



Coaching Workers

A Guide For Supervisors

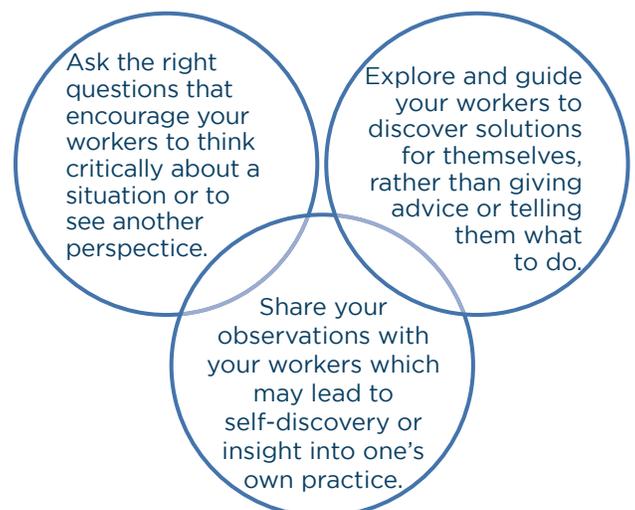
Coaching is a collaborative and structured process in which the supervisor, as the coach, uses specific strategies to help their workers improve their skills and behaviors. Improving workers' skills and behaviors with families can contribute to improved agency practice and improved safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for children and families.^v

What is coaching?

Coaching through supervision creates opportunities for support and professional development for your workers. Coaching is not telling or directing your workers on what to do. But rather, supporting your workers, so they can grow and develop their own solutions as they incorporate the Practice Standards into their work. Coaching also creates a safe environment that fosters trust and will boost your workers' confidence. Through coaching, your workers will be more likely to ask questions and seek guidance as they need it.

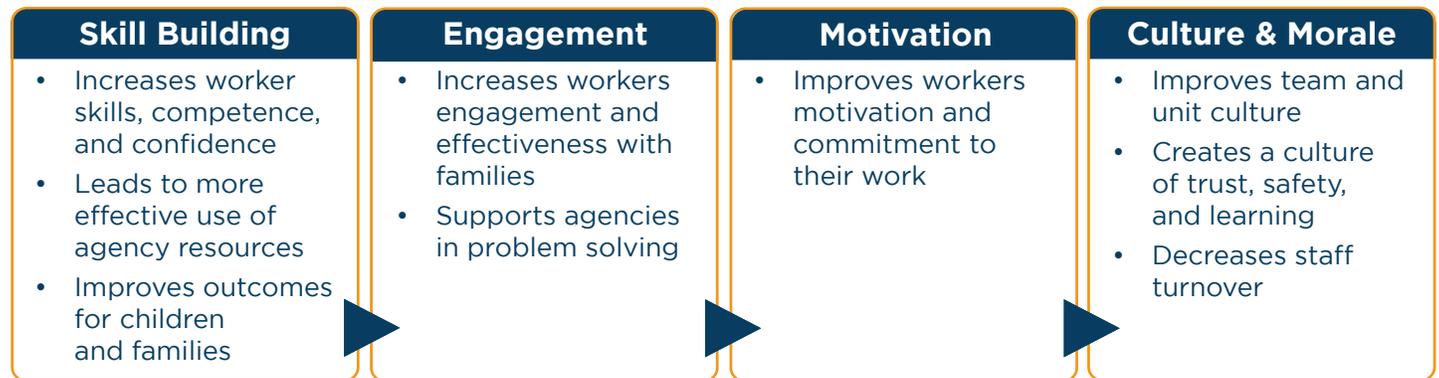
Coaching is beneficial for all staff regardless of their experience level. It should occur consistently throughout supervision and should be oriented to the experience level of your worker. Coaching can occur in many different situations and environments, such as case staffing, unit meetings, and out in the field. Providing coaching to your workers will help them integrate the Worker Practice Standards into their own case practice.

