



## Family-Centered Coaching

A toolkit to transform practice  
and empower families





## Welcome Letter from the Kellogg Foundation

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for your willingness to join in a process of building a set of tools and resources on Family Centered-Coaching. By using these tools and giving us feedback in this process, you have joined a highly unique, deeply collaborative network of experts, practitioners, and parents themselves-- to build an open-sourced set of tools to help us create strong relationships and partnerships with families.

At the Kellogg Foundation, we have a mission of supporting children, families and communities as they strengthen and create conditions that propel vulnerable children to achieve success as individuals and as vital contributors to their communities and larger society. We believe all people have the inherent capacity to effect change in their lives, in their organizations, and in their communities. In service to this mission and our values, we have been working to advance two-generational approaches, efforts that create equitable conditions and combine integrated supports for children and parents simultaneously in the areas education, health, family economic security and social capital. Through these approaches, we aim to address equity in employment and education, build economic stability for families, and help all children grow and thrive, while breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.

As two-generation strategies are rapidly expanding, there is a critical need to support programs and partners in approaching their work with families holistically. Unfortunately, most coaching efforts are not truly family-centered; that is, they do not approach coaching in a whole family way. Organizations may work with parents on parenting coaching, or on workforce career planning, or on financial coaching; but there are few programs focused on coaching that takes the whole family into account. We know families don't segment their lives and goals into the siloes and systems we've created. And because coaching is at the core of two-generation approaches and is one of the key places where all of the elements of what parents and children need and deserve come together, it is well worth investing in helping the field understand and adopt effective practices.

We know, that across various sectors and fields, there is a growing number of organizations that are beginning to use coaching and other innovative approaches to work with families differently. To help catalyze and spread this work, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has invested in this effort to bring the best thinking, best practices, and most effective tools and approaches together into this Family Centered coaching toolkit.

We hope that this toolkit will help spark, transform, and strengthen the ways in which we all come together to serve families more effectively and holistically across generations. We lean heavily on our collective work around family engagement and our strong commitment to racial equity and community and civic

engagement. With your help, we will develop tools that honor the resiliency and diversity of families--- tools that don't just focus on one aspect of a family's life, but that follows, supports and celebrates the various goals of families in transforming their lives for the better.

We look forward to your input and feedback, your valuable insights, and your continued partnership on these resources. Together, we know that this small group of committed individuals, with passion and purpose, can advance more effective practices for families. Together, we can transform the ways in which our programs and systems respond and meet the needs of whole families. Thank you.

Paula Sammons  
Program Officer  
Family Economic Security

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# Introduction

Welcome to the family-centered coaching toolkit! We are excited to offer a set of strategies, tools, and resources that can help programs, agencies, case managers, coaches, and others change the ways we work with families as they strive to reach their goals. With this set of resources, we are hoping to undo, and redo, how we approach working with families - to see families holistically, even though the funding streams and programs within which we work may not.

Whether you are front-line staff, a coach or a case manager, and whatever type of organization you work in (workforce development, human services, early childhood) this toolkit is for you! The toolkit can guide how you work with a participant using what we call family-centered coaching.

The focus is on who you are serving — adults with families — not on the type of organization in which you work. In this way, the toolkit can help staff, supervisors, organizations and partners to plan for and intentionally change the way coaching is delivered to families. You may be working within your organization or choosing to partner with other organizations to support a whole-family approach. We hope this toolkit helps you to plan for and intentionally change the way coaching is delivered to families!

We know what happens within families affects how families are able to move ahead. Approaches that take into account *all* the family interests will help programs succeed in helping families succeed. And *how* organizations approach working with families matters: using a strength-based, parent-led approach recognizes the resilience of families who have led their families far already. And when you set your work with families within the larger contexts of institutional racism, lack of opportunity, and program silos, it helps us all serve families more effectively.

Finally, new and exciting research and front-line methods are emerging that can inform your work with families. This toolkit brings together all these pieces to offer you strategies, tools and resources to help you coach families better.

“Coaching” is a term that many of us use, and it has come to mean many things - across any given set of programs coaches may be using a variety of approaches including elements of case management, mentoring, coaching, and counseling. A key goal of this toolkit is to steer how you work with families toward a coaching philosophy that places the participant in the lead, with staff playing a critical supporting role. At the same time, there are times when other methods – case management or motivational interviewing – are needed to help families move to a place where coaching can be most effective. This toolkit offers a framework that incorporates multiple approaches, with goal setting as a key technique of supporting families in making the changes they need.

A note for this edition: This is our first edition of this toolkit, built from both experience and new research. We hope you will test out this “working model” in the coming months and give us feedback. We will schedule regular webinars during winter and spring 2017 to hear your ideas and incorporate them into a final toolkit for distribution and use by the broader field in summer 2017. We deeply appreciate that you will be taking the time to help us make this an excellent guide for the entire human services and coaching field. Thank you!

## What is Family-Centered Coaching?

Family-centered coaching first and foremost changes the fundamental way in which case managers, coaches, and other family-support workers engage participants. Some of the terms in this toolkit might be confusing, so it's important to define what we mean.

When we refer to a **coach**, we mean: a person who works one-on-one with a participant in a collaborative process to help address individual and family goals. This broad definition of coach includes everyone that provides one-on-one services including, case managers, family support workers, counselors, and others. It does not mean, however, that a coach is only using “coaching” to support families.

When we refer to a **participant**, we mean: the person who is taking part in the coaching relationship. Because the target audience for family-centered coaching is often parents, the terms participant and parent are used interchangeably in this guide. In addition, our definition of parent is purposefully broad — it may include grandparents, foster parents, and other caregivers who are responsible for keeping a family moving together.

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*... because parents are their own best experts at what they need, what strengths they can draw from and build upon, and where the sticky challenges are for themselves and their families.”*

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When we refer to **families**, we take an expansive view of intentional and created families in their many varieties. A family could include a parent and his or her children. It could include stepparents, grandparents, and foster parents and children. Or it may include cousins, aunts, uncles, close friends, and any other person who is considered part of the family.

The key is putting the participant or parent in the driver's seat of the work, because parents are their own best experts at what they need, what strengths they can draw from and build

upon, and where the sticky challenges are for themselves and their families. In family-centered coaching, the participant takes the lead in identifying goals for their defined family. Doing this, and establishing a relationship between coach and participant on the same level, is the heart of the work, and enables coaches to support parent-driven agendas. When constructed in this way, the relationship between a participant, their defined family, and the coach can be transformational for families to achieve their goals. You as a “coach” enter with a wide lens on how a family may be defined and the range of interests and needs they may have.

Second, family-centered coaching focuses on the whole family, instead of focusing only the interests of one person. While many organizations focus on particular aspects of a participant's life — such as financial stability or child developmental outcomes — family-centered coaching aims to bring all aspects together to better serve the family. Family-centered coaching helps you find ways to consider the whole family, even though all family members aren't usually a part of the actual coaching sessions.

Third, family-centered coaching takes into account different perspectives on how to improve outcomes for families, recognizing that families need different things at different times to move forward. And importantly, family-centered coaching is rooted in an understanding of the institutional forces that prevent families from moving forward: the long and persistent effects of systemic racism and poverty are at the root of many family challenges. A deep recognition of this is critical to supporting families living with those realities.

The family-centered coach is the one person working with the family whose job is to keep the whole family in mind. While ideally, a family would have a relationship with one coach who helps to track and coordinate supports, resources, and tools that the family needs, we know that the systems and programs are not currently designed to support a single point of contact. Therefore, successful family-centered coaching allows for flexibility in implementation based on an organization's mission, structure, community resources, and the overall outcomes your organization hopes to achieve.

We have grounded this toolkit on several core principles, many of which come from successful efforts in working with families. Family-centered coaching is guided by these values and operational principles:

Family-Centered Values	
<b>Full family focus</b>	Coaches address the interests of all members in a family, including children and other family members or people identified by a parent. Coaches know that families change over time, and check in on who is in the family "circle."
<b>Family led</b>	The work of achieving a family's goals is led by the family. The family is the agent in setting goals and direction for their lives and their family's lives. Family empowerment means you as a coach are responsive to if and when to coach adults and children together. It also means the family defines who is in their family.
<b>Respect</b>	Coaches have deep respect for a family's expertise and lived experience. Respect is fundamental to establishing trust in a coaching relationship.
<b>Strength-based</b>	Coaches start with an understanding that all families have strengths. The family identifies their strengths, and the coach then works with families to utilize these strengths and build other strengths.
<b>Racial equity and inclusion</b>	Family-centered coaching recognizes the impact of institutional racism and implicit bias within the organizations and systems working with families. Staff understand these influences in their own approaches to families, the design and delivery of social services and in the lives of families served, and knows that understanding these forces is critical to be effective in working with the family.
Family-Centered Operational Principles	
<b>Fluidity of Approach</b>	Coaches work together with parents to decide on a family's readiness for change. Based on that, they may use several approaches when working with parents, ultimately moving towards a coaching approach that supports changes the family wants. This can happen during a single meeting or over the course of working together, understanding that families' readiness for change may fluctuate over time and can be in different areas of their life.
<b>Transparent</b>	Coaches talk with parents about the different roles the coach can play (such as case manager, counselor, etc.), based on the approach used. Coaches can discuss with the parent which approach may be the right fit with their stage of change and goals.



	Together they agree on which approach will best support the family at a given moment.
<b>Peer-based</b>	Coaches operate from a place of peer respect, knowing that both staff and parent have strengths and challenges that change over time, and that the relationship is collaborative.
<b>Choice</b>	Families can choose the level and type of support and tools needed over time based on their interests and results sought. Programs are designed to provide parents access to different coaching tools at different stages in the coaching relationship, knowing that families can be at different stages with different parts of their life. Having a flexible approach to coaching recognizes that families may want different support at different times depending on the results they are seeking to achieve.
<b>Responsiveness</b>	Coaching is responsive to family interests as determined by the family. This means the coaching approach needs to be flexible. Coaches meet parents and families where they are, and are able to “change hats” as families identify their interests. Family-centered coaching supports coaches to move fluidly among approaches and to develop agility to do so.

### How is family-centered coaching different than current approaches to working with families?

Traditional case management sometimes has viewed the family as something to be “fixed” or a problem to be “solved.” This minimizes or forgets that every family brings strengths to the table, and that families know best what they need. Coaching, because of funding requirements or organizational mission, sometimes focuses on only one aspect of a parent’s life. To support families most holistically, putting parents in the lead and holding a wide view of family interests is key.

Many organizations are beginning to pursue training staff in other ways of working with families, including coaching and goal setting, motivational interviewing, and more effective case management practices. This toolkit brings together resources and approaches based in all of these techniques, as well as lessons from other promising practices and evidence from a range of disciplines like behavior economics and brain science, to help provide the best set of tools in working as a partner with a family.

At its best, family-centered coaching addresses organizational program goals AND it addresses the parents’ goals and desired results for their children and family. Here’s an example:

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*“To support families most holistically, putting parents in the lead and holding a wide view of family interests is key.”*

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*A parent may have goals to buy a home, to support his child’s artistic interests, and to help an aunt with handling medical debt. If the coach is in an organization with a goal of increasing home-ownership, it might be the practice to focus solely on this goal. Yet all three of the parent’s goals are interrelated. Can the parent buy a home and still afford to support his child’s artistic interests? Does the aunt need financial support to manage her medical debt, and if so, how does that affect the family’s current and future budget and choices? Without knowing the full range of family interests, many things could happen. A family might make choices that limit its ability to reach family goals in another area of life – buying the home might mean the child can’t take art classes. Or, unexpected events might pop up:*

*having taken out a mortgage, the family might have to sell their house because the aunt's medical debt becomes urgent for her to get care. Balancing organizational program goals with family goals may be a challenge, but because these goals are often interrelated, both need to be addressed in family-centered coaching. Addressing them this way also increases the chance of success of both goals.*



## CHECKING IN:

At key places in this toolkit, we'll ask you to stop and reflect on the content of the section. We attempt here to ask our own set of powerful questions to help reflect on our own experiences and how this work fits — or doesn't — with what we know to be true. These notes are for you — and no one else — to check in on how to move this forward.

What resonates for me in this section?

What worries me about this approach and work?

What two or three things do I see here that would be helpful in my work with families?

1.

2.

3.

# What's in this Toolkit and How to Use It

We have pulled together a set of tools and resources that can help implement this vision of working holistically with families to accomplish their goals. The main focus of the toolkit is on goal setting, because this approach is the most promising in putting parents in the drivers' seat with a focus on longer-term goals. But there are other approaches that lead toward goals setting. These approaches, including case management and motivational interviewing, provide important tools at key moments for families, are also included in this toolkit, though more briefly. We offer guidance on how parents and coaches can work together to decide what approach is best at which time in a family's work with the coach.

The Toolkit also incorporates information and promising practices from other coaching curricula, and incorporates strategies from the fields of racial equity and inclusion, trauma-informed care, behavioral economics, and executive skill building. It is our aim not to give you everything there is to know about each of these, but instead to provide an overview of each field and extract practical lessons you can integrate into your work with families.

The sections below outline the family-centered coaching approach in five overarching sections:

- **Section 1: A Family-Focused Mindset.**

First, we acknowledge and spend significant time discussing how to change not just what we do with families, but how we engage with them. This section asks us, as front-line staff, to think through our own biases and perspectives. It asks us to shift our mindset so that regardless of the tools or methods we employ when working with families, our mindset about families has fundamentally shifted to a new strength-based approach.

