



2. How to use a coaching approach in practice



In this section we cover in more detail what is involved in coaching in practice in social services.

1. The values and behaviours of all those involved in a coaching approach.
2. The core skills needed for a coaching approach.
3. The scope of an informal coaching conversation and how to manage it well.

Each of these elements is involved in the different applications of coaching from informal to more formal as outlined in table 1.

Application of coaching approach	An informal coaching conversation	Coaching in line management relationship	Coaching as leadership style	Formal coaching one-to-one	Formal coaching of a team
Who is involved	Two or more people	Individual worker and line manager	Leader, colleagues and stakeholders	Coachee and internal or external coach	Team or group and one or more coaches
What is involved	Positive intent, core values and behaviours				
	Core coaching skills				
	Clarity about purpose of conversation	Clarity about purpose of coaching in context of line management relationship	Alignment with principles of citizen and collaborative leadership	Application of core coaching model(s) or approaches	Application of team coaching model

Table 1: Who and what is involved in different types of coaching

There is more information about the practice of formal coaching and the application of different coaching models in section 3.

After reading this section you will be able to:

- describe the skills and knowledge needed to practise a coaching approach effectively
- analyse your own capabilities to identify areas of strength and areas for development in relation to developing an effective coaching approach
- name a number of different practical tools for coaching
- identify the most relevant tools for your own practice and show how they could be used.

2.1 Values and behaviours of all those involved in a coaching approach

The quality of the space created in a coaching conversation can help people make sense of their situation and clear choices about what to do next. The people involved in a coaching approach create this space through their behaviours and values.

These behaviours and values are described in a set of core principles. The principles are as relevant to those involved in informal coaching conversations as those taking part in a formal coaching relationship. There is a strong link between the core values of social services and these principles of the practice of coaching. The bold words below demonstrate the potential link with core social service values.

- The person being coached is **resourceful**. They have the potential resources and the capabilities within them to work on their own issues and resolve their own problems.
- The role of the coach is to **enable the person to draw on their own resources**. This means helping them develop their own awareness and insights, take responsibility and exercise choice in finding their own solutions.
- Coaching considers **the whole person** enabling them to **understand and appreciate their strengths** as well as their areas for development from all parts of their life and make sense of their past or current achievements and challenges.
- The person being coached sets the agenda **enabling them to focus** on what is concerning them within the context of the service or their area of work.
- The person coaching and the person being coached are **equals**. Coaching is non-directive, non-judgemental and it relies on mutual trust and respect between those involved in it.
- Coaching is about **change and action**. The person seeking coaching wants something to change and the role of the coach is to help them achieve this self-improvement or skills development. Ultimately coaching is about helping people develop their own ability to coach themselves.

(Jenny Rogers, 2004)

There is also a strong link between the principles of coaching and citizen leadership:

- taking responsibility
- being enabled to exercise choice
- realising your potential
- focusing on your own development
- being involved in understanding and resolving your own issues
- being person-centred.

What do the values look like in practice?

- When you engage fully in a coaching approach you have a **positive intent** about the other person (or people).

- You have a belief in their **resourcefulness** and their potential to make sense of their own situation.
- You believe they can find their own solutions. Your intention is to **help them find their own solutions** and **make their own choices** about their course of action following the coaching conversation.
- Your relationship with others in a coaching approach is based on **trust and mutual respect**.
- You remain **curious** about their issues and concerns and **seek to understand** more about their perspective.
- You are **open and honest** in your interactions. If there is something which is not clear to you or you do not understand, you ask more about it rather than jumping to your own conclusions.
- You strive to be **non-judgemental** of the other people, their issues and concerns. You are prepared to see the situation from the other person's point of view. In other words, you demonstrate **empathy** rather than sympathy.

What do the behaviours look like in practice?