It's important to use coaching for growth and development rather than for situation- or problem-specific challenges. When supervisors use coaching with their workers, workers will in turn be more likely to use it with the families with whom they work. Effective coaching focuses on three main strategies that are tailored to each worker's individual needs.ⁱ





Benefits of Coachingⁱⁱ



Principles of Coachingⁱⁱ

- 1) Relationships come first:** Coaching is successful only in the context of a positive, empowering relationship.
 - Coaching requires a culture of trust in a strengths-based environment that encourages growth and professional development.
 - Coaching is founded on trust, and defined by partnership and equality, not hierarchy.
 - Coaching occurs separately from supervision or performance evaluation, and supervisors must be willing to give up some of the power inherent in their position when coaching.
- 2) People can create their own solutions:** Coaching means supporting and empowering your workers to identify their own solutions.
 - Resist the urge to solve problems or identify solutions for your workers.
 - Recognize workers have knowledge and skills that they bring to their job and coaches must support them to use their expertise to discover their own solutions.
- 3) Facilitate the process, not the outcome:** To take ownership of their work, workers must determine the next steps they will take.
 - Ensure goals and action steps are concrete and workers have the knowledge to implement identified steps.
 - Remember to be flexible. Coaching must be individualized for each worker. Learning what each worker needs can take time.
 - Create room for workers to make their own decisions, even if their decisions are not what yours might be.
- 4) Manage yourself first:** Be aware of your own bias and the impact personal bias may have on your work.
 - Understand and accept your culture and how past experiences affect how you evaluate others.
 - Stay neutral even when your worker has a different approach or perspective that is driving the solution.
- 5) Table your expertise for curiosity:** Operate from a sense of genuine curiosity.
 - Listen to understand others' perspectives and ask thoughtful questions.
 - Step back so agency staff can step into the role of expert on their cases.
 - Resist the urge to simply give your workers the answers or solutions.
- 6) Ask powerful questions:** Ask insightful and open-ended questions that will prompt your workers to reflect and critically think through the situation.
 - Encourage workers to ask questions and seek guidance as they need it by asking your workers thoughtful questions.
 - Create 'a-ha' moments by asking powerful questions that facilitate learning and growth in workers' practice.





Building Your Coaching Toolboxⁱⁱ

Because coaching is about asking rather than telling, having a toolbox full of different questions is key. Questions must be insightful, open-ended, and powerful to create those “a-ha” moments.

Exploring questions: Encourages workers to share more about a situation to help clarify. These questions look deeper into a situation and promote critical thinking.

Relationship questions: Encourages workers to look at situations from different perspectives. Promotes self-awareness by asking workers to consider another person’s perception and acknowledge their own biases.

Exception questions: Encourages others to think about the absence of a problem or a time when it was less of a problem. These questions encourage workers to identify strengths to build on what has worked in the past.

Scaling questions: Encourages workers to be solution-focused. Questions can be used to assess safety, needs, and strengths; set goals; measure progress; and determine the next steps.

Coping questions: Acknowledges a difficult situations your worker is experiencing while recognizing their strengths, persistence, resiliency, and resources to cope. Encourages your workers to use their coping strategies during difficult situations.

Visioning questions: Encourages your workers to think about how they would like a situation to be or imagine what it would be like if the situation was better. This can motivate them to work towards their goals. These questions focus on asking what they want for themselves or what they envision for a family on their caseload.

Action questions: Encourages your workers to take the lead in identifying and moving towards committing to action steps. These questions ask what needs to happen first, who needs to be involved, what is needed to make it happen, and the potential barriers.





Coaching Toolbox



Exploring Questions

- What is the concern?
- What have you already tried?
- What do you think is different about this case?
- What will happen if nothing changes?



Relationship Questions

- How do others feel about what is happening?
- What else might have been going on during that situation?
- What do you think it means to the family that child welfare is involved in their lives?



Exception Questions

- Tell me about a time when you felt you were experiencing success with the family.
- What was different then?
- What has worked well in the past that you might want to try again?



Scaling Questions

- Define the 1 and the 10 on the scale.
- Where are you on the scale?
- What does the scale look like closer to the desired state?
- What steps might it take to move up or down?



Coping Questions

- What has been helpful in managing the situation?
- What's better? What else is better?
- Where has there been success despite the challenges?



Visioning Questions

- Six months from now, how do you want the situation to look?
- At the end of your time with the family, what would you like the family to be doing differently?
- What will success look like?