- **Section 2: Building Your Skills for Coaching**

Second, we outline three key ways of working with a family based on their readiness for coaching:

- 1) High-quality case management. When participants are facing short-term issues and need help navigating systems, finding information, or addressing crises.
- 2) Motivational interviewing. This approach uses questions to help participants more clearly define their goals and what changes they want to see in their lives.
- 3) Goal-setting/coaching tools. These are increasingly seen as a promising practice to strengthen a wide range of service provider skills that support people in setting and achieving their goals for their lives. Research and practice shows that all of us struggle to change our behavior – even when we know what we want to do – and that we benefit from the support of another in moving toward change.

- **Section 3: Addressing the Whole Family, the Wheel of Life**

Across fields, such as human services, workforce development, and early care and education, work with families often overlooks keeping the whole family in mind. Because families don't operate by focusing on only one aspect of family life at a time, bringing the whole family into focus is central in helping families reach any one goal, or several goals, at the same time. In this section we provide the Wheel of Life tool, as well as short content modules on the seven content areas found within the wheel.

- **Section 4: Integrated Lessons**

While developing this toolkit, innovations across coaching, motivational interviewing, and case management are emerging. Researchers and practitioners are finding new ways to optimize work with families and improve practice and outcomes. Trauma-informed care and behavioral economics are two areas where new knowledge of how to optimize behavioral change can be applied to working with families. Similarly, promising scholarship and practices are emerging on how the brain reacts to the persistent stress of being low-income, and on the brain science of executive skill building, which provides practical ideas to help families achieve their goals.

- **Section 5: A Step-by-Step Guide**

In this final section, we bring all the pieces together in a step-by-step guide for coaches to use when working with families. We lean heavily on existing resources, weaving in tools and tips from across a number of fields to bring you the best thinking on how to improve your work with families.

It is our hope that by the end of this training, you'll have a framework as well as the knowledge and skills to:



Work with families using emerging best practices from across fields;



Focus your view of parents and families on their strengths and resilience rather than needs and challenges;



Create a positive mindset for yourself in working with a family at any point in time;



Use the best approach for each interaction or meeting with a participant based on his or her stage of change;



Use a set of questions covering a full range of issues in a families' life; and



Adapt and address needed modifications that can support and enhance the work you do with families.

## Section 1: Building a Family-Focused Mindset

Family-centered coaching requires a shift in mindset regardless of the approach being used. Whether you are a coach, case manager, counselor, or family-support worker, family-centered coaching requires a mindset that puts the parent at the center. It is imperative that you see the participant as resourceful and having the solutions to their challenges. Participants have developed strengths over their lifetimes and they are working hard to move their family along.

Do you view the people you are working with as resilient or do you think they need you to fix their family? Do you believe the participant has the answers to their challenges or do you view yourself as the expert? This section will help you to begin to identify any biases or stereotypes that could be blocking you from seeing the participant from a strengths-based perspective.

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*“Coaching is built on the premise that participants have the answers. This means **really believing** participants do have their own answers.”*

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For some staff, adopting family-centered approaches may require a fundamental shift in the way you work with participants. It requires a change in the power dynamic and the relationship. If you are used to being the “expert” and resolving problems, it will be a different dynamic to work with participants to support them to find their own solutions to their challenges. This is true whether you are using a coaching, case management or motivational interviewing approach.

It is important for coaches to get into a positive mindset before working with participants. You

can do several things before and during a meeting with participants to support you in holding a positive mindset.

### **Clear Your Mind and Eliminate Distractions**

As you prepare to meet with a participant, prepare to devote your entire attention on the participant. Clear your mind and space for the meeting. Free yourself from distractions during the coaching session. If your mind is racing, jot your thoughts out by hand or electronically. Draft your to-do list if that is distracting you. Make note of work you want to address after the participant leaves. These “tricks” will help calm your mind because you have a written reminder of what needs to be done rather than trying to keep it in mind while coaching. Some people find meditation or a few deep breaths help clear the mind; build this into your preparation process if it is useful to you. Once your mind is clear, make sure you remove anything in your meeting space that may distract you during the coaching session. Turn off your computer. Silence additional phones.



## **Self-Management**

Coaching is built on the premise that participants have the answers. This means *really believing* participants do have their own answers. There may be a temptation to be the expert or problem solver, especially when the participant seems stuck. Self-management starts with holding back your advice and options, and instead

leading participants with questions. Eventually you will find times when it is appropriate to share valuable experience or expertise. If the experience is related to the goals the participant has set, ask permission first to offer your thoughts. If you are shifting to problem-solving, also ask permission and be clear that you are changing from your coaching hat to a counseling or case management hat.

## **Know Your Triggers**

When you sit down with your participant, you bring all of your emotions and stresses with you. Coaching a participant can sometimes raise issues that are emotional triggers for you even in your coaching. If you go into a coaching session unaware of how you are feeling, issues or triggers may become amplified. For example, if you are uncomfortable when people sit close to you, be aware of this and set up your space to avoid a build-up of your discomfort during a meeting. Proactively dealing with triggers is essential. If not managed appropriately, emotional triggers can interfere with the coaching conversation. Consider enlisting the help of a coach or a therapist to work on your own emotional triggers.

## ***Examine Hidden Biases and Be Aware of Impacts of Institutional Racism***

Everyone, no matter their race or upbringing, has biases and stereotypes. We are wired to create categories in our minds. Biases may be based on race or ethnicity, as well as gender or economic class. When our assumptions and biases get in the way of connecting with people, or when they are institutionalized against certain types of people, they can lead to harmful outcomes for people and communities. By clearly addressing equity and inclusion in our communities, organizational decision-making, and family-centered coaching practice, we can become consciously and actively part of the solution — equitable opportunities and outcomes for all — instead of unconsciously or passively part of the problem, where biases and inequities are perpetuated, often unintentionally.

Family-centered coaching includes a strong emphasis on equity, so coaches must understand the impacts of three types of bias on the families they are coaching: systemic, organizational, and individual bias.



Understanding and addressing these three types of bias is critical to effectively use this toolkit. Two are addressed here — systemic and individual — while organizational bias is discussed in the organizational assessment of family-centered practices that is a companion to this toolkit.

**Systemic bias**, in particular the impacts of systemic racism, is an array of historic, contemporary, institutional, and cultural dynamics that routinely privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. Systemic bias continues to produce real inequities, barriers, and stress for people of color. Practitioners of



## CHECKING IN:

Think about a time when you went through a challenge or a transformational change in your life. It can be something from your personal life, with your family, or something in your work life.

Did you lean on anyone to help you get through this challenging period? If so, what were three important characteristics about the supportive person in your life?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Reflect on how that relationship worked and why it worked. List three aspects of the relationship itself that seemed to help you through the challenging time.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How can you bring these features to your work with families? How can your own experience overcoming a challenge help you think about families in a different way—with strengths and challenges?

- 1.
- 2.

What two or three things do I see here that would be helpful in my work with families?

family-centered coaching often work with families of color, requiring awareness of how pervasive patterns of racial inequities often results in added challenges for families, both external and internal.

External challenges may include racial discrimination in employment and housing, or limited access to high-quality educational opportunities and health services. Internal challenges may include the impacts of immediate, chronic, and cumulative stress related to systemic racism, uniquely experienced by each individual and family. Acute and chronic stress can affect daily functioning, physical and mental health, and even life expectancy.

People of color are often *individually* blamed for problems that are *systemic*. The blame is often framed as “personal responsibility,” motivational deficiency, or stereotypes such as laziness, criminality, promiscuity, immorality, or other derogatory depictions. These dehumanizing assumptions and stereotypes can be held unconsciously, not only by individuals, but also by institutions and organizations, including well-intentioned social service agencies and programs. While some racial bias is explicit and intentional, much of it is unconscious (also called implicit bias) and unintentional.

An awareness of systemic racism and racial disparity statistics can provide a coach with more appreciation for the lived realities, actual challenges, and external barriers faced by many of the parents they are coaching.

**Individual bias** is related to the attitudes and behaviors of coaches of all races and backgrounds, which are shaped by their own racial identities and life experiences, as well as by societal and cultural influences, which commonly result in unconscious bias. Within Our Lifetime Network, a national organization working to expand public awareness of implicit bias, offers the following:

*Implicit bias refers to the way people unconsciously and sometimes unwillingly exhibit bias towards other individuals and groups. Many people are not aware of having implicit bias. Implicit bias should not be confused with explicit forms of bias, or racism. Explicit bias, or overt racism, involves conscious and knowing discrimination towards other individuals and groups. Implicit bias can reveal itself in different ways, such as by the words we use to express our feelings and behavior toward people of color. These unconscious mechanisms are deeply embedded in various aspects of our lives, including health care, education, and our criminal justice system. Understanding implicit bias can help free us from guilty feelings about the embedded nature of racism in our society. It can help us recognize that individually we may not be to blame, but that we are all responsible and accountable for confronting racist policies and behaviors.* (Source: “What is Implicit Bias?” Within Our Lifetime. <http://www.withinourlifetime.net/2014campaign/Toolkit/index.html>)

Examining your own identities—such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, size, etc.—can help you gain more awareness of your ingroups and outgroups, and where you are “privileged” or disadvantaged. Reflecting on areas where you may be disadvantaged or marginalized can help you cultivate understanding and empathy for others who are disadvantaged. Learning about how you are advantaged can help you work with your privilege in a responsible and accountable way so that you are not unintentionally hurting others.

Counteracting racial bias involves more than awareness of *racism*, it also requires action that deliberately moves our practices towards *racial equity*. A Racial Equity Impact Assessment<sup>1</sup> is an example of a tool that

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<sup>1</sup> See: [https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment\\_v5.pdf](https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf)



### Examining your implicit bias and more:

Becoming aware of your own implicit bias is the first step toward being able to change. Research is still emerging on debiasing strategies. The **Kirwan Institute** has documented some strategies including training (such as meditation), intergroup contact (interracial exposure and cultural learning), taking the perspective of others (role playing others' perspectives), emotional expression (such as positive and approachable facial expressions), and counter-stereotypical exemplars (having role models who are people of color).

You can get a sense of your own level of implicit bias by taking the **Implicit Association Test (IAT)**—an online test taken by millions of people around the world, administered by Project Implicit, based at Harvard University

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>. The IAT allows you to explore bias in more than a dozen different areas—race, gender, disability, sexuality, etc.

Implicit bias is also at the root of micro-aggressions—subtle but offensive comments or actions directed at people of color or other marginalized people, which unintentionally reinforce stereotypes.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race>

can help you address racial equity and inclusion on the front-end of decision making in order to prevent unintended consequences on the back end, once decisions have already been implemented. Having a racial equity focus is critical for supporting the well-being of all families.

In conclusion, it is vital to go into a coaching session aware of any hidden biases, assumptions, or stereotypes that you may hold. It is equally important to understand the role that systemic racism plays in all of our lives and especially in those of the families with whom we work. Your willingness to examine your own possible biases is a key step in preparing for a coaching session. Examining potential biases is not about making you feel guilty or proud; it is about discovering internal influences that could affect your interactions with your participant. The very act of discovering your hidden biases can propel you to act to correct for it.

### Know Your Boundaries

Staff at all levels and job titles must know at what point they need to seek additional help in working with a participant because of mental health or other challenges. This can be hard to navigate, as both coaches and therapists focus on helping participants identify goals and transform their lives. However, there are signs of when you as a coach should refer a participant for more intensive counseling or mental health services. The guide below highlights some of the key indicators for when a mental health referral might make sense.

An active mental illness, substance abuse, or domestic violence situation might trigger a referral to additional supports for the participant. There are no hard rules on when and how to address these issues in a way that respects the relationship with the participant. If you, as a coach begin to sense that certain topics or issues are beyond your expertise, you should bring up the idea of a referral with the participant and together decide what would be most helpful.

As we outline in the content session more fully, there are also several simple assessments for depression, one of the most common mental health challenges that parents face. A commonly used tool is the Patient Health Questionnaire-2, which involves two simple questions as a “first step” to help determine if further consultation or referrals might be needed. The scoring for the PHQ-2 goes from 0-6. Roughly, anyone scoring a 3 or above should have further assessment (there is a 9 question version) and counsel. Remember too that many parents do not test for a depressive disorder, but still have symptoms severe enough to affect their lives and the outcomes of their children. So, remember to follow the lead of the parent in

## The Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2)

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Visit \_\_\_\_\_

Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?	Not At all	Several Days	More Than Half the Days	Nearly Every Day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	1	2	3

identifying what would be most helpful. More information can be found in the content module called Health and Well-Being.

Finally, it is important to note that some states have mandatory reporting laws, especially around issues of attempted suicide or child abuse or neglect. Research your state reporting laws prior to working with participants. If those issues arise while coaching a participant, follow your state's guidelines.

## **Top Ten Indicators for When to Refer Participant to a Mental Health Professional**

### **If your participant:**

1. Is exhibiting a decline in his/her ability to experience pleasure and/or an increase in being sad, hopeless, and helpless. (Example: The participant may make comments about “why bother” or “what’s the use”.)
2. Has intrusive thoughts or is unable to concentrate or focus. (Example: Your participant reports that she has so many thoughts swirling in her head and that she can’t get them to slow down.)
3. Is unable to get to sleep or awakens during the night and is unable to get back to sleep or sleeps excessively. (Example: Your participant begins talking about not being able to get to sleep or how he just wants to sleep all the time.)
4. Has a change in appetite: decrease in appetite or increase in appetite
5. Is feeling guilty because others have suffered or died. (Example: Your participant reports that he feels guilty because he is alive or has not been injured.)
6. Has feelings of despair or hopelessness. (Example: According to your participant, nothing in life is OK.)
7. Is being hyper alert or excessively tired. (Example: Your participant reports that it feels like she always has to be on guard.)
8. Has increased irritability or outbursts of anger. (Example: Your participant becomes increasingly belligerent or argumentative with you or other people.)
9. Has impulsive and risk-taking behavior. (Example: Your participant reports doing things, such as going on a buying spree, without thinking about the consequences of the behavior.)
10. Has thoughts of death and/or suicide. (Example: Your participant makes comments that to die right now would be OK with them.)