- In a coaching approach, you **attend** to the other person (or people) involved. This means that you are fully present and not distracted by your own concerns or priorities.
- You **listen carefully** and you demonstrate openly that you are listening.
- You are committed to **building rapport**. You understand that building and maintaining rapport is a critical foundation for an effective coaching approach.
- You are **self-aware**. This means you are aware of the impact of a coaching conversation on you. You are able to manage your reactions carefully, remaining present in the conversation and attending to others in the coaching conversation.
- You are **supportive** to others involved in the coaching conversation. You create the space in which they can talk openly about their issues and concerns without fear of judgement or censure.
- While you are supportive, you resist the temptation to jump in and solve others' problems. In a coaching approach, it is not your responsibility to rescue the other person. You believe in the **resourcefulness** of the other person even though it may be tempting to make it better for them. You understand that when we are enabled to reach our own insights and find our own solutions, we are more likely to take action and the impact is more sustainable.
- You are able and prepared to **challenge constructively** with the positive intention of supporting the other person's own exploration of their issues and challenges. You do not shy away from **giving honest feedback** in the moment. But you are sensitive in how you provide this feedback consistent with the principles of coaching.
- You manage yourself carefully in a coaching approach. You are **honest and open about your own professional competence** and its boundaries. In other words, you recognise when there are issues beyond the scope of a coaching conversation and highlight this to everyone involved.

2.2 Core skills needed for a coaching approach

There is a core set of coaching skills whether it is as part of an informal coaching conversation or a formal coaching approach. The skills are built upon the foundation of the values and behaviours for coaching (described above).

- **Attending** to the other person involved in a coaching approach, building rapport with them and seeking to understand what is going on for them.
- **Listening** actively and carefully to the other person and paying attention to what they are saying and how they are saying it.
- **Summarising** or **paraphrasing** what the other person has said as a way of helping them reflect on their own situation, rather than giving advice or adding your own judgement.
- **Using open questions** which encourage the other person to say more, to reflect and understand more about their own situation.
- **Being prepared to give honest, clear and specific feedback** while making sure the relationship stays positive and open.

Attending

Attending to the other person (or people) involved in a coaching approach means keeping your full attention on the other person. This is important for conveying genuine interest in them and their issues. It is an important foundation for building rapport and looking to understand what is going on from their point of view.

It can be challenging to attend to what someone else is saying and how they are feeling without being overtaken by our own thoughts and feelings.

Here are some guidelines on how you can stay present and attend to someone else during a coaching conversation so you are able to concentrate fully on what they are saying and not saying.

- Before a conversation spend a few minutes sitting quietly. Quieten your mind and your own issues and concerns so you feel ready for the conversation and fully attentive to the other person (people).
- During a conversation try to remain calm. If you notice your calmness slipping away, take some deep breaths and consider taking a pause in the conversation. This will help you regain your sense of calm and focus on the other person.
- Make sure you distinguish between your own reactions or emotions and those of the other person.
- Find a balance between being objective and showing empathy for the issues being expressed by the other person.
- Make it clear to the others involved that they are always in charge of choosing what they want to express.
- Avoid the temptation to make lots of notes. Notes can get in the way of being with the other person, really hearing what they are saying and our relationship with them.

- Notice if your mind is racing ahead to thinking of a solution or making a judgement. Jumping to your own conclusions or solutions will distort your listening. Ultimately you will be more helpful to others if you enable them to reach their own conclusions and find their own solutions.
- After a conversation notice what happened to you in the conversation. Listen to your own curiosity and intuition. Consider developing your ability to be as present as possible by cultivating a practice in mindfulness, yoga or some other approach that supports the ability to be more aware of what is happening in our minds and bodies. If you are interested in reading more about the use of mindfulness in coaching see Mindful Coaching by Liz Hall (Liz Hall, 2013).

Exercise for attending

Find someone to have a coaching conversation with you. Be clear that you are using this conversation as a way of developing your own coaching skills.

Be aware of how you are as you start the conversation.

Write down your thoughts and feelings.

Note any barriers that prevent you from listening actively.

At the end of the conversation, discuss with your coachee how you both experienced your listening during the conversation.

How did the coachee experience your attending and listening to them?

Identify the moments when you thought there was a difference between what was being said and the feelings you were sensing from the coachee.