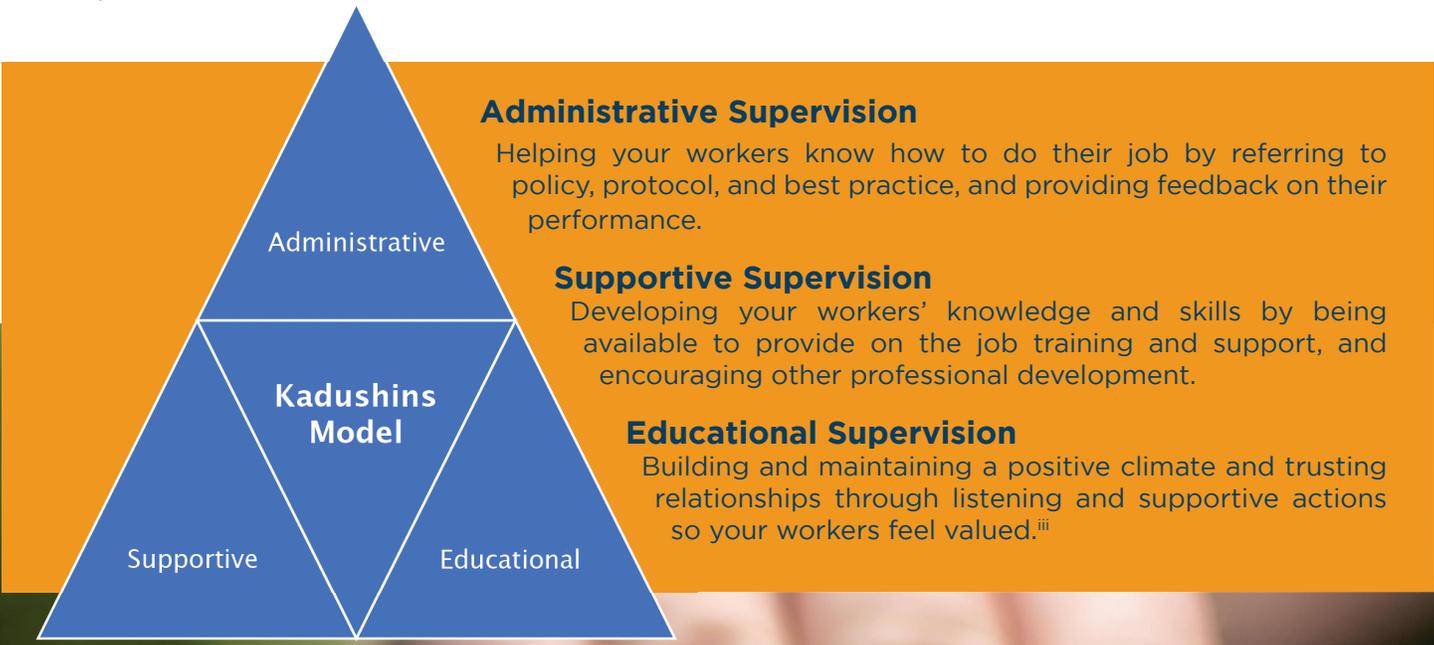
Action Questions

- What are the pros and cons of each possibility?
- What is the first step you will take and when? How will that address the concern?
- What will it take to make that happen?
- What are the potential barriers?
- What support do you need from me?



Implementing the North Carolina Practice Standards Through Coaching

The North Carolina Practice Standards build skills and behaviors in the workforce that provide the groundwork for learning, and these standards are the foundation of North Carolina’s Practice Model. A statewide Child Welfare Practice Model ensures that child welfare services are provided consistently to improve outcomes for children and families across the 100 counties in North Carolina. In addition to your Supervisor Practice Standards, your workers have their own set of Core Activities and Practice Standards. Support your workers as they incorporate their Practice Standards into their work. When your workers have the skills and demonstrate desired behaviors in these areas, you will have confidence in their work and interactions with children and families. You will also find increased engagement and improved safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for the children and families they work with. Supporting your workers as they implement their Practice Standards through coaching is more effective than telling or directing your workers to implement the Worker Practice Standards. Coaching is a “hands-on” approach allowing workers to see how the Standards should look in practice.