*Adapted from Financial Coaching: Helping Clients Reach Their Goals. (2011). Washington, DC: NeighborWorks America.*

## Section 2: Building Your Skills for Coaching

Once you have adopted a family-centered mindset, the next step is to figure out how coaches and participants can best work together at any given meeting or session. The family-focused mindset should be a fundamental underpinning whether using a coaching, motivational interviewing or case management approach. Family-centered coaching recognizes that families are most successful when supported by a range of approaches; different approaches are more effective at different times and for different areas of their lives. How can you better work with a parent to identify the best approach at a given moment, with the goal of moving toward a family's life goals?

Sometimes it isn't possible to start with goal setting. A family may need immediate case management support to find housing, or may benefit from a deep set of questions to help uncover where a parent is ready for change. Sometimes that change cannot yet happen for a range of reasons, often personal and/or systemic.

Case management and motivational interviewing are tools that help you and the family get to goal setting

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*“Most parents want to make changes, but there are often long-standing institutional forces, including systemic racism, that impact and prevent families and communities from moving ahead.”*

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and acting on changing their lives as quickly as possible. We know that families will benefit from the use of all these approaches at different times because change is not linear. A family may start with goal setting on finding a job, but then lose their apartment. Then the parent and coach may decide to hold off on pursuing that job goal and move into case management mode to solve the housing issues. Or a family member starts with the goal of becoming a nurse, but after many meetings hasn't taken the steps discussed during the coaching sessions. Then together the family and coach may decide to step back

and use motivational interviewing to help identify what is going on for the parent. Identifying which approach to use when is one of the central parts of family-centered coaching.

As you use these approaches, it is critical to talk with the parent about the different roles you can play depending on what the participant would find most useful. This transparency and collaboration with parents on your role provides choice and helps put parents in control of how they work toward their goals and manage their lives and families.

The approaches highlighted in this toolkit are motivational interviewing, goal setting, and case management. While there are many other approaches to engage with families, such as mentoring, counseling, solution focused therapy, and family support services, this toolkit focuses on these three because they are most readily applied and used by coaches and providers across different fields.

## Assessing Approach by Understanding Stages of Change

Family-centered coaching is informed by where a parent is in their lives. All of us go through a series of steps when making a change in our lives, however large or small that change may be. New research about human behavior has illuminated our own “stages of change.” These stages help identify and understand the steps people move through to make life changes. They can help you and the parent understand whether a parent is feeling uncertain about making a change, and can help identify how to best support the parent in moving toward action to make a change.

Most parents want to make changes, but there are often long-standing institutional forces, including systemic racism, that impact and prevent families and communities from moving ahead. For example, a parent might be ready to get a job but cannot pursue that goal because the family lacks childcare, or is homeless and has limiting curfews at its emergency housing. Similarly, a parent might want to improve their child’s performance in school, but because there are poorly funded schools with few supports, it is very challenging to support the child in moving to that goal.

There is no judgment related to where in the stages of change a parent identifies. Understanding a parent’s stage of change is important “because change can be difficult, resistance normal. Understanding the stages of change will help you know where the parent is in the change process and how to coach parents....”<sup>ii</sup>



### CHECKING IN:

Think about a behavior change you’ve recently tried — quit smoking, lose weight, exercise more, spend more time with your children, etc.

Can you identify what stage of change you’re in?

If you’ve been stalled in making progress toward the change, what might you find most helpful in moving forward?

What has been helpful in making changes in the past?

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<sup>ii</sup> The Prosperity Agenda. (2015) Career and Life Coaching Toolkit: The Career Readiness Project. [www.theprosperityagenda.org](http://www.theprosperityagenda.org)

As a coach, you know that a parent may be at different stages of change in different areas of their lives. For example, a parent's readiness for work may be different than her readiness to change her parenting skills. Use the stages of change as a guide for how the parent feels about making a change in those two areas as an indicator of readiness for coaching. You can then use different approaches with the parent based on different content topics and readiness for coaching.

## How to Use the Stages of Change to Assess for Readiness for Coaching

Table 1 outlines different stages of change related to the topic and/or goal a participant has identified as a priority. The second column, "Person's Perspective," provides examples of what language a parent might use during a meeting that would signal their readiness for change on a particular topic.

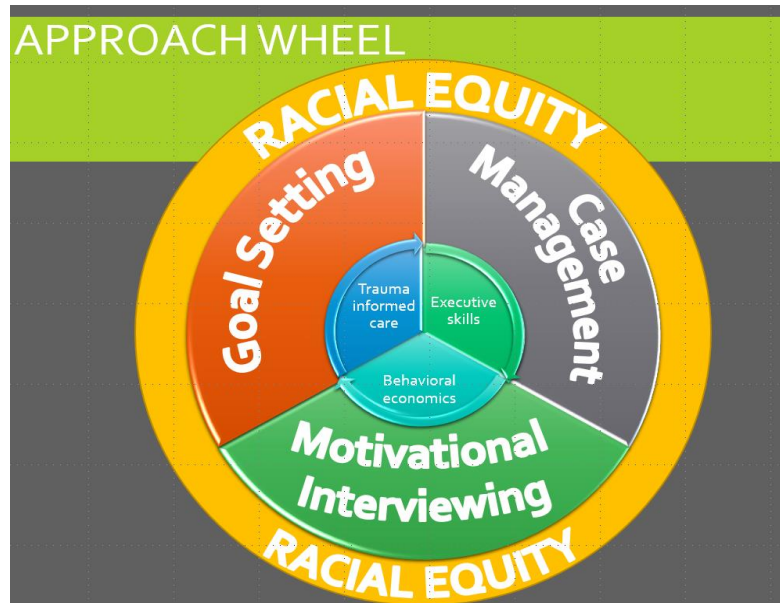
Once you have better sense of where a participant is in the stages of change, you can map that stage to a particular coaching approach.

Table 1: STAGES OF CHANGE		
Stage of Change	Person's Perspective	Suggested Approach
Not ready for change	"I need x" or "I can't think about change."	Case management
Pre-contemplation	"Change what?" "I won't" or "I can't."	Motivational interviewing
Contemplation	"Change? Maybe." "I might" or "I may."	
Preparation	"Yes. But how?" "I will."	
Action	"I'm ready." "Let's do it." "I am."	Goal setting
Maintenance	"How do I keep it going?" "I still am."	
Relapse/Recycle	"If I slip, what can I do?" "I'm not sure."	Motivational interviewing

## The Approach Wheel

Now that we've discussed stages of change, we'll review how you can use motivational interviewing, case management, and goal setting as approaches in your day-to-day work with families. We've developed an "Approach Wheel" that puts the three areas together.

### What Role Can You Play to Be Most Responsive to Parent's Stage of Change?



When a parent is sitting with you, it can be challenging to know how to work with them in a way that will best support them in obtaining the results he or she wants for their family. The Approach Wheel is a guide for identifying how to work with a parent at any point in time and for recognizing that the approach needed may change both during a single coaching session and over the course of the coaching relationship. This fluidity is a hallmark of family-centered coaching.

For example, for a parent who has begun to take concrete steps toward making a change, but now expresses ambivalence about making the change or seems “stuck,” you may suggest switching from a goal setting role to motivational interviewing. Until the parent is clear and any concern is resolved, the parent will likely not be able to benefit from coaching. When the parent is ready to move forward, you and the parent can shift back to the coaching approach. It is important to keep in mind that family members may be in different places at any one point in time necessitating a coach to be responsive to each family goal with different approaches.

The underpinnings of the three areas within the Approach Wheel are outlined below. We then offer a guide on how switch among these three as needed.

## Case Management

Case management is often the default in many social services organizations. It can often be transactional—when a participant needs a resource or service, or comes to the agency for something particular. It is also a staff-driven process for actively addressing issues that arise in parent’s lives, often identifying and coordinating services from both inside and outside an agency.



In case management, the coach is frequently the “driver” — determining timelines and providing services within the constraints of the system. Case management, in and of itself isn’t bad — there is good case management, where staff are responsive to participants, follow through on referrals, and help families get the supports they need quickly and efficiently. There is also not-so-great case management, where families get little access to knowledgeable staff, where expectations are unclear, processes are duplicative and

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*“Little work on goal setting or self-reflective observations on one’s own behavior can be done when a person, or a family member, is in crisis.”*

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onerous, and are often designed to make it difficult for families to get a service or support. Families sometimes talk about the feelings they get when they work with case managers — a lack of respect, feeling looked down upon, or making them feel bad about asking for help.

Little work on goal setting or self-reflective observations on one’s own behavior can be done when a person, or a family member, is in crisis. We know that there are important times when a staff person has information, relationships, or the ability to direct services to

a family’s identified needs.

It is up to the coach to determine when strong, strengths-based case management should be used to overcome a particular challenge, or how addressing crisis issues might need to be a part of meeting to guide a person toward readiness for goal setting. Here’s an example:

*During the course of meeting with a coach, a parent may have a health crisis that necessitates the coach switching from a goal-setting approach to a case management approach. This will help resolve the immediate health crisis by laying out options for a parent, and is made with the understanding that the parent makes the final decision as to how to handle the crisis. Once the crisis is resolved, the coach and parent re-assess the parent’s readiness to move forward on the original set of goals. They then can move to either motivational interviewing or actively working on goals the parent has set out. When the coach is transitioning to another role, it is helpful to be transparent about the change with the parent.*

## Motivational Interviewing

A second approach being used successfully with participants across the country to help families move ahead is motivational interviewing, which can help participants explore what might be getting in the way of taking action toward the desired results. Motivational interviewing is a specific technique for which there are numerous trainings around the country; our intent here is to offer an overview. A note here, that seen through a racial equity and inclusion lens, the name of this work might imply that people are not “motivated” and are simply unwilling to change. However, the intent of motivational interviewing is to uncover the factors that may be keeping a parent from taking action, with an awareness that it may be due to external forces such as institutional racism, discrimination against low-income populations, or biases found throughout our culture and systems. Therefore, we suggest that you do not call the approach motivational interviewing when discussing this with parents — perhaps call it a readiness assessment. You can use a set of questions that will help them reflect on how they are feeling and thinking about changes in their lives.



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*“...the intent of motivational interviewing is to uncover the factors that may be keeping a parent from taking action...”*

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As we note in the stages of change section above, the first two stages of change (pre-contemplation and contemplation) involve parents expressing uncertainty or doubt about making changes. All of us have doubts — or at times are unclear about where we want to move ahead.

Motivational interviewing frames a set of questions that can be helpful before the goal-setting stage with a participant. In some cases, the uncertainty around change may be due to fear of change, to not being aware of options, or due to forces outside a participant's control. Motivational interviewing enables the coach to enter into a “learning conversation” with the parent to identify the source of ambivalence without judgment. This process allows a parent to move forward and take steps toward achieving the change that will positively affect the well-being of his or her family.

Through motivational interviewing, a coach seeks to meet participants where they are. Coaches empathize and understand participants' perspective and help them recognize either their own ambivalence and/or the structural constraints that may be obstructing their forward movement. By asking open-ended questions, listening, exploring options, and remaining open, the coach seeks to help parents discover their interest in considering and making a change in their life. This leads to readiness for coaching.

## Goal Setting

When participants are ready to make changes in their life for themselves and their family, they are likely ready for a set of conversations using tools for goal setting. They are ready to discuss how to support families around achieving these goals. This approach is used when a parent is in the preparation, action, or maintenance stage of change.

At these stages, the parent does not express ambivalence about making a change, and is ready to take concrete steps toward the change. Goal setting is results-based. If at any point the parent begins to express ambivalence, or is “stuck,” then it may help to switch to motivational interviewing, unless the reason for being stuck is driven by a crisis, which may require case management.

Goal setting differs from case management in that a coach is not in charge of a parent's plan, but partners with the parent to identify and take steps to reach results that support family well-



being. In family-centered coaching, the parent, not the coach, sets the agenda and direction of the coaching, and the coach guides the process. While a parent may have several areas of his or her life in which he or she would like to make changes, it is up to the parent to set the priorities. When using this goal-setting approach, a coach partners with a parent to develop an individualized plan tailored to the parent's interests and skills and that is tracked over time. This plan is flexible, with the timing and pacing set by the parent.

Goal setting also entails providing "scaffolded" services. This means working with parents to strengthen or develop planning skills by providing opportunities for them to practice these skills during and between coaching sessions. This process helps parents identify their strengths and understand the transferability of their skills between their home lives, work, and their goal-setting work. For example, parents already use planning skills, as they juggle making breakfast, getting children to school on time, and taking public transportation to work or appointments. This is but one example of how you guide parents to draw upon the transferable skills they use on a daily basis and apply them toward taking steps to their goals. As they demonstrate increased proficiency, the coach slowly pulls back the level of support, while continuing to monitor the parents' skills and adjusting support as needed.

## Using the Approach Wheel

*The Approach Wheel* helps illustrate these three different approaches to working with families depending on where they are in their lives and their readiness for change at a given moment. As noted earlier, it is your ability to work with the family to move fluidly and intentionally among the approaches, with the intent of moving toward goal setting, an anchor approach within family-centered coaching. As you move among the roles associated with the approaches, it is always with an eye on meeting the parent where he or she is and in partnership with the parent, who is taking the lead.