Check out your views with the coachee.

Listening

All interactions with other people rely on listening. We all know that the quality of our listening can vary. Active listening is essential to an effective coaching approach.

'To be listened to is a striking experience, partly because it is so rare. When another person is totally with you – leaning in, interested in every word, eager to empathise – you feel known and understood. People open up when they know they're really being listened to; they expand; they have more presence. They feel safer and more secure as well, and trust grows. That is why listening is so important to coaching...'

(Laura Whitworth et al, 2007, p31)

Being committed to listening in a coaching conversation means you pay close attention to the verbal and the non-verbal cues of the person speaking. Our body language and voice convey a lot of meaning. When there is inconsistency between

the words someone is using and their body language and tone of voice, it is likely the real meaning is being conveyed in the non-verbal cues.

For example:

A colleague says she is happy about taking on a new role in her team. But her facial expression and tone of voice seem to convey a different message. At that point, you might say: 'You said you're happy to take on this new role, but your face and voice seem sad. I'm wondering what you really think about it'. This gives the colleague a chance to share her real feelings if she chooses to do so.

As a coach, you need to use all your senses when listening. You need to be prepared to offer observations about what you see as well as the discrepancies with what the coachee is actually saying. As a committed listener, you leave space for the other person to speak and to reflect on your question before speaking. You resist the temptation to jump in and give your opinion or piece of advice.

By noticing everything the coachee is saying and how they are saying it (or not saying it), you offer them the opportunity for a much deeper level of understanding and insight into what is going on. In this way, the skill of attending is closely linked to effective listening.

What can get in the way of active listening? We all have an inner voice that causes us to be distracted. Sometimes this inner voice is distracted by thinking about an event which has affected us. Sometimes it is throwing in our own fears, concerns or judgements. Whatever the inner voice is saying it can be an interruption to our ability to listen fully and actively to another person.

Exercise for listening

Think about some of your own personal barriers to listening.

Practice noticing body language, facial expressions and tone of voice in others.

When you feel comfortable, try offering observations if you think that their body language, facial expressions or tone of voice are at odds with what they are actually saying.

There are different levels of listening. In their approach to coaching, Laura Whitworth and her colleagues describe three levels of listening (Laura Whitworth et al, 2007).

- At level 1 our awareness is on ourselves. The purpose of information gathering at this level is to meet our own needs. It informs us about ourselves and what is going on around us. In a coaching conversation, the coachee is mainly listening at level 1. The coach aims to listen mainly at levels 2 and 3 and needs to be careful about slipping back into level 1.

- At level 2 we have a sharp focus on the other person. In a coaching conversation the coach's awareness is totally on the coachee. The coach listens to their words, their expressions, their emotions. They notice what they are saying and how they are saying it. They notice what they are not saying. Listening at this level means you also need to be aware of how you respond to what you have heard and how you leave space for them to react to your response.
- At level 3 you are also listening to your intuition. It can be described as environmental listening. It means going beyond what you are hearing and trusting your senses.

Exercise for listening at levels 1 and 2

- The aim of this exercise is to experience what it is like to listen completely at level 1 and then at level 2.
- It will allow you to compare and contrast the two levels of listening.
- It will provide a practical experience of the differences, advantages and disadvantages of these two levels of listening.

Part one

- Describe level 1 listening to someone.
- Ask them to describe a trip they have taken including stories about things that went well and things that did not go so well.
- As they tell you the story, your job is to listen to the words and interpret the story entirely in terms of your own experience. Make frequent comments which offer your opinion. Think about what you would have done differently or how you might improve their story.
- What is happening for you while the other person is talking? What are you thinking about and how are you feeling?
- What does the story remind you of in your own life?
- After 10 minutes, tell each other what it was like to listen and be listened to at level 1.

Part two

- Work with the same person and the same story for another 10 minutes but this time be curious (without describing level 2 listening), asking questions, clarifying and articulate what you see.
- Be alert for the other person expressing their values in the story. Stay completely focused on them by listening and responding at level 2.
- After 10 minutes, tell each other what it was like to listen at level 2 and what it was like to be listened to at level 2.
- How was the experience different from level 1 listening?