The North Carolina Practice Standards build skills and behaviors in the workforce that provide the groundwork for learning. The Standards are described in observable, behaviorally specific terms to illustrate how workers will conduct the essential functions of child welfare and how supervisors and leaders will support them. The Practice Standards are divided into the following five Essential Functions:

Communicating Essential Function

Timely and consistent sharing of spoken and written information so that meaning and intent are understood in the same way by all parties involved. Open and honest communication underpins the successful performance of all essential functions in child welfare.

Administrative:

- Clearly and openly communicate to workers job responsibility expectations through honest and direct discussions.
- Provide regular and ongoing feedback regarding individual performance. Tailor feedback to the experience level of the worker.
- Create a culture where workers are actively involved in their performance reviews and strategies to improve performance.
- Describe and explain to workers the ‘why’ behind requirements and directives, such as policy or statute.

Educational:

- Allow time to enhance two-way communication during case staffing and unit meetings by pausing for questions and answers to ensure each worker’s understanding.

- Help workers identify and understand their own biases and techniques to mitigate their impact on the families with whom they work.
- Actively listen to workers and ask insightful, open-ended questions to encourage workers to understand the situation from the family’s point of view.
- Consistently provide feedback to workers on their communication skills, including using clear language, minimizing the use of acronyms, and ensuring documents provided to families are tailored to the family’s needs and the family’s level of understanding.

Supportive:

- Demonstrate interest, respect, and empathy by speaking to workers in a non-judgmental, respectful manner in all interactions.
- Consistently demonstrate transparency, authenticity, and genuineness during difficult conversations with workers in a way that promotes dialogue and the professional development of staff.
- Model for workers the skills necessary to conduct courageous conversations. Discuss the skills you have modeled to create an environment where workers learn from their experiences.

Engaging Essential Function

Engaging defined: Empowering and motivating families to actively participate with child welfare by communicating openly and honestly with the family, demonstrating respect, and valuing the family’s input and preferences. Engagement begins upon first meeting a family and continues throughout child welfare services. As a supervisor, you will empower and motivate your workers, families, and stakeholders through open and honest communication, demonstrating respect, and valuing their input and preferences.

Administrative:

- Prepare in advance for meetings with workers to demonstrate respect and engagement through knowledge about the topics being discussed.
- Connect with workers by providing enough time during meetings for clarifying and follow-up questions about policy, protocol, and best practices.
- Include workers in their performance review

and ask about areas they would like to work on, directing them to training or other professional development opportunities.

- Operate with the belief that workers have insight into their own performance and professional development by encouraging workers to identify priorities for their learning.
- Consistently provide feedback to workers on their engagement skills, such as being fully present when meeting with families, establishing rapport with families, preparing in advance for meetings with families, and keeping family voice at the forefront of all conversations.

Educational:

- Create a collaborative environment by encouraging feedback, input, and new ideas from workers. Identify both positives and challenges as opportunities for learning.
- Ensure workers finish speaking without interruption during meetings in order to fully



Engaging Essential Function (con't.)

understand their perspective and thought process.

- Assist workers in understanding cultural considerations as well as preferences, like gender pronouns, in all interactions with families. Talk with workers about how to build relationships with families from other cultural groups in an appropriate and effective manner and how culture may play a significant role in body language.

Supportive:

- Demonstrate empathy to workers' perspectives in all situations by listening, reflecting, and acknowledging their perspectives, even when you may disagree.

- Ignore distractions when meeting with workers, such as your cell phone and emails.
- Ask workers to share their recent success on a case during unit meetings. Acknowledge and celebrate worker strengths, growth, and success.
- Provide workers an opportunity to process lessons learned after tough situations, such as court hearings or challenging Child and Family Team meetings.
- Use active listening and body language, such as leaning in, smiling, maintaining eye contact, and nodding your head to show you are listening and interested in what your workers are saying.

Assessing Essential Function

Assessing defined: Gathering and synthesizing information from children, families, support systems, agency records, and persons with knowledge to determine the need for child protective services and to inform planning for safety, permanency, and well-being. Assessing occurs throughout child welfare services and includes learning from families about their strengths and preferences. As a supervisor, you will support and facilitate the gathering and synthesizing of information from children, families, support systems, agency records, and persons with knowledge to determine the need for child protective services and to inform planning for safety, permanency, and well-being. Encourage thorough assessing activities throughout child welfare services, including learning from families about their strengths and preferences. It is important to continually assess as circumstances with families constantly change.