### **What does it mean to be fluid in the use of approaches?**

Fluidity will look different depending on how an organization chooses to implement family-centered coaching. In some cases, the three approaches may be spread among several different staff positions (a

coach, a case manager, and a clinical counselor) at one agency. If this is the case, then strong internal coordination is necessary so that a parent's transition from working with one staff person to another is smooth and seamless, and that staff are clear on their roles. At a minimum, all staff should be aware of the concepts within the three approaches so that they can recognize what might be needed at a given moment. In other settings, a coach may be expected to use all three approaches when working with a parent and to move among them as needed. In this case, it is essential that a coach have a clear understanding of when and why she is moving among the approaches. In both cases, communicating and consulting with the parent about the approach is critical, so that a parent knows when a coach shifts her role.

## Identifying Your Role and Areas for Partnership

The Approach Wheel is intended to help you identify your role in the delivery of various family-centered coaching approaches. It can also help clarify and make that transparent both within the organization and with the parent. Being intentional about your role and the roles of others you may partner with (inside or outside of your organization) helps everyone know the boundaries of their work. This, in turn helps you deliver effective services to families, and helps identify areas for collaboration and coordination with other staff and/or resources, whether internal or external. Table 2 explains in more detail the cross walk between stages and change and the different approaches you can use.

**Table 2: STAGES OF CHANGE AND FAMILY-CENTERED COACHING APPROACHES**

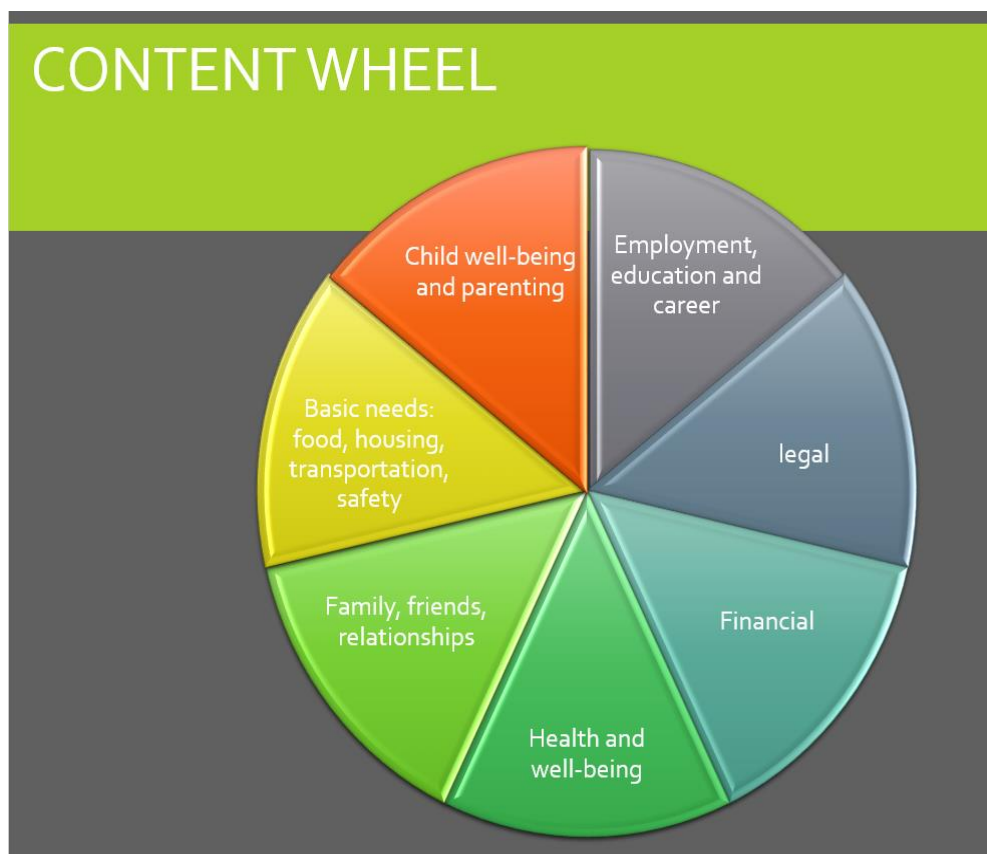
	<b>Case Management</b>	<b>Motivational Interviewing</b>	<b>Goal Setting</b>
<b>What is it?</b>	Addresses a specific issue, service need or response that can be "opened" and "closed" over a period of time. It may take the form of crisis intervention.	A coach and parent engage in a "learning conversation" to identify what is in the way of a parent moving forward.	Regular, parent-driven sessions with parent or family member using a results based conversation and action plan.
<b>When to use it? (Stages of Change)</b>	When parent is experiencing a crisis that needs to be resolved before moving forward on goals.	When parents are expressing a feeling of being "stuck" or unsure as to readiness to take steps toward their desired result. <b>(Pre-Contemplation and Early Contemplation)</b>	When the parent does not express ambivalence about making a change and is ready to take concrete steps toward the change. <b>(Preparation, Action, or Maintenance)</b>
<b>Who takes the lead?</b>	Coach becomes the driver responsible for meeting timelines and providing services within the constraints of the system.	The coach asks open-ended questions, listening, exploring options, and remaining open, seeking to help the parent discover what might be impeding them from considering and making a change in their life.	Parent /family driven.
<b>When to transition to another approach?</b>	Once the crisis is resolved, the coach and parent re-assesses the parent's stage of change	Once the parent has identified any obstacles, confirmed their willingness and desire to prepare for a	If at any point the parent begins to express ambivalence or has stalled repeatedly, then

	relative to the original goal setting topic and moves to either motivational interviewing or actively working on goals with the parent.	change, and has tentatively committed to a plan.	the coach switches to the use of motivational interviewing, or in a crisis trigger staff then switches to case management.
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## Section 3: Addressing the Whole Family

All families have a range of interests they want to pursue across many aspects of life. Interests will be different for each family member, and they will also vary over time. The family-centered Content Wheel provides a means for parents to take the lead by self-assessing seven key life areas for their families, and then prioritizing the area(s) in which they would like to make changes. The Content Wheel complements the Approach Wheel, and together they form the basis for the process of family-centered coaching.

In this section, we outline these seven key content areas for a whole-family approach. This tool can be used with the participant to identify both core strengths and needs, and to also begin to assess where families want to focus.



### How to Use the Content Modules

The content module for each of the seven topics provides guidance and information on the following:

- Why this topic is important
- General tips and advice for coaching on this topic (including how to incorporate a family focus)
- Powerful questions and other family-centered questions
- Resources to identify in your community
- General tools and resources for the topic

Guidance and materials were chosen based on their:

- Support of the principles of family-centered coaching
- Success in use by organizations working with similar population and goals
- Non-proprietary resource that is accessible at no cost
- Ease of use for coaching

In addition to the guidance and resources for each of the seven topics, this Toolkit provides a template for developing a local resource guide for family-centered coaching. This template allows you to include in the guide resources for basic needs, education and training providers, child care, and legal services. You can also include any other resources essential in supporting parents as they move forward toward their goals. A unique feature of the template is its use of photos of contact staff at referral agencies and pictures of the outside of buildings participants may visit. The template design makes hand-offs from one agency to another as warm as possible to ensure continuity of services and to support the family-centered principles of transparency.

# Content Modules

## Content Module—Education, Employment, and Career

Note:

- *At the beginning of the modules section, we will have a template for developing a resource guide based on the model used by LIFT.*
- *We will also refer coaches to the one pager “Everyday Strategies for Working with Families” that will list out top 10 things you as a coach can do to reduce the impact of stress/trauma when meeting with a parent/family member. (For example, small steps, short timelines, calm presence, safe space, provide choices, etc.)*

### **Why is education, employment and career knowledge and services important for both a coach and a family?**

Furthering education and finding stable and high-wage employment is critical to every family’s economic stability and is a core of any two-generation work. As a coach, understanding how workforce and education services and programs tie together can help a parent move more efficiently in the direction of their goals. Given the diverse and siloed funding streams for education and employment, programs need to think about how best to leverage and braid funding to support parents in their family-centered goals by putting together services that help parents to take advantage of job training and education. In some cases this may mean connecting with your local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partnerships to be able to access support services for parents. As a coach, it can also mean identifying targeted job training programs for parents receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits while also figuring out how to access child care or after school supports. Knowing local adult education providers to assist parents in increasing their English proficiency or to enroll in a high school equivalency program – all these are key steps in helping a parent and their family reach their goals in this area. Community colleges offer an extensive array of certificates and associates degrees leading directly to in-demand jobs. In some cases it may mean helping a parent determine the best way to combine work and education. It can also mean helping them identify education financial supports such as the Pell grant and other financial aid opportunities.

In addition, this topic:

- Supports whole family economic well-being.
- Is a means to address how bias/stereotypes and institutional racism impact families’ attainment of education and jobs.
- Provides guidance on developing a career and establishing economic well-being - a journey that a parent will continue long after they have completed your program. Providing guidance on this process and helping them practice and strengthen these planning skills sets them up for success.



### **General tips and advice for coaching on this topic:**

- If getting a job is a goal, then it is important to not only help a parent obtain a job, but to then guide them in thinking about up-skilling and beyond. One of the big challenges for every family is needing a job to support their families, but also needing to take the next step in training or education if they have less than a post-secondary education, because there are few jobs that pay enough to support a family if you have a high school degree or less.
- Let the parent know you will continue to be there to help them through the process and that they can tell you what works best for them and their families. If your program isn't equipped for long-term coaching, work with the parent to identify other resources that can support them in the long run, and make an active referral to that program.
- Meeting the client where they are – whether unemployed, underemployed, employed – has bearing on how you work with them.
- Understanding what constraints they have is critical – do they have child care or after school limits? Are they able to work flexible schedules? Does the family receive benefits or services from a particular kind of program that has education or training funds, like TANF or SNAP?

Keep in mind bias and stereotypes

Gender bias such as:

- Guiding women to enter nursing, teaching or other helping professions and not exploring other options.
- Assuming women are supposed to make less money than men.
- Women may be conditioned to not think of themselves as competent for a job
- Guiding men to enter construction, technical, mechanical, or professional careers and not exploring other options.
- Assuming men are good at being in charge at work.

Racial bias such as:

- Guiding Asians into technical and math oriented jobs, guiding away from managerial jobs.
- Guiding African-Americans away from higher level jobs or professional jobs (IT, law, medicine).

If a parent has experienced race/gender bias in previous jobs help them think about:

- What are things they can do to mitigate that in the next interview or job?
- What can you learn from the bias experienced?

### **Powerful Questions and Other Family-Centered questions:**

- What do you think you're good at?
- What do you think you like to do?
- What makes you happy? What makes your family happy?
- What type of employer do you want to work for?
- What type of environment do you want to work in?
- What are your family's aspirations and strengths? How can those help you in setting an education/employment/career goal?

Be intentional and explicit about asking about a family's situation. Then you and the parent together can begin to understand how the family situation affects decision making.

- What are the job hours that work best for your family? If a job has odd hours, evenings or weekends can the family help out? If not, what are the hours that will work, and which jobs are a good match?
- Is your family supportive of your job?
- You explore with the parent if the occupation is favorably viewed in the family or culture. If not, is that impacting the parent from moving forward? If so, how can it be addressed?
- Are there other things to think about from the perspective of my family?

**What are the core areas from other parts of this toolkit that you need to think about to support family success in this area?**

This topic ties closely in with other topics such as child well-being, basic needs, finances, and legal. Looking at these areas provides insights into other interests, strengths, and potential challenges that can support or hinder a parent's ability to make progress toward the employment/education/career goal.

Other Content Areas	Questions for the Coach and Parent to Discuss.
<b>Child Well-Being/Parenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the ages of your children? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What child care, after school needs do they have?</li> <li>○ What extra -curricular activities do they have?</li> <li>○ How does the timing and/or extra cost compare to what the job pays?</li> <li>○ This can be the source of a conversation about the challenges to work.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What are the medical needs of your children or other family members? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example, if a child has asthma a parent may have to attend many doctor appointments, administer meds, etc., making it necessary to either have a job with flexibility or with limited hours.</li> <li>○ Follow-up questions might include, "How can we provide you with relief from the costs? Have you looked at the options?"</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What child care is needed and what are the options?</li> <li>• What are back-up plans for child care?</li> <li>• What hours are needed to support attending school, training, or a job?</li> <li>• How far is it from school/job/home?</li> <li>• Who in the family can provide support?</li> </ul>
<b>Basic Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long is the commute to school/training/job?</li> <li>• Is there public transportation or a car to use?</li> <li>• Is it reliable? Does it meet the hours needed?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If others are working, what are their hours and transportation? (This information helps budget for time and other costs.)</li> <li>• What are back-up plans?</li> <li>• Have you thought about car pooling with family or neighbors? How will this impact childcare arrangements?</li> <li>• How else can you enlist the support of family and friends?</li> </ul>
<b>Finances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need to earn to support your family? (You should come ready to address this as the family may not know.)</li> <li>• Is anyone else in the family working?</li> <li>• What other income is coming into the family?</li> <li>• You can explore benefit options with the parent.</li> </ul>
<b>Legal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know what the options are for dealing with criminal records in your state. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can records be expunged?</li> <li>○ What can be asked on an application?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### **Tools/Resources:**

**The resources identified below were recommended by the Advisory Committee and Topic Experts for the Family-Centered Coaching Toolkit.**

### **Resources to identify in your community for your resource guide:**

- One Stop Career Centers
- Skills training providers (This can include both community based organizations, technical schools, and community colleges.)
- Community Colleges
- Adult basic education and ESOL programs
- SNAP-ET Programs

### **Tools/Resources**

My Next Move

<https://www.mynextmove.org/>

Skillful.com

<https://www.skillful.com/>

Knack

<https://www.knack.it/apps/index.html>

People use Knack to identify their interests, career pathways, and connect with job opportunities.

