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# PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

## WHAT IS PRACTICE-BASED COACHING?

### PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

Head Start has a long tradition of providing professional development to support education staff as they implement effective practices that lead to positive outcomes for children. Coaching is one form of professional development that has shown promise for supporting education staff as they implement effective teaching and home visiting practices.

The purpose of this document is to present the Practice-Based Coaching model. This model has both a research base* and an experience base. Practice-Based Coaching is a model of coaching that includes three components (described below) which are associated with change in coachee's practices and associated changes in child outcomes. While the components are all necessary, the way in which they are implemented may vary. This document will define *Practice-Based Coaching* and discuss formats in which *Practice-Based Coaching* can be implemented, and it will highlight and explain the components of *Practice-Based Coaching*.

### WHAT IS PRACTICE-BASED COACHING?

PBC is a cyclical process for supporting the use of effective practices that lead to positive outcomes for children and families. The coaching cycle components are:

1. Planning goals and action steps
2. Engaging in focused observation
3. Reflecting on and sharing feedback about teaching and home visiting practices

PBC occurs within the context of a collaborative partnership. Each component in the cycle is designed to inform the actions taken by a coach or coachee during the subsequent component (or throughout the coaching process). The cyclical nature of PBC emphasizes that expectations and desired outcomes of coaching are regularly reviewed and updated. The figure below shows the PBC cycle and illustrates the relationships among the components.






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For the purposes of this document, it is helpful to define several key terms. A *coach* can refer to an expert, a peer, or the coachee (self). Here, an *expert* is someone who has knowledge and experience in the effective practices being coached. *Coachee* is used to describe the recipient of coaching. Practice-Based Coaching can be used with individuals who work with young children and families, such as teachers, home visitors, family child care staff, or support staff. *Effective practice(s)* refers to research-based practices that support family and/or child learning. Examples of effective practices may include designing and implementing developmentally appropriate activities, providing positive descriptive feedback to children or caregivers, and designing learning environments to support positive interactions. For information about specific effective practices, see the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) Effective Practice on the ECLKC. *Practice-Based Coaching* can be used to support, improve, or refine effective practices across all domains delineated in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

## IN WHAT FORMATS CAN PRACTICE-BASED COACHING BE PROVIDED?

PBC can be implemented in different delivery formats. Coaches can be experts, peers, or the coachees themselves.

Programs can deliver coaching on-site or virtually using technology, and they can also deliver coaching in multiple formats. For example, an expert might view a recorded activity that was uploaded to a website and then arrange for a face-to-face debriefing meeting. We show these options in the following table. We also refer to a specific model of delivering Practice-Based Coaching called Together Learning & Collaborating (TLC), which incorporates expert, peer-reciprocal, and self-coaching in a well-defined process. It is important to note that only expert coaching and TLCs currently meet the HSPPS requirements for intensive coaching. However, reciprocal/peer and self-coaching can be used to support staff as a part of a program's research-based coordinated coaching strategy.

OPTIONS FOR DELIVERING PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

| | | COACH | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | EXPERT | PEER | SELF |
| FORMAT | ON-SITE | Expert comes into the learning environment to observe an activity.<br>Expert meets with education staff to provide feedback on effective practices.<br>Education staff meet in work group with facilitator/coach to discuss their practice. | Peer comes into the learning environment to watch an activity.<br>Peers meet to reflect on observations and provide feedback to each other. | Education staff uses selfguided materials to structure an observation of his or her teaching practices, including videotaping while teaching.<br>Education staff examines data on effective practices to evaluate progress. |
| | DISTANCE | Expert watches video of activity that the coachee uploaded.<br>Expert uploads written feedback to shared website and conducts a conference call to provide specific prompts for reflection. | Peer reviews a video that the other peer has posted to a discussion board.<br>Peers arrange a time to discuss observation via Skype. | Education staff uses online tutorial to plan an activity to videotape.<br>Education staff records experiences using a structured online self- coaching tool. |

## WHAT IS MEANT BY COLLABORATIVE COACHING PARTNERSHIPS?

Practice-Based Coaching occurs within the context of a collaborative partnership. A collaborative partnership refers to the working interactions between a coach and coachee, group facilitator and coachee, or peers, that provide a safe space for coachees to ask questions, discuss problems, get support, gather feedback, reflect on practice, and try new ideas. Coaching is neither evaluative nor judgmental. PBC is a supportive way to help adults grow professionally.

Developing a collaborative coaching partnership is an on-going process that develops over time. Collaborative partnerships are begun and developed by establishing rapport and shared understandings. This might be done through sharing of professional experiences and backgrounds; establishing a set of shared expectations for time


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commitments and outcomes; or discussing and reaching a mutual understanding of the coaching process and purpose. The coaching cycle is designed to strengthen collaboration and should be used systematically. The coaching components require reciprocity, or two-way interactions. Each coaching partnership is individualized to the unique strengths, needs, shared understandings, and desired outcomes of the coach and coachee.

## HOW IS EACH COMPONENT OF PRACTICE-BASED COACHING IMPLEMENTED?

Each component of the PBC model is described in the following table. Taken together, all components help a coachee achieve desired outcomes for improvement or refinement of effective practices. A summary of the processes involved in each component is provided in the table below.