Administrative:

- Establish strategic performance measures for workers to continually assess performance and professional development needs.
- Share tools and techniques that will strengthen workers' assessing skills.
- Help workers develop their professional skills so that they understand how to differentiate between factual information and opinion in assessments.

Educational:

- Guide workers to gather detailed and factual

information during assessments to understand the circumstances that led to agency involvement from a variety of sources and to critically evaluate information gathered based on the source.

- Provide guidance to workers on the importance of ongoing information gathering and analysis, such as identifying what has worked well in the past, to inform the next stages of work with families.
- During supervisory meetings, ask workers questions to understand the information that was gathered to be sure it includes all relevant information needed for the case. If they have not gathered all relevant information needed to inform decisions or make sound conclusions, provide guidance about obtaining the missing information, such as why the information is needed, why it is important, and how to gather it.
- Monitor how workers are processing information and forming conclusions by asking open-ended questions, such as "How does the family's history impact their functioning now?"

Supportive:

- Encourage workers to identify family strengths and successes and draw on these strengths in their assessments and planning.
- Help workers understand how their biases may impact their assessments and conclusions.
- Support workers as they think critically to connect information gathered in the assessment to inform their decision-making and planning for families.



P L A N N I N G



Planning Essential Function

Planning defined: Respectfully and meaningfully collaborating with families, communities, tribes, and other identified team members to set goals and develop strategies based on the continuous assessment of safety, risk, family strengths, and needs through a child and family team process. Plans should be revisited regularly by the team to determine progress towards meeting goals and changes made when needed. As a supervisor, you will coach and mentor your workers on how to synthesize assessment information, engage children and families, and develop behaviorally specific case plans that get to identified outcomes. It is important to continually analyze and evaluate the family's progress toward meeting their case plan goals and to adjust the plan accordingly.

Administrative:

- Successfully find and allocate resources, such as training and tools to support worker professional development needs.
- Provide tools and techniques to help workers identify the root causes.
- Provide tools and techniques to workers on how to engage children and families in the case planning and Child and Family Team meeting process.
- Thoroughly review workers' case plans, factoring best practice standards, to assess for quality, and provide feedback on any needed adjustments to the plan.

Educational:

- Help workers understand the importance of and how to engage children and families in planning, such as listening to, respecting, and considering family concerns during the planning process.
- Take time during supervisory meetings for skills

practice with workers, such as taking turns practicing how to engage with families during difficult situations and conversations.

- Talk with workers about different ways they can empower families to take action to change the behaviors and conditions that led to their involvement with child welfare.
- Use Structured Decision-Making tools with workers to further identify needs and concerns in the assessment process and how to address those needs through planning.
- Talk with workers about the importance of continually analyzing and evaluating progress toward meeting case plan goals and adjusting plans accordingly. Help workers stay on track so plans are reviewed and adjusted timely to keep the plan current.

Supportive:

- Engage and actively listen to workers' opinions and ideas in identifying the root causes for involvement with child welfare.
- Engage workers in practice conversations ahead of Child and Family Team meetings so they have greater confidence and are prepared for any potential challenging situation that may come up.
- Support workers through field observation during Child and Family Team meetings, so that child and family voice is accurately reflected in the case plan.
- Ask workers questions to understand their concerns as it relates to the child and family, and then talk through those concerns to identify goals that will appropriately address the family's needs.
- Talk with workers about bias and how their own bias may be impacting the areas of need and goals they have identified for families.



Implementing Essential Function

Implementing defined: Carrying out plans that have been developed. Implementing includes linking families to services and community supports, supporting families to take actions agreed upon in plans, monitoring to assure plans are being implemented by both families and providers, monitoring progress on behavioral goals, and identifying when plans need to be adapted. As a supervisor, you will coach, mentor, and provide feedback to your workers regarding progress made in implementing plans, accessing services, assessing progress, and achieving outcomes.