Promising Occupations for Low-Income Families by State

<https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-focus-areas/family-support/data-visualizations/tanfmap>

*General Guides/Curricula*

Empower Your Future: Career Readiness Curriculum

[http://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/resources\\_eyf-career-readiness-curriculum-guide.pdf](http://commcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/resources_eyf-career-readiness-curriculum-guide.pdf)

Resources for Connecting TANF Recipients and Other Low-Income Families to Good Jobs

<https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/resources-for-connecting-tanf-recipients-and-other-lowincome-families-to-good-jobs>

## Content Module – Finances

### Why is this topic important for both a coach and a family?

During the past ten years, financial coaching has emerged as a powerful means for helping families move toward economic stability and sufficiency. Initial research shows that supporting families to achieve their financial goals is promising strategy for helping them also achieve other goals. Talking about finances with families is often a means to learn about what is happening in their overall life and what they are trying to achieve. A parent may come into your program wanting to talk about a debt issue, but as the conversation unfolds you learn that there are child care needs and an unexpected medical crisis that contributed to the credit issues. As you work with the parent to understand the pieces of their financial life, it will lead back to many other areas on the content wheel. Being able to save is linked to many other outcomes for family well-being.

### General tips and advice for coaching on this topic:

- Be sure the meeting space is comfortable and allows for privacy. Make the approach to the conversation nonjudgmental assuring the parent the discussion is confidential and that how quickly they proceed depends on how fast they want to go – the parent sets the agenda and pace and the coach provides the options.
- Start the conversation with basic and non-specific questions by asking the parent how they are doing overall. It doesn't matter if the response is related to a financial concern or not. If you start by asking about their budget or credit then they can feel overwhelmed. "Listen to learn" by providing space and waiting for them to tell you what is most important. Parents, like us, come in with what they perceive as their failures and it is not the coaches' roles to give an opinion, but to support them through listening knowing that they will develop their own solutions.
- As for all the content areas, cultural competence is key. It is important to have staff who can interact with a parent in their own language and who know the culture.
- For many programs, financial coaching and child care needs are closely tied. Many early care and education programs have upfront conversations with parents about their finances as a means to help parents recognize that they could benefit from financial coaching. Then with strong referral mechanisms in place, parents can receive the assistance with finances that they need.
- Do you have a budget? Do they feel like they have extra money at the end of every month? If not, what do you do? Are you able to put money into savings? Make a visual and a budget helps them have an "aha" moment.
- Many times coaches can guide parents in making the most progress by broaching the topic of college saving. Families feel motivated when they can think about this in bite sized pieces. Research shows that any type of savings creates a more likelihood of going to college and staying in college.
- Financial problem solving is an important conversation. What happens when an unexpected thing happens to a family? You can help a family identify a head of time what they will if something happens. Having backup scenarios helps them be prepared and able to make better decisions when something unexpected happens.
- Typical financial topics for discussion include savings, cost of childcare, tax credits related to children, access to financial products and services, income and spending, and debt.

- Never endorse products or services. Coaches must not recommend or suggest that participants use a specific financial product or service, regardless of perceived quality or lack of a conflict of interest. The client must trust that the coach is establishing a relationship that puts the responsibility of product search on the client.

### **Powerful Questions and Other Family-Centered questions:**

- Where would you like to be?
- Have you ever thought about setting a financial goal for your family?  
What are your dreams for your children? (Many families are more relaxed and open to a conversation about savings if you ask about their dreams for their children, rather than for themselves. This can open the door to other conversations as to their individual dreams at a later time.

### **What are the core areas from other parts of this toolkit that you need to think about to support family success in this area?**

This topic ties closely in with other topics such as education, employment, and career, basic needs, legal, and child well-being & parenting. Looking at these areas provides insights into other interests, strengths, and potential challenges that can support or hinder a parent's ability to make progress toward a financial goal.

Other Content Areas	Questions for the Coach and Parent to Discuss.
Education, Employment, and Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of jobs are you interested in or what job do you currently have?</li> <li>• What is the average salary/wage?</li> <li>• What are the opportunities for advancement?</li> <li>• Is there a need for more education/training?</li> <li>• What are the costs?</li> <li>• How will you pay for it?</li> </ul>
Basic Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would your financial picture look like without benefits? (Food stamps, TANF)</li> <li>• What would you like the picture to look like?</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any issues with criminal records that are getting in the way of finding a job?</li> <li>• Is child support current? (When child support has not been paid, driver's licenses can be suspended and tax refunds taken. If a family has relatives in other countries and they need to get a passport but have a past due child support, then they can't get a passport without paying it off. Growing number of immigrant families are dealing with this.)</li> <li>• For men being released, legal financial obligations pose barriers. Some men have hundreds of thousands of dollars of legal fees/obligations. )</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What your legal status in the country? (To understand what kinds of financial services are available such as drivers' privilege cards, insurance options, etc.)</li> </ul>
Child Well-Being & Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What child care needs do you have?</li> <li>• What is the cost of child care?</li> <li>• How it is paid for?</li> <li>• What are the types of childcare options?</li> <li>• What is your back-up plan?</li> <li>• Are there ways to enlist the support of your family?</li> </ul>

**The resources identified below were recommended by the Advisory Committee and Topic Experts for the Family-Centered Coaching Toolkit.**

**Resources to identify in your community for your resource guide:**

- Credit counseling
- Financial literacy programs
- Financial coaching
- Low-income tax payer clinics

**Tools/Resources**

The Mint Grad

Financial Fitness Test

<http://www.themintgrad.org/try-it/financial-fitness-test/>

You Need a Budget

<https://www.youneedabudget.com/>

myRA

A new retirement savings account from the United States Department of the Treasury.

[https://myra.gov/b/?utm\\_expid=112154954-6.9kQ70xmmTvGLQU-pge4ypA.1&utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F](https://myra.gov/b/?utm_expid=112154954-6.9kQ70xmmTvGLQU-pge4ypA.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)

EARN

A savings tool

<https://www.earn.org/>

Personal Capital: Financial Software and Wealth Management

<https://www.personalcapital.com/>

Wally – Personal Finance App

<http://wally.me/>

## Identify Theft Recovery

<https://www.identitytheft.gov/>

## Saving for college expenses

- [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)
- [fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov)
- Understanding education tax credits: <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/education-credits>
- Coverdale ESAs: [http://www.savingforcollege.com/coverdell\\_esas](http://www.savingforcollege.com/coverdell_esas)
- 529 plans (both as a part of tax season, and independently):  
[http://www.savingforcollege.com/529\\_plan\\_details/index.php?page=plans\\_by\\_state](http://www.savingforcollege.com/529_plan_details/index.php?page=plans_by_state)

## General Resources

### National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions

<http://www.cdccu.coop/about-us/>

National Foundation for Consumer Credit Counseling Agencies (To learn what is the best option for someone, getting a discount on payments, negotiating scams and fraudulent activities.)

<https://www.nfcc.org/>

### Change Machine

<https://change-machine.org/share>

The “share” portion of the platform provides a means for coaches to get answers from other coaches on financial topics. There is a fee for this service.

## Content Module – Child Well-Being & Parenting

### Why is this topic important for both a coach and a family?

Parents play a critical role in a child's health and development. Brain science shows us how child development is supported by positive parent and family interactions. As Head Start notes, “. . . strong families are at the heart of children's success . . . When families are strong and secure, and family outcomes are enhanced, children are more likely to be healthy and ready for a lifetime of learning.” For many parents, their child's well-being is a major reason for wanting to make changes in their lives. Knowing how best to support child well-being is a challenge faced by all parents especially as they juggle the pursuit of education, finding or maintaining a job, and taking care of their family.

We also know that parents- and especially low income parents—can be significantly stressed by the challenges of caring for children while ensuring that basic needs are met. All parents need a strong support network of peers and community members to support them as they raise their children. And children's needs vary across ages—with young children demanding time, attention, and care when parents are away at work or training. Older children need support, guidance, and room to develop their social emotional skills as they transition to young adulthood.

### General tips and advice for coaching on this topic:

- As a coach, come to a meeting with a parent knowing, as Head Start states, “Families of all types can raise thriving children. This includes families with various care-giving structures, cultural beliefs, socioeconomic levels, faiths, home languages, and countries.”
- Remember that the parent is the expert on their own children and their voice is the most important one.
- Approach these topics from a family perspective asking what are the parent's goals for their children, and how do those goals support family well-being.
- Value a family's passion. If a family is angry that it can't get needed services for a child, it may look aggressive, but it is essential that you recognize they are advocating for their child. Always seek to understand and value what a family is telling you. With that mindset, together you can make a plan to address their concerns.
- As the coach, your role is to listen and share information as requested by the parent. Framing information shared from the perspective of what we have *all* learned about parenting from brain science and other research and how it works, rather than as what is “good” parenting, helps maintain and reinforce that you are equal partners in the coaching process.
- Key areas within this topic include: understanding child development, heredity and environment, parent and child interaction, and raising resilient children.

### Powerful Questions and Other Family-Centered questions:

- What are you hoping for your child?
- What are you looking for your child?
- What do you want to be able to do for and with your child? Who is available to help you with this?
- What is possible for your child?

- What are your worries about your child? What keeps you up at night?

More specific questions for child care needs include:

- What child care needs do you have? (this includes both early child care and before/after school care)
- What is the cost of child care? How it is paid for?
- What is the quality of the care you have? Does it meet the developmental needs of your child?
- What are the types of childcare options you have, and how do they support your goals for your child?
- What are your back-up plans?
- Are there ways to enlist the support of your family?

More specific questions for older children include:

- What is your relationship with your child?
- How do you resolve conflicts and disagreements?
- What are the ways you connect with your child about their lives- their hopes and dreams?
- What are your worries about your child? What keeps you up at night?

### **What are the core areas from other parts of this toolkit that you need to think about to support family success in this area?**

This topic ties closely in with other topics such as health and well-being, basic needs, family, friends, relationships, and finances. Looking at these areas provides insights into other interests, strengths, and potential challenges that can support or hinder a parent's ability to make progress toward the child well-being and parenting goal.

Other Content Areas	Questions for the Coach and Parent to Discuss.
<b>Health and Well-Being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is your body, mood, and behavior affected by stress?</li> <li>• How does your physical health impact your mood and your relationships with your children, your job, and your family?</li> <li>• What are some of the best ways to ensure health of body and mind?</li> <li>• How are your children's health? Are there health concerns?</li> <li>• What are the social and emotional aspects of your children's lives? Are they generally happy, content, sad, angry or clingy?</li> </ul>
<b>Basic Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are basic food, housing and clothing needs met for you and your children?</li> <li>• Are the children's health needs met?</li> <li>• Do you have safe, stable, quality care for your young children?</li> <li>• Are older children getting their basic needs met (school, food, housing, clothing?)</li> <li>• Is there enough to cover activities for older children's development (sports/after-school clubs?)</li> </ul>
<b>Friends, Family, Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are any spiritual practices that support you and your family? (better way to ask this?)</li> <li>• Describe your strongest relationships (family or friend).</li> <li>• How is your relationship with your older children?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What in your relationships might you want to change?</li> <li>• Do your children have strong social networks/friends for their healthy development?</li> </ul>
<b>Finances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need to earn to support your family?</li> <li>• Is anyone else in the family working?</li> <li>• What other income is coming into the family?</li> <li>• You can explore benefit options with the parent.</li> </ul>

**The resources identified below were recommended by the Advisory Committee and Topic Experts for the Family-Centered Coaching Toolkit.**

**Resources to identify in your community for your resource guide:**

- Parents are the experts – ask them where are they telling their friends to go? Ask them where they go for the local resources such as preschools, Head Start, pediatricians, public schools, child care, etc.
- Check with your local Head Start programs as they are required to develop a community resource guide for families (health, fuel, library) including eligibility criteria and hours of operation.
- Check with your local YMCA or Boys and Girls clubs for activities and supports for older children.

**Tools/Resources**

American Academy of Pediatrics Health Children Website

Provides information on a range of topics across the ages and stages of children's lives from pre-natal to young adult. Information available in English and Spanish.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/default.aspx>

VROOM (app)

Vroom shows how to make parent-child engagement fit within the schedule of family routines and work.

<http://www.joinvroom.org/tools-and-activities>

7 Tips for Practicing Positive Discipline

[http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/positive\\_discipline\\_tips.html](http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/positive_discipline_tips.html)

Use Positive Words

<http://www.ecmhc.org/TTYC/documents/Folder9HomeKit/FileE%20UsePositiveWords/UsePositiveWords.pdf>

Our Morning Routine Chart

<http://www.withherownwings.com/our-morning-routine-chart/>

## General Guides/Curricula

### Head Start

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Simulation: Boosting School Readiness through Effective Family Engagement Series

This is a series of video simulations to help you explore and practice everyday strategies to develop Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships with a family. These relationships are key to our work with children and families, including the journey toward school readiness. Simulation 1 allows you to practice building bonds with families, beginning with an intake visit. Simulation 2 explores the process of developing and implementing goals with families. Simulation 3 explores using strengths-based attitudes to partner with families during challenging times.