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING COMPONENTS AT-A-GLANCE

| COMPONENT 1: SHARED GOALS AND ACTION PLANNING | COMPONENT 2: FOCUSED OBSERVATIONS | COMPONENT 3: REFLECTING ON AND SHARING FEEDBACK ABOUT TEACHING PRACTICES |
|---|---|---|
| ▪ Assess needs.<br>▪ Set goals for coaching.<br>▪ Create an action plan to guide coaching.<br>▪ Review and update goals and action plan throughout coaching partnership. | ▪ Gather information through observation.<br>▪ Record information about the observation.<br>▪ Use support strategies to learn more about the practice or to improve or refine effective practices (coach models or prompts). | ▪ Discuss and reflect on observation and progress.<br>▪ Share and consider feedback.<br>▪ Use support strategies to learn more about the practice or to improve or refine effective practices (problem-solving conversations, creating materials, etc.). |

## COMPONENT 1: PLANNING GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

This component of the *Practice-Based Coaching* model includes processes for *initial* goal setting and action planning and processes for *ongoing* goal setting and action planning. For initial goal setting and action planning, a needs assessment should be conducted. A needs assessment involves gathering data about current effective practices and determining priorities for enhancement or refinement. The selection of an appropriate needs assessment instrument will depend on the focus of coaching. An important feature of the needs assessment instrument is the clear delineation of the effective practices to be examined.

Based on needs assessment information, a set of goals is developed that guides the creation of an action plan. Goals should be clearly defined, measurable, and achievable within a defined time frame. Goals provide accountability and allow opportunities to celebrate progress. For example, a classroom coaching goal might be that the coachee wants to increase children's responses and interactions during storybook reading, while a goal for a home visitor might be that the coachee wants to increase his/her positive statements to the parent about interactions with the child.

During action planning, the steps, resources, and supports needed to reach a goal are specified. The action plan also includes a time frame to review progress on goals. The steps included on an action plan are small, observable tasks or strategies that support accomplishment of the goal. For the above storybook reading goal, sample action steps might be to read articles about shared storybook reading; to read the storybook ahead of time and put sticky notes in the book as reminders for inserting interactive activities; to select books with repetitious phrases that children can repeat; and to read the story to the children using the sticky notes and encouraging children to repeat phrases. For the home visitor, sample action steps might be to brainstorm positive statements with parents, identify materials that will support positive parent interactions with the child, and use at least 5 positive statements about the parent's interactions with the child during the home visit. The goals and action plan provide a "roadmap" for the support and feedback that occurs as part of the other components in the coaching cycle.



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## COMPONENT 2: ENGAGING IN FOCUSED OBSERVATIONS

The second component in the *Practice-Based Coaching* model is engaging in focused observations. The term "observation" refers to the process of gathering and recording information about implementation of desired effective practices during ongoing activities, routines, and transitions. Focused observations are guided by the goals and action plan steps described above. Observations are focused, because the information the coach is gathering is specific to the shared goals and action plan steps rather than a more general observation of the learning environment. For example, if the coachee and coach agreed on a goal of improving transitions with an action plan step of the teacher providing specific reminders of expectations prior to transitions and providing positive feedback for children who are meeting expectations, the coach would observe and record information on these targeted actions by the teacher. If a home visitor coachee had an action plan step to provide verbal prompts for the parent to notice a child's communicative attempt, the coach would record information on how many times the coachee provided these prompts, specific examples of prompts, and missed opportunities. There are many different ways to engage in focused observations, including live observation by the coach, reviewing video of the coachee implementing practices, or self-monitoring on the part of the coachee. Focused observations may include the coach providing support to improve and refine effective practices. This support might include strategies such as the coach modeling a practice, providing a verbal prompt, or offering quick suggestions. Coaches, whether expert, peer, or self, use a range of strategies that support using effective practices during on-going activities in the learning environment. The strategies are selected based on the action plan steps and discussion between the coach and the coachee.

## COMPONENT 3: REFLECTING ON AND SHARING FEEDBACK ABOUT TEACHING AND HOME VISITING PRACTICES

The third component of the Practice-Based Coaching model focuses on (a) mutual consideration of the support strategies used and information gathered about effective practices to identify successes, challenges, and areas for additional improvement or refinement (i.e., reflecting on use of practices); and (b) sharing feedback about implementation of support strategies and implementation of effective practices. This component happens in the context of a debriefing "meeting". A debriefing meeting is a time to communicate about progress and challenges, and make plans for future meetings and observations.

Reflecting on effective practice involves taking time to think about what was effective and what was a barrier to improving or refining implementation of practices. Reflection encompasses consideration both of the feedback and the support experiences.

Sharing feedback about effective practice involves providing information about performance that is both supportive and constructive and is intended to help achieve identified goals and improve or refine practice. Supportive feedback is used to recognize and encourage successful implementation of effective practices. Supportive feedback connects information from the observation with the goals and action plan steps to illustrate progress toward desired outcomes. Constructive feedback is used to help recognize opportunities for improving or refining teaching practices. Constructive feedback should be specific and provides guidance for what to do differently or better in implementation of the effective practice. Feedback is informed by experiences from examining and supporting effective practice, and might also be informed by reflection.

There are different ways to reflect on and share feedback about effective practices. For example, reflection might occur through journaling, while watching a video of a practice, or in conversation. Feedback could take the form of written notes or emails, graphical representation of progress, discussion, or adding notes to specific moments of a focused observation video. As in the previous component, support strategies are also used during reflection and feedback to improve or refine effective practices. Examples of support strategies include role-playing, problem solving conversations, or provision of materials and resources.


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## HOW DOES THE COACHING CYCLE CONTINUE?

As part of the debriefing meeting, information from the processes associated with reflection and feedback lead the way to engaging in ongoing goal setting and action planning, associated with Component 1.

For ongoing goal setting and action planning, the existing goals and action plan are reviewed and updated. Updating the goals and action plans might include continuing with the same goals and revising the action plan, revising the selected goals and updating the action plan, or identifying new goals and creating a new action plan. At some point during the ongoing process, the original needs assessment might be reviewed or updated to determine new priorities.



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