Administrative:

- Review community resources with workers to ensure their understanding and familiarity with available resources to engage families and match families with services based on their individual needs.
- Help workers understand evidence-based practices and how those can assist families.
- Help workers apply what they learn in training to their day-to-day work by discussing with them what they learn, how to implement the practice, and what support they need.
- Escalate issues to leaders when patterns emerge on quality services lacking in the community.
- Focus on identifying your workers' skills that contribute to successful outcomes as a learning opportunity and chance for repeatable behaviors.

Educational:

- Provide guidance to workers about how to be family-centered as they take action to implement plans with families, including thoughtful matching of services to individual family needs.
- Help workers understand what services may be most successful to address specific behaviors with children and families.
- Provide guidance to workers to ensure recommended services are tied to specific behavioral changes and how to prioritize services to avoid overwhelming the family.
- Meet regularly with workers on family progress, provide honest feedback, and consider suggestions as needed.
- Use scaling questions with workers to look at case progress and what may still need to be done to accomplish goals and close the case.

Supportive:

- Provide hands-on, active support to workers to take action on implementing plans.
- Brainstorm with workers to help them identify potential barriers and solutions to successful plan implementation.
- Reflect with workers on the demands of their job and how to pace themselves to avoid burnout.
- Encourage workers to share information they recently learned about a new service provider in the community during unit meetings.





Coaching Follows the Essential Function Process

When applying the Practice Standards as a supervisor, particularly around coaching workers, utilize the four-step process to ensure your workers stay focused on concerns, strengths, and what needs to happen next. This will help you, as a supervisor, effectively demonstrate your role as a coach and mentor, and resolve issues as they arise while modeling your own Practice Standards.

<p>→ 01</p> <p>Exploring & Relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the concern? • What will happen if nothing changes? • How do others feel about what is happening? <p>Exploring and relationship gains clarity and perspective and sets priorities in addressing concerns as they arise</p> <p>Communication & Engaging</p>	<p>→ 02</p> <p>Exception, Scaling & Coping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has worked well in the past that you might want to try again? • What has been helpful in managing the situation? <p>Coping scaling and exception identifies strengths and needs, resources, and potential options and solutions.</p> <p>Assessing</p>	<p>→ 03</p> <p>Visioning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will success look like? • At the end of your time with the family, what would you like the family to be doing differently? <p>Visioning identifies goals and next steps</p> <p>Planning</p>	<p>→ 04</p> <p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the first step you will take and when? How will that address the concern? • What support do you need from me? <p>Action clarifies your worker's commitment to taking next steps.</p> <p>Implementing</p>
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Coaching Strategies to Guide Agency Staff^v



Supervisor Keys to Success of Coaching^v

- **Purpose:** Be clear on what problem you are trying to solve and how you plan to solve it via coaching, whether for a worker, family, or community member. Supervisors need to clearly define their coaching purpose. Coaching can help resolve individual worker goals, such as performance on specific goals, and agency goals like responding to organizational needs to improve outcomes.
- **Structure:** Be clear on what you are trying to accomplish through coaching, whether with an individual worker or with your entire unit. Set specific times to conduct coaching. If doing individual coaching with a worker it is helpful to develop coaching agreements and roles and responsibilities, and how plans will be tracked.
- **Motivated Learners:** Workers need to be engaged and invested in the coaching process for supervisors to get their desired results. Regardless if coaching is requested or required, supervisors can help build motivation through management, guidance, training, and general encouragement.

ⁱ Jordan Institute for Families. (2014). Coaching for Change [curriculum]. UNC-CH School of Social Work and NC Division of Social Services

ⁱⁱ Family & Children's Resource Program. (2022) Staying Power [curriculum]. UNC-CH School of Social Work and NC Division of Social Services

ⁱⁱⁱ Kadushin, A., & Harkness, D. (2014). Supervision in social work (5th ed.). Columbia University Press.

^{iv} Evident Change. (2021). Safe Measures. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from https://www.evidentchange.org/sites/default/files/SafeMeasures%20Pamphlet_0.pdf

^v National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. (2012). Coaching in Child Welfare. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from https://ncwwi.org/files/Mentoring_and_Coaching/Coaching_in_CW.pdf



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