1. Engaging Families From the Start
2. Goal Setting with Families
3. Starting with Strengths in Challenging Times

[https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/pfcea\\_simulation](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/pfcea_simulation)

Video from Head Start– Engaging Fathers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/father-engagement/fatherengagement/best-practice-video-engaging-fathers.html>

## Section 4: Integrated Lessons from Other Disciplines

### Lessons on Behavior Change from Trauma Informed Care, Executive Skills, and Behavioral Economics

Recent research and practice in working with low-income families offers significant insights and new tools for families seeking to make changes and the coaches supporting them. This section offers lessons from three related disciplines that are very useful in work with families: trauma-informed care, executive skill development, and behavioral economics. These disciplines set important context for how people operate in the world, and provide tips for how to make change easier.

#### Two Suitcases

Poverty is an especially pernicious form of scarcity because it effectively puts families in a double bind: everyday tasks are more costly, and at the same time, the consequences of mistakes or misfortunes are more severe because families have no cushion to fall back on when an unexpected shock or minor error throws off their tenuous equilibrium...(this is) the absence of slack, or extra reserves of a resource (e.g. time or money) that families can draw on in case of emergency.



To understand the implications of living without slack, we turn to a metaphor, originally conceived by Eldar Shafir and Sendhil Mullainathan that features two suitcases. One is large and roomy, with plenty of space for clothing, toiletries, and any other potentially useful items. The other is small and compact, and fitting even the basics inside is a challenge. Packing the first suitcase is a breeze: it's quick work because it doesn't require the packer to make many mentally taxing decisions. Not sure whether you'll need a coat? Throw it in just in case. Can't decide between two pairs of shoes? Grab them both. The second suitcase is more challenging: its smaller size requires you to make tradeoffs. Because space is so limited, you can't bring along anything inessential. You need to accurately predict what you'll need and take the time and effort to pack all of those items (or at least those that fit!) inside the suitcase like pieces in a game of Tetris. When you're forced to pack so leanly, unforeseen events cause problems you are unprepared to address. Should the weather be different than the forecast predicted, or should you stain one of your few shirts, you're out of luck.

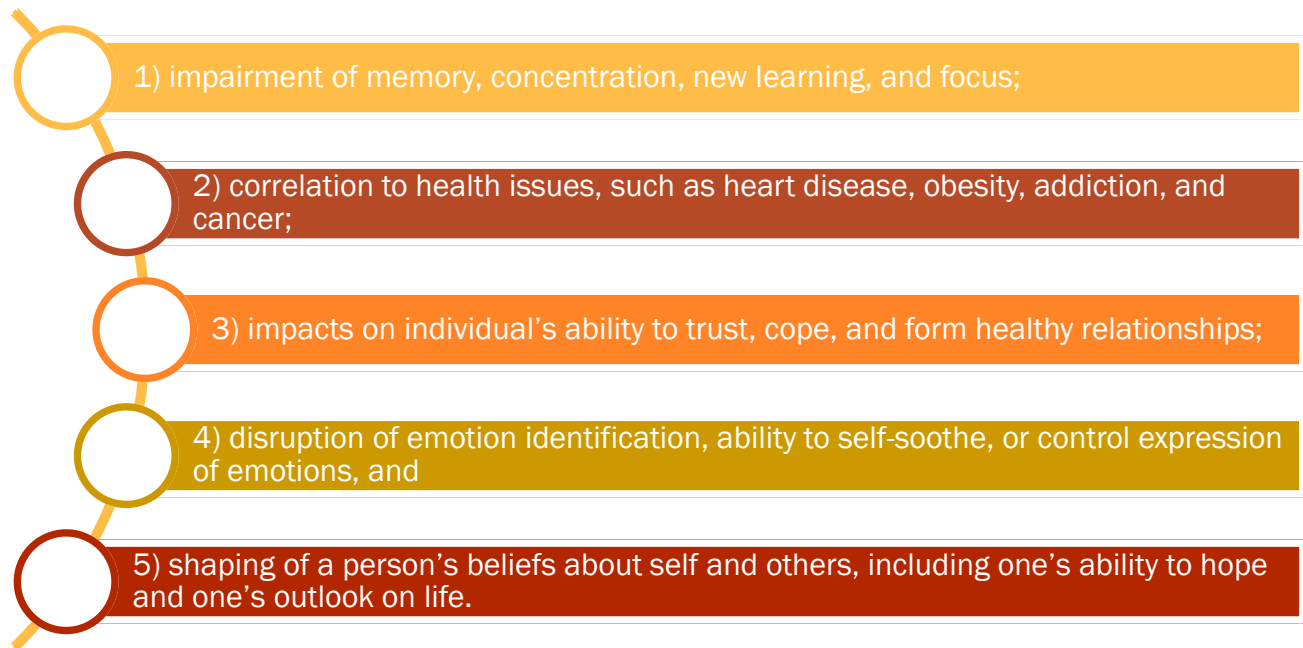
This is a rather light metaphor for the very serious ways in which a lack of slack both levies a cognitive tax and leaves families vulnerable to relatively minor shocks. Living in poverty is similar to having a too-small suitcase in the sense that there's no extra "space." Income may barely cover expenses, or fail to cover them all, and there may be little to no emergency savings tucked away... Without slack, slight changes in income or expenses are likely to throw even a very carefully packed suitcase into disarray and leave families scrambling to put things back in place for months or even years.

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<sup>iii</sup> The McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, New York University Silver School of Social Work, 2015.

Family-centered coaching seeks to develop trauma-informed care approaches and practices, which recognize the trauma of racism and poverty experienced by individuals or families in addition to the trauma due to specific events.

Effects of trauma include:



The term “trauma-informed care” may be problematic to some people because it could seem to say people are “stuck” or not resilient. The word “trauma” indicates that external, negative forces are at play — things that are beyond a person’s control — and this is the context that trauma-informed care attempts to set. We do not judge a child with a broken leg, or a soldier returning from war; they have experienced trauma that shapes their life experiences. Trauma-informed care works to recognize this context and offers guidance both organizationally and for staff in how to best support families who are experiencing trauma, or may have experienced trauma in the past. The goal of the trauma-informed care approach is to ensure that service systems recognize and respond to the unique needs of trauma survivors.

### **Why is Trauma-Informed Care Important to Family-Centered Coaching?**

To be most effective, family-centered services must be delivered in a way that is responsive to the impacts of trauma on individuals and families, and that recognizes the trauma families often experience living in disenfranchised communities. Systemic racism and being low-income create stress and trauma on a daily basis. Organizations and coaches should prioritize creating a trauma-informed care approach regardless of who they are serving.

Five principles can help you begin to create a trauma-informed environment:

1. Safety – creating areas that are calm and comfortable
2. Choice – providing a parent with options

3. Empowerment – noticing capabilities in a parent
4. Collaboration – making decisions together
5. Trustworthiness – providing clear and consistent information

These principles mirror and support those of family-centered coaching; the coaching relationship cannot be built and sustained without parents feeling safe, valued, and in control.

## Executive Skills

### What are Executive Skills?

Executive skills are the skills that help people set goals to achieve the results they desire. All of us have differing strengths and challenges related to our executive skills. While these skills have a neurological basis and develop most strongly prenatally and into our mid-twenties, new research shows that we can build executive skills throughout our lives. Our ability to use our executive skills can be diminished by stress and scarcity.

Understanding how executive skills can support or make more difficult each of us reaching our goals is important. As noted by Richard Guare, author of *Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential*, "There is no one skill or cluster of skills that is necessarily better than another. For each of us, the 'best' skills are the ones that allow us to most effectively manage the challenges of the daily living and work situations that we either have chosen or find ourselves in."

Executive skills can be broken down into three broad categories with specific skills:

#### 1. How we organize and plan things

- Organization
- Time management
- Planning/prioritization

#### 2. How we react to things

- Response inhibition
- Flexibility
- Emotional control
- Stress tolerance
- Metacognition

#### 3. How we get things done

- Task initiation
- Sustained attention
- Goal-directed persistence
- Working memory

How are these skills applied in the daily life of a parent or a child? They use these skills to stay organized and to plan out the day or week. Parents use executive skills to think about and regulate what they are going to say to a child or boss *before* they say it. We use executive skills when we deciding to get off Instagram or Facebook and start working a task that we've been avoiding.

The ability to successfully develop and use executive skills is affected by stress, scarcity, and poverty, among other factors. For adults, executive skills are often diminished by stress and fatigue, which, for many of the participants we work with, comes from the daily life of living in disenfranchised communities.

### **Why Are Executive Skills Important for Family-Centered Coaching?**

Understanding a parent's executive skills helps you as a coach know how to help parents use the strong executive skills they already have and compensate for their weaker skills when reaching for their family goals. Similarly, assessing your own executive skills helps you know your strengths and challenges as a coach, and enables you to find ways to apply your executive skills in supporting families. It also helps you enter into a more equal and respectful partnership with a parent knowing that everyone has strengths and challenges.

## **Behavioral Economics**

### **What is Behavioral Economics?**

Why do we do things we do? Why do we continue to smoke despite research telling us it is harmful? Why do we reach for the extra sweets when we are stressed? Behavioral economics helps explain why we behave the way we do – and uses science to improve how programs support families in setting and reaching goals.

Behavioral economics also acknowledges that poverty is a context in which so many families live, and which

has a greater influence on what we do than our individual traits or actions. A leading non-profit organization in this arena, ideas42, suggests we “fix the context, not the person.” The lack of access to resources and opportunities and the stress created by poverty produces a “bandwidth tax” on parents, reducing the ability of individuals to make quality decisions. Indeed, “the behaviors and decisions we may observe among people living with low incomes tell us much more about the condition of poverty itself than about the motives, skills, or character of the people experiencing it.” (“Poverty Interrupted: Applying Behavioral Science to the Context of Scarcity,” ideas42, 2015)



A goal of behavioral economics is to respond to the way people are instead of how we think they should be. And it offers a whole range of strategies for individuals, programs, and systems to become more effective in our lives and communities. It offers ways to encourage behavior change, supporting us in making those changes we want to make but sometimes find it so hard to do.

## Why is it Important to Weave Behavioral Economics into Family-Centered Coaching?

Behavioral economics can help make the road toward goals easier for families, and help programs effectively support families in reaching those goals. Using some basic design principles, organizations and coaches can make it easier to find information, and help families make choices and take steps toward their goals.

Here are some examples of strategies that behavioral economics uses to support family-centered coaching:

**Reduce the cognitive burden on families.** Make information clear, culturally relevant, and easy to read so that it is easy to act on. Break critical and complex steps into multiple pieces when coaching. For example, a goal of “finding a job” is made easier when the first step is “identify and call three employers with job openings.”

**Reduce “hassle factors.”** Put all critical information in one place (such as coaching dates, phone numbers, transportation options) so people don’t have to search for them. Use texting and video chat (e.g., Facetime, Skype) coaching for follow-up appointments to avoid long bus rides for appointments. Travel to a spot near the family you are coaching so it is easier for them to get you.

**Opt out.** Develop ways that families can choose to opt out to make it more likely they will benefit from the service. For example, as families sign up for coaching, they might have to opt out of text messages for reminder appointments, rather than have to agree to them up front. It’s more likely they will get the text messages – which in turn means they are more likely to stay in touch and show up for appointments.



## CHECKING IN:

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses when it comes to executive skills. We learn how to build them and how to adapt for weaknesses, and accommodate around our own skills.

Think about one particular executive function skill where you excel. Do you remember when you first realized it was a strength? How does this skill help you as a family member? How does it help you in your work life?

Now think about an executive function skill where you are a bit weak. How does it affect you as a family member? How does it affect you at work? What tools or tricks do you rely on to help compensate for the weakness? (Think about technologies, cues, and ways you might avoid leaning on this skill.)



Many more strategies are offered by ideas42 and others:

ideas42: [www.ideas42.org](http://www.ideas42.org)

MDRC: <http://www.mdrc.org/project/behavioral-interventions-advance-self-sufficiency-project#overview>

CFED: [https://cfed.org/blog/inclusiveeconomy/how\\_to\\_use\\_behavioral\\_science\\_to\\_help\\_end\\_poverty/](https://cfed.org/blog/inclusiveeconomy/how_to_use_behavioral_science_to_help_end_poverty/)

## Environmental Modifications

One aspect of the emerging practices from these three lenses are the modifications that can help you to improve your coaching approach and the environment of your program and organization. Environmental modifications are essentially anything that makes it easier for us to reach our goals and live daily life. Many aspects of behavioral economics, such as opting out of services rather than opting in, are examples of environmental modifications – you don't have to decide to receive the service; it happens automatically. Other examples of environmental modifications include:

**Modifications at home:** Work with families to make it easier to move through a given day. Create checklists for kids of what they need to do each morning to get out the door to school. Identify with parents a place near their front door where parents leave all essential things they need when they leave home.

**Program modifications:** Redesign programs to make them easier for families to access and participate in. Reduce the number of steps a participant needs to go through to become enrolled in a program. Co-locate services so parents don't have to travel. Break down program activities into small steps and make them clear and easy to follow. Use texting to push out messages and remind families of appointments.

**Technology modifications:** Identify ways that technology can make parents' lives easier. Set reminders on phones for important tasks. There are numerous phone apps now that help you keep track of spending, keep track of your "to do" list, and that help you set and track progress towards goals. One app that is being tested in public agencies is "Woopmylife" ([woopmylife.org](http://woopmylife.org)), which helps people change their habits and reach their goals.



## Section 5: Pulling it All Together—Step-by-Step

### The Family-Centered Coaching Process: Guiding Steps

Family-centered coaching focuses on the whole family instead of focusing only on the needs of one person. It also focuses on the interconnected needs a family may have. Family-centered coaching uses a range of approaches to help families meet their goals.

As you work with families, keep in mind the ten principles and values outlined in the “What is Family-Centered Coaching section.” Remember that working with families is dynamic and fluid; it is not a rote process. However, following the framework and general steps we’ve laid out will help you lead the conversations.

