collage that depicts what they want.

Session Four

In this session, the focus is on action steps so the client can make tangible progress toward the goal.

Start by recapping the goal they identified and envisioned being solved in the previous session. Then move into helping clients explore their options and possible steps. Often clients (especially parents) feel so overwhelmed that they need help generating *possibilities*, before they can get specific about action steps. The following questions will help clients to do just that:

- "What do you think your options are here?"
- "Let's brainstorm together. What *other* options can we put on the table?"
- "Which of these options do you want to pursue?"
- "Is that a step you're willing to take?"
- "What will you do, by when?"
- "What are you willing to commit to between now and our next session?"
- "What will you commit to do in the next _____ weeks to keep moving forward?"

- "What kind of accountability do you need on this?"
- "Are there any obstacles that we need to address?"

By the end of this session, both you and the client should be absolutely clear on what the next action is that the client will take. Have the client restate it in their own words and write it down. As the coach, you need to write it down, too.

In between sessions, have the client fill out an [Accountability Check-in Form](#) 24 hours before your next session. You can start the next session celebrating what the client did that worked, and helping them overcome obstacles (information on doing that in the following session).

Session Five

In this session, the focus is on overcoming obstacles.

Obstacles are a natural part of the growth and change process. Change isn't always easy! Normalizing this fact for clients while holding them accountable for both identifying and overcoming obstacles will help them progress towards what they really want. The following are some questions that can tease out what the obstacles are:

- "When you've tried to make changes like this in the past, what's gotten in your way?"
- "What one resource or tool would make all the difference if you had it?"
- "What's your worst-case scenario? What's the fear behind that?"
- "What belief is behind your responses?"
- "What's the critical voice in you saying about this situation?"
- "What's going on inside you when you think about making this change? This could be an emotion, a memory, a physical sensation, anything."

At this point in the session, both you and the client should be getting clearer about what's getting in the client's way. Listen deeply to the client's answers to the above questions and reflect back what you hear. Ask the client for clarification by saying, "I hear you saying that _____ and _____ are getting in your way, and that you're feeling _____. Is that accurate? What would you add?"

Once you both are clear, it's time to overcome obstacles. Here are some questions to help with that process:

- "What if the obstacle magically disappeared---just imagine, for a minute, that it is completely gone. How does that change things? How do you feel now?"
- "Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge such as this. How did you do it? What were you thinking and saying and doing?"
- "What resources do you need to overcome this?"
- "Whom do you know that could help you with this?"
- "You've mentioned several times that _____ was an obstacle. If _____ weren't an issue, then what would you do?"
- "What do you need that you don't currently have to overcome this?"
- "What 'story' are you telling yourself that could be getting in the way of reaching your goal?"

At the end of this session, ask the client to tell you what they perceive their obstacles are and some possible ways to overcome them. Listen deeply. If necessary, probe with "Tell me more about that" or "Please say more."

Both you and the client should write down both of those things: what the obstacles are and possibilities for overcoming them. Ask your client, "What's one thing you'll do this week that will help you overcome one of your obstacles? How can I support you?"

Session Six

Now that you've gotten this far with the client, your role is to continue to guide them on the path to reaching their goals.

Notice when they are getting closer and give them positive feedback, so they know what they did to move forward. When they get stuck (see above section on obstacles), ask them questions to help them get clear on what the obstacle is, and some possibilities for overcoming it. Ask them to commit to an action step that would help them overcome it.

Think of yourself as a Sherpa, guiding your client to the top of the mountain (which signifies the attainment of their goal). You don't carry them up the mountain. You also don't yell at them when they feel like giving up, or feel sorry for them when the terrain gets difficult. Rather, you help them see the compass, keep pointing out what's working and what's not, remind them of their overall goal, and help them keep tapping into how good it will feel to attain it.

Along the way, you can encourage them, by asking questions that help them reflect on their progress. Here are some questions to get you started:

- "What did you do well? What would you do differently if you could do it all over again?"
- "What progress can you celebrate here?"
- "What have you accomplished so far that used to seem insurmountable? What skills and inner qualities did you use to do that?"
- "On a scale of 1-10, evaluate your progress toward your goal. What step could you take that would raise that number up just one point?"

Session 7

When the client has reached the goal that they came up with and both of you wrote down, it's time to celebrate!

The questions above that you used to help them evaluate their successes and progress will be the ones you use as a wrap-up session. Overall, you'll summarize where the client started, what the problem was, what they wanted to work on, what their obstacles were and how they overcame them. This will be a give and take conversation of celebration---less structured than previous ones, but dedicated nonetheless to focusing on how the client reached the goal, and they feel about it!

Examples/Recordings

A role play with a parent, for how the parent could ask open ended-questions with a young adult is a demonstration of coaching skills. Listen at www.parentstoolshop.com/audio/GoldCalls/07-27-11-GoldCall.mp3

Call recording description:

By request, we discussed "How to ask questions of ourselves and others (children) to help guide to a solution without taking over."

This is by far one of the most important skills for parents (really anyone) to develop as it has countless benefits for us and others.

You'll do a review of F-A-X listening and, specifically, how to use this skill at each step. You'll also hear a practice conversation that uses this tool all the way through each step of F-A-X listening, from feelings/problem to solution.

Assignments

Have a phone call with a partner this week. Coach each other for no more than a ½ hour. It doesn't have to be a parenting issue, but would be helpful if it was. Focus on listening intently and asking questions that help your partner gain clarity and help him or her move forward.

Share with each other what was helpful and record helpful questions and possible issues coaching could address better than the other skills (problem-solving or group coaching).