The actual engagement process can be broken into steps. Family-centered coaching incorporates elements from several coaching models including general coaching using goal setting, financial coaching, and child welfare coaching. It also brings in lessons learned and applied from motivational interviewing and strong case management practices. It weaves in best practices from trauma-informed care, behavioral economics, and executive skill building.

Below are seven steps to working with parents using a family-centered approach. At the end of each step, we list tools and resources that can be used when working with parents. You may not need or want to use every tool every time; rather, this toolkit provides you a set of resources upon which you draw to support you and parents as they move toward their goals.



*Om—is character depicting the Hindu sound of the universe. Symbolizes the process of centering one's mind and to be present.*

#### Step 1: Preparing for the Meeting

Before each parent meeting, it is essential to prepare yourself for readiness to coach from a family-focused mindset. You want to approach each meeting affirming that the parent you are meeting with is resourceful and has the solutions to their challenges. Take ten minutes before each meeting to review the suggestions from the tip sheet “Ready to Coach Today.” These are quick and easy things you can do to focus your attention on the parent sitting in front of you. Here are a few examples:

- Is your mind is racing? Quickly note your thoughts on a piece of paper.
- Are you distracted by what you need to do for work today? Draft a quick to-do-list.
- Unsure of what you want to accomplish in the meeting? Write down one key objective.
- Calm your mind by practicing mindfulness. Take ten slow deep breaths in and out.

- Eliminate distractions by turning off your computer and cell phone.

You also want to set the stage for providing a welcoming space for the parent to enter into an equal partnership with you. Make sure you have a private and welcoming space to meet that is respectful of diverse cultures. If needed, identify a child-friendly space for children to play when meeting privately with the parent.

These preparation tips are ways to practice and model for the parent self-care, which is essential to overall well-being and which so many of us are challenged to find time for. As you build the relationship, you may want to share how and why you do these preparations.



Tools/Resources: [Coach Resources: Ready to Coach Today Checklist, Everyday Strategies for Working with Families](#)



*Chinese letters for strength; the quality of being brave and determined; physical strength, and the force or power to do.*

## Step 2: Building the Relationship

The first time you meet with a parent is the start of designing a relationship with the parent. Relationship building is an ongoing process. Family-centered coaching takes a strengths-based approach and puts the parent in the driver's seat for determining what result he or she wants to achieve through coaching. It empowers you to use the coaching process in a way that will move the parent toward his desired results. You and the parent are equal partners in the coaching process, but you and the parent each have distinct

roles: the parent sets the agenda and you guide the process.

When meeting for the first time, be on time to greet the parent and walk them to your meeting space. Ask the parent, "What brings you here today?" The answer will help identify if a parent is in a crisis that needs to be addressed before either of you can focus on building the relationship. If the parent is not in crisis, explain the family-centered coaching process, showing them the road map of the 7 Steps of Family-Centered Coaching), noting that is a means for working together to support achievement of the goals for their family.

Review the role of the parent and coach in each step to emphasize that this an equal partnership in which each of you is accountable to the other. As you review the road map, discuss and decide together if there are other expectations for both you and the parent. Sharing the road map makes the family-centered coaching process transparent, effectively "setting the table" for establishing an equal partnership in which

both you and the parent are full participants. Explain that this first meeting provides an opportunity for parents to identify some initial goals they have for themselves and their family.

In addition, in the first meeting you will want to discuss how often you will meet, preferred communication method, and any challenges such as transportation, limited time for sessions, etc. Together decide how challenges will be addressed.

### Getting to Know You: My Family and Hopes and Dreams

A key question on where to begin is asking the participant to identify who is in his or her family. As stated earlier, family-centered coaching takes an expansive view of intentional and created families in their many varieties. This could be a mother and her children, or a father and his children. Or, a family could include parents, grandparents, and children, foster children, cousins, aunts, uncles, close friends, and any other person who is considered part of the family. There is no right or wrong way to define family, and who is in the family may change over time.

Other family members usually won't join an actual coaching session, yet their interests within a family are key to helping the whole family move ahead. You can help parents identify who they include in their family in many ways. A good way to start is to acknowledge that there is no one definition of who is in a family, and that it's important for the parent to say who they would include in their circle of "family." Then, either through questions or using drawing of relationships (see My Family worksheet), the parent can think about who they would include.

Questions in this conversation could include:

- "If you were to identify the people who you consider to be in your core family, who would they be?"
- "Which family members or people play a role in the day-to-day operations of your home life?"
- "Who else might be thought of as family by others, and do you want to include them in your family circle?"

From here, you want to learn more about a parent's hopes and dreams for themselves and his or her family. As this is about developing a transformational relationship with a participant, you begin by asking them about themselves. Begin with strengths and acknowledge the resilience and expertise they bring to this relationship. Use the "Hopes and Dreams" tool to ask the parent to share their answers. Listen for the strengths of the parent and the family. Ask the parent to talk about where the family has been successful. This conversation prepares both you and the parent to talk about areas where they want to change and grow which begins to move your work together to Step 3.

Another part of building the relationship in a coaching engagement is being transparent that you and the parent can revisit how you are working together at any time. Decide on a regular time to check-in on how the relationship is going. This could be once a month or longer, depending on the nature of your work together.

### Example Questions to Build the Relationship

- Tell me about yourself and your family.
- What are your hopes and dreams for your life and for your family?
- What are you most proud of?
- If our work together were to have a positive impact in your life what would it look like?
- How do you prefer to communicate with me (meetings/phone calls/texts)?
- How will we know if the coaching relationship is successful?
- How will I know when you are stuck?
- Tell me about yourself and your family.
- What are your hopes and dreams for your life and for your family?
- What are you most proud of?

This becomes part of your mutual accountability and recognizes that you are both active participants in making the relationship successful. Here are some questions you and the parent should continue to ask yourselves over time:

- How is the coaching relationship working?
- Are there ways we can improve the coaching relationship?
- What are obstacles or potential obstacles we need to address?
- What do we need to change in order to make the relationship more effective or have more impact?



**Tools/Resources:** [Tools Shared with Parent: The 6 Family-Centered Coaching Steps, Who Is In My Family?, My Hopes and Dreams, and My Children.](#) [Coach Resources: Step-by-Step Guide to Family-Centered Work with Parent and Becoming an Active Listener.](#)



*Various Cultures: The Wheel of Life*

### Step 3: Focusing our Work—The Wheel of Life

If you are in an organization with the flexibility to work with families on a broad range of areas and skills, use the content wheel to begin to identify which areas families are focused on. If however, you sit within a particular organization — such as a workforce training program or an early childhood setting, where your focus is on only a few aspects of family life — you can still use the content wheel to identify what else might be a priority for the participant. This is especially important because the non-discussed areas of life are often a factor in whether the work of your organization is successful or not.

The Wheel of Life Assessment Tool, which is the content wheel that can be used with parents, is a means to open a discussion with a parent. The seven sections of the Wheel of Life shown below represent key areas for a family that represent balance.

The Wheel of Life Assessment Tool is one model for focusing the work and identifying parent interests and initial goals, though there are others used effectively by practitioners across fields. Whether you use the Wheel of Life or another tool, the goal is to use the tool as a means to open a dialogue with the parent to acknowledge they are the experts on their family and the source of their own solutions.

Sharing a holistic assessment tool provides an opportunity for the parent to identify their satisfaction with each area in their life. By using a simple rating scale, such as in The Wheel of Life, of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) the parent develops a framework for looking at their life. Keep in mind, this process helps parents identify strengths in each area and places they would like to work on. Ask parents to

elaborate on how they or their family succeeded in an area. Celebrate the strengths and successes of the parent and family. Even in areas where parents have indicated a need for work, ask them to describe what has worked in that area. As a coach, you can help shine light on strengths of which the parent may not have been aware.

For each section on your assessment tool, you can ask guiding questions:

- What would a level 5 look or feel like in this section? What might it look or feel like to other family members? If there is a difference, why might that be?
- How will you know if you've reached a "5"?
- In comparison to the 5, how do you rate your current situation or satisfaction? How do you think other family members would rate this area?

As you and the parent discuss their successes and the levels of satisfaction for each area, you can guide the conversation by asking:

- If you were to set a goal to improve one or two sections, what section(s) would you focus on and what would the goal(s) be? Would these be the goals of other family members as well?
- Take a moment to imagine the goal. What does it look like, feel like? What would be different? What would it feel like for your family?
- What obstacles might you encounter as you work toward this goal?
- How might you overcome the obstacle(s)? How might your family help in overcoming those obstacles?
- If you were to set a plan right now to begin to work toward the goal, what is one step that you could take today or tomorrow?

Once the parent has identified two or three areas she would like to begin working on with you, be explicit in noting which, if any, of the next steps relate to other family members. Ask the parent to identify how moving forward on the area helps the overall family and the parent's well-being. Ask the parent what other family members may think about these next steps and how best to engage her in helping to reach those goals.



**Tools/Resources:** [Tools Shared with Parent: Wheel of Life Assessment Tool.](#) [Coach Resources: Content Modules and Resource Guide Template.](#)





*West African (Ashanti) Symbol: Sesa Wo Suban. It means to change or transform; life transformation. It combines two separate adinkra symbols, the "Morning Star" which can mean a new start to the day, and the wheel, representing rotation or independent movement.*

## Step 4: Assess What Role to Play

As you engage in conversation with a parent using the Wheel of Life Assessment Tool in Step 3, you are starting the process of assessing their readiness for goal setting, namely setting a clear goal and making a plan to achieve it. Step 4 helps move the process along, making it more clear to the parent if they are ready for change. While you discuss areas on The Wheel of Life or other assessment tools, listen for signs of a parent's readiness to move toward goal setting and planning for a particular area. Very broadly, you'll want to think about three questions and how the answers align with the three approaches in the Approach Wheel:

1. Are they in crisis? (Case management)
2. Are they still exploring a solution and how they feel about making a change? (Motivational interviewing)
3. Are they clear on their goal and ready to move forward on action steps? (Coaching)

While these are not definitive questions for determining what approach to use when working with a parent to increase their satisfaction level, these questions can help discern a parent's readiness for coaching. The goal is to move toward coaching on whole-family interests. Plus, a parent's readiness for coaching aligns with their readiness for change. As you listen to the parent discuss areas on the Wheel of Life, you can begin to map what the parent says to the stages of change. "What Approach Do I Use?" is a helpful tool for matching language used by the parent with the associated stage of change.

### Example Questions for Goal Setting

- What do you want for yourself?
- What do you want for your family?
- What is your desired outcome?
- If you got it, what would you have?
- How will you know when you have reached it?

As mentioned earlier in this toolkit, fluidity is hallmark of family-centered coaching. This means that, for example, when working with a parent in one area on the Wheel of Life, you may start with a case management approach, while in another area the parent may be ready for goal setting and coaching. If you start with case management in one area, once the issue is resolved, you check in with the parent to see how they are now feeling about readiness to make a change in the area. If there is still doubt or uncertainty, that then points toward using motivational interviewing to explore why they are uncertain and to understand what the parents needs to feel ready to move forward toward coaching. In other cases, after the resolution of a crisis through case management, a parent may be ready to move directly to coaching. One way to be transparent about moving among the approaches is to discuss with the parent the three different roles you can play as you work together. The roles are:



- Providing your knowledge and access to services to address specific information and/or resources that can be shared when using a case management approach
- Engaging in a “learning conversation” to explore and resolve doubt and uncertainty when using motivational interviewing
- Guiding a goal-setting and planning process when using a coaching approach

See the tool “Roles a Coach Can Play.” By sharing this tool with parents, you are practicing transparency, and providing them choice and support in determining what is most helpful to them in moving toward a higher level of satisfaction in their family life.

Together, think about how each identified area affects the other areas. Addressing a crisis in one area may remove an obstacle to moving forward in another area. For example, if a parent experiences a crisis because a child care provider closes unexpectedly, then resolving the childcare issue may allow the parent to move forward in a job search. As you work with a parent over time, the areas on which he or she wants to focus may shift depending on the interests of the family and any issues that arise.

For those areas where a parent’s stage of change indicates they are ready to set goals and make a plan, you can move to a coaching approach as described in Step 5: Plan, Do, Review.



**Tools/Resources:** [Tools Shared with Parent: Roles a Coach Can Play](#) and [The 6 Family-Centered Coaching Steps: Roles of Parent and Coach](#). [Coach Resources: What Approach Do I Use? - Assessing Readiness for Change, Transitioning Among the Approaches, Family Focused Powerful Questions](#).



*Celtic symbol (a form of a triskelion) represented completion or progress; advancement.*

## Step 5: Plan, Do, Review

In the previous steps, you started the process of building the relationship, getting to know the parent’s current situation and what they hope to achieve, and determining readiness for coaching by assessing the stage of change. When a parent is ready for coaching in a particular area, you and the parent move into Step 5 and focus on the coaching process.

Step 5 is when the parent makes a specific plan to reach a goal.

At this step, the parent refines their goal for a specific area and makes a concrete plan for how to achieve it. View the parent with an “opportunity lens” and approach them from a strength-based perspective. Understand that the parent is whole and complete. The parent is an expert in their own life and able to achieve the results they desire.

As their coach, you help parents focus on building on their strengths and in creating a compelling vision for what they hope to achieve in life. As parents articulate goals to you, work with them to use the strategy of “Plan, Do, Review” as a means to move forward on their goal. Below are the key components:

- Develop a family goal statement
- Plan – together brainstorm answers to:
  - **What is to be done?** The more specific the parent can be as to what this is the easier it will be to take action.
  - **What role can family members play?** Encourage the parent to enlist the support of family members and to think about how to approach those members for assistance.
  - **Who will carry out the steps (parent, family members)?** There may be a series of small steps some taken by the parent and others by family members.
  - **When will it be done?** You and the parent may want to set timelines for each of the small steps and then an “all done” date for completing all steps. This way the parent can see movement and success along the way.
  - **Where will it be done?** Are there things to do in the home? At the workplace? At school?
- Do – This is when the parent and family carry out the steps outlined in plan.
- Review – Together discuss the successes and unexpected outcomes.
  - How did it go? Did things happen according to the plan?
  - How did the plan affect the family? Were steps missed?
  - Did things happen on time?
  - If the plan was achieved, then celebrate that and continue with the plan making adjustments as needed.
  - If the plan was not achieved, what needs to change? What family support might be needed?
  - What support or resource can you as the coach provide?

#### Example Questions to Plan Next Steps

- What opportunities exist?
- Which steps come next?
- Which strategy will you take?
- What will you do to reach your goal, and by when?
- Which concrete step can you take now?
- What obstacles might get in the way?
- How will you overcome those challenges?
- How can you gain support from family, friends, others to achieve your plan?
- Will this plan get you to your goal?

To develop the plan steps, the parent generates ideas that can help move them toward their desired result. You can help the parent to first generate ideas by asking powerful questions that evoke solutions from the parent. Allow the parent to reflect and gain greater insight on what is possible. Brainstorming is a technique that can be used during this step to facilitate the parent coming up with new approaches and provide an objective safe place for them to think out-of-the-box. During this phase, you will encourage the parent to come up with as many possible strategies as possible and then prioritize them.

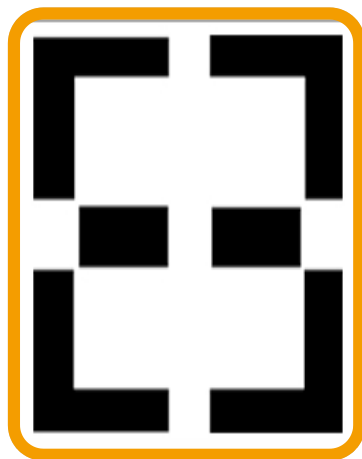
As you begin to work with parents, they will identify a step — or series of steps — that they need to take to progress and achieve their intended result. Breaking the larger step down into smaller steps allows you and the parent to decide which of the steps can be completed between meetings and which ones may need more time.

Together map out a timeline for achieving each of the steps in the Plan. Work with the parent to think about any potential obstacles that they may encounter at each step. Your role as a coach is to provide support and make sure that the parent has the resources they need for each step. You can also develop a plan to address the anticipated obstacle.

Lessons from the executive skills field suggest there is value in having the parent succeed in smaller initial steps in a shorter timeframe. As steps are completed and momentum is gained, steps can be made that reach further into the future. The executive skills field also suggests scaffolding the coach's help so that help is slowly pulled back as parents demonstrate increased skills to reach their results.



**Tools/Resources:** [Tools Shared with Parent: Plan, Do, Review.](#) [Coach Resources: How to Have Effective Brainstorming Sessions.](#)



*West African (Ashanti) Symbol: Woforo Dua Pa a (meaning: when you climb a good tree.) A symbol for symbol of support, cooperation and encouragement.*

## Step 6: Feedback for Support and Accountability

The final step in the process is creating a mechanism that holds both the coach and parent accountable for their role in the coaching relationship. Together the parent and coach should determine what process of accountability will work for them. There are several ways a parent could build in accountability. For example, a parent may decide to give you an update at the next coaching session. Others may call, text, or email you when they accomplish a task.

Accountability helps keep the parent on track with their plan and with implementing their next steps. Accountability also gives structure to the ongoing coaching.

Developing support also develops accountability. Help parents develop a support plan that includes others such as family members, friends, and co-workers. The plan can identify who can support them and how. This also lessens the focus on the coach as the sole support, and helps parents develop their personal networks. Some of the questions you may ask parents to help them develop a support plan are: Who can support you (family, friends, others)? What support can they provide? How will you ask them for support?

**Example Questions to Create a Mechanism for Support and Accountability**

- What will you do?
- When will you do it?
- How will I know?

Remember that if a parent doesn't complete the task they committed to, this is an opportunity for you to explore what

hindered them. Perhaps the parent needs more support to complete the task, or perhaps it turned out to be the wrong task or wrong timing, or the task needs to be broken into smaller steps. Accountability is not about judging or scolding or blaming. It simply is a process to help parents have a structure for achieving what they committed to do. If a parent does not achieve the steps they had hoped to achieve, the coach can turn this into a learning opportunity. What worked? What did not work? What would you do differently next time? What do we need to change here so you can succeed? What can I do to support you?

As the coach, you are accountable to the parent, some of the ways which are listed below:

- Responding in a timely manner to phone calls, texts, emails or other forms of communication. Decide together if you will respond within 24 hours, the next work day, or some other time period. Discuss if there are occasions when the parent may need a quicker response and how the parent will communicate that to you.
- Providing resources and information requested by the parent in the time frame noted in the plan in Step 5.
- Providing a safe and welcoming space for each meeting.
- Participating in a discussion on how the coaching relationship is going.

Step 6 is also an opportunity for you and the parent to establish accountability for revisiting how the coaching relationship in general is working as noted in Step 2: Building the Relationship.



**Tools/Resources:** [Tools Shared with Parent: Plan, Do, Review.](#) [Coach Resources: How to Have Effective Brainstorming Sessions.](#)

## Next Steps and Ongoing Meetings

All the steps can be done in an iterative process as you meet with families over time. In each session, you might need to revise where the participant is in a state of change, and what approach will work best for that

day. In particular, Step 5: Plan, Do, Review, can be used during goal setting periods of work with a family as a check-in and allowing you and the parent to recalibrate the approach and measure successes.

Remember that while a parent may have been actively ready for goal setting in an area, that can change as family interests and circumstances change. If a family member gets sick and needs care, the parent may need help from you identifying health services. That may necessitate moving from actively coaching to moving to a case management approach. You and the parent are continually reassessing what would help the parent move forward at any point in time. A parent might also achieve a goal in one area and be ready to start on another area in the Wheel of Life — perhaps starting at motivational interviewing or ready to dive into goal setting using the successful tools and experiences of accomplishing one goal for their family.

Each follow-up meeting is an opportunity to hold yourself and the parent accountable by reviewing and discussing progress on steps. These may be coaching steps from Plan, Do, Review, or steps taken between meetings to address a case management issue or to help a parent further explore their interest and readiness to make a change.

## Appendix A: Coaching and Troubleshooting/FAQs

### **I'm not sure my parent is ready for coaching? How do I know he/she is ready?**

If your parent has identified a goal or a result they want to achieve, they are ready for coaching. You can help your parent to identify a goal by using motivational interviewing techniques. Motivational interviewing is a technique you can use to help your parent to identify the result they want to achieve. In addition to working with your parent to identify a goal, it is also helpful for you to assess your view of the parent. Do you view the parent as resourceful and having the solutions to their challenges? Do you have biases or stereotypes that could be blocking you from seeing the parent from a strengths-based perspective? See the "Preparing for Coaching" section of the toolkit for more information.

### **How do I ensure that I am continually holding the parent's agenda?**

If you think that you are occasionally coaching the parent toward your own agenda, take steps to ensure that you focus solely on holding the parent's agenda. Start by assessing your view of the parent. Do you view them as resourceful or do you think they need your help? Do you believe the parent has the answers to their challenges or do you view yourself as the expert? If you answered yes to either of these questions, you may be pushing your own agenda rather than the parent's agenda. If you are unable to view the parent as the expert in their life, you will have a tough time holding their agenda. If you view the parent as resourceful, but are slipping into old habits of "having to be the expert," identify strategies to keep your parent's agenda at the center of the coaching. Periodically check in with yourself to make sure you are letting go of your opinions. Post reminder notes around your work space that the parent has all the answers. Check in with the parent to confirm that the coaching is helping them to achieve the result they want to achieve.

### **I feel like I am doing the heavy lifting in coaching sessions. What can I do differently?**

If you pose a question to your parent and they are completely silent or answers "I don't know," you may be tempted to jump in and help them find the answer. Don't jump in! Resist the temptation to help the parent, but let the silence do the work for you. Get comfortable with silence! It is often during silence when the parent is coming up with the answer. If the silence lasts too long, ask a follow-up question such as "What's the first thing that comes to your mind?" or "How did you feel when I asked you that question?" to get the parent to continue to reflect and find their own answers.

If the parent is stuck, also consider whether you are asking the wrong question. Are your question too complex? Are you asking "why" questions instead of "what" questions?

### **My parent can't identify a goal. How can I help?**

If a parent doesn't have a clear goal, if they are unsure what result they want to achieve, or if they are unclear about what they want out of a coaching relationship, it can be challenging to coach them. Start by helping the parent become aware of what they want to accomplish in the future. Visualization can be a powerful tool to help parents see possibilities. Help the parent to identify their personal values, preferences, needs and skills. Motivational interviewing techniques and tools such as the Coaching Wheel can help your parent better assess where they are now and what they want to accomplish in the future.

### **My parent doesn't want to address their goals for their children or family members in our coaching sessions. What should I do?**

The parent directs the goals and desired results that they want to discuss so you can't force the parent to discuss goals for their family if they don't want to. However, during Step 1: Design the Relationship, you and the parent agreed that the focus of the coaching would address the whole family. If the parent doesn't want to address family goals, revisit Step 1 to uncover the parent's reason for not discussing family goals. Perhaps they want to build a relationship with you first before discussing goals for the family. Although you should respect the parent's wishes not to discuss goals for their children and family members, consider asking powerful questions to encourage the parent to discover how their children and family members may impact the goal they are pursuing.

**My parent won't commit to take action. What can I do to help them move forward?**

The purpose of coaching is to support the parents to make changes so they achieve their desired result and will be accountable for their future. Start by recognizing that there are legitimate obstacles — including structural and institutional racism — that may prevent them from moving ahead. Once you have explored and validated potential obstacles, revisit the parent's goal. Start by confirming whether or not the goal is the right one. Can the goal be broken into smaller, more manageable steps? Is the timing is right to tackle the goal? Review these questions with the parent and make any necessary adjustments to the goal. If the parent confirms that the goal is the right goal and it doesn't need to be adjusted, explore the parent's level of commitment to the goal. Ask "on a scale of 1-10, how committed are you to making this happen?" Find out what needs to happen to increase their commitment level. Lastly, there may be other priorities that are preventing the parent from focusing on their goal at this time. If this is the case, explore ways to support the parent to address their priorities and come back to the goal at a later time.

**My parent seems to want me to solve their problems. How can I empower them to find their own solutions?**

Your role is to guide the parent, not to solve their problems. As a coach you should continually view the parent from a strengths-based perspective, even if the parent is unable to see their strengths and resourcefulness in the moment. Your job is to ask the powerful questions and get the parent to develop his/her own solution. If you give the parent the solutions, you are not providing them an opportunity to grow and to find the solutions on their own. Giving solutions also creates a reliance on the coach rather than reinforcing the parents' confidence that they have all the answers.

**My parent seems unable to manage their emotions. What should I do?**

Occasionally, a coaching session can elicit strong emotions from a parent. As a coach, you want to have empathy for your parent AND hold them as resourceful and able to find their own solutions. Have an empathetic attitude, allow parents to share emotions, and then support them to create solutions and focus on the future. If a parent is unable to focus on the future and is unable to manage his emotions, he may need more support than you can provide as a coach. In Section 1, the When to Refer Box provides guidance for making a referral to counselors, therapists, and other service providers.



## Appendix B: Commonly Used Coaching Skills

There are a variety of skills that you can use during a coaching session. Below is a list of commonly used skills that are applicable for family-centered coaching. After reviewing a number of coaching curricula, we provide below a set of common skills that are lifted up within coaching. A matrix of the components of these different coaching models is included in the family-centered coaching section of the toolkit. Below is an outline of the guiding steps that you will follow as you coach a parent.

### **Asking Powerful Questions**

The hallmark of coaching is your ability to ask powerful questions. Powerful questions evoke clarity, action, discovery, and insight. Powerful questions are open ended rather than yes/no questions. They help the parent to discover new possibilities, new learning, and it strengthens their vision.

### **Holding the Parent's Agenda**

During a coaching session, you must let go of your own opinions, judgments, and answers. Instead the goal is to follow the parent without knowing the right answer, giving solutions, or telling the parent what to do. Holding the parent's agenda requires you to put the whole attention on the parent and the parent's agenda not your own agenda for the parent.

### **Visioning**

Visioning occurs when you help a parent to create a strong mental image that inspires them to take action and creates a picture of their future life. A powerful vision is exciting and magnetic and it continually inspires the parent to reach their intended result.

### **Active Listening**

Active listening involves listening for the parent's vision, values, and purpose as expressed by the parent's words and by their demeanor. You listen with consciousness and your total attention is on listening to the parent.

### **Clearing**

When parents are preoccupied with a situation that interferes with their ability to be present during the coaching session, you allow the parent to vent or clear the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move onto the next steps. You encourage the parent to clear for a set period of time and after the clearing is complete, you and the parent are able to be fully present for the coaching session.

### **Bottom-Lining**

Bottom-lining is a skill that enables the parent to get to the essence of the communication rather than engaging in long descriptive stories.

## **Referring**

If during a coaching session, you discover something that should be addressed by therapy, or that the parent could benefit from services from another organization, make a referral. For information on best practices for making referrals, see the When to Refer box in Section 1.

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