Source: Laura Whitworth et al, 2007, pages 47-48

A sign of good listening is that the coach picks up on the coachee's choice of words and uses them to reflect back. This is one of the simplest yet most profound skills in coaching. Reflecting means you replay some of the coachee's words back to them so they can add to them or explore further.

It can help by:

- letting the coachee know they have been heard
- confirming for the coach they have correctly understood what the coachee is saying
- challenging the coachee gently to explain further or say more about the issue.

It does not matter if the coach is inaccurate as long as the reflection is offered in a spirit of curiosity and a desire to understand. It simply enables the coachee to refine the reflection and it gives the coach a clear steer on what is important and significant for the coachee.

The skill of reflecting lies in the timing and choice of phrase to replay. It is best to wait for the coachee to pause and then reflect back the chosen words or phrase.

Summarising and paraphrasing

Summarising is a skill that allows the coachee to pause for thought. A summary does not have to capture everything the coachee has said. It draws out the main themes in the conversation as those are what matter.

Summarising is a shared activity. The coach draws out the key themes for the coachee to verify and build upon. The skill in summarising is the time and method. It is best to wait for a natural break before offering a summary but sometimes, if information is coming thick and fast, it is helpful to interrupt gently and suggest a summary might be beneficial.

It is best if the coach indicates a summary is about to happen as shown in the following examples.

- 'Can I check what I think we have covered so far? You mentioned ...' (then summarise the key themes).
- 'I would like to make sure that I have heard what you have said so far. I believe you mentioned ...' (then summarise the key themes).
- 'I wonder if I could check in with you. Am I right in thinking that you have discussed ...' (then summarise the key themes).

Once the coach has offered a summary, it is crucial to leave space for the coachee to verify the summary and add to it if they want.

Summarising helps those who think aloud explore lots of points along the way by connecting them back to the key points of what they want to cover in coaching.

Summarising helps those who think first before speaking by showing they have been heard and understood. Summarising helps the coachee think further and deeper about what they are sharing in the coaching.

Sometimes people have a lot to say in a coaching conversation. It might be the first time they have been given the space to fully explore their issue. In this case it might be better to invite the coachee to do their own summary as shown in the following examples.

- 'There seems to be a lot in what you just said. What would be the main highlights for you?'
- 'You seem to have thought about this a lot. If you were to pick out the headlines, what would they be?'

It can also be helpful for the coach to add to the coachee's summary.

- 'I think I picked up another point in addition to your summary. I wonder whether I could check it out with you.'

Offering a summary or inviting the coachee to give a summary is helpful to the coachee. It remains the coachee's choice which key themes they spend more time on in the rest of the coaching conversation.

Paraphrasing is a short statement or summary of what another person is saying. It helps the coachee clarify their thinking. By doing this without giving advice or interrupting with your own judgement or story, the coach will deepen the level of trust. Paraphrasing actively demonstrates you are fully listening to the other person, you care about what they are saying and you are trying to understand their point of view.

Exercise for summarising

Practice your skill of summarising by listening out for the key threads, elements or issues in what a colleague is saying.

At a suitable pause, ask their permission to provide a summary.

Mention the number of points you are summarising followed by your brief summary of these key points.

Check the summary represents a shared understanding of what your colleague has said. Leave space for your colleague to confirm the summary is accurate or to reframe your key points in a way which makes sense to them.

Watch this brief video Improve your listening skills with active listening by [MindTools on YouTube](#).

For a perspective on the importance of listening, especially within the context of negotiating and managing conflict, watch this TEDx Talk [‘The power of listening’](#) by William Ury (2015) on YouTube.

Using open questions

A key skill for coaching is asking effective and open questions. The purpose of asking questions in a coaching conversation is to encourage the other person to say more, to reflect and understand more about their own situation.

Effective questions flow from your ability to listen actively. Sometimes the most effective way of enabling someone to explore their issue or concern is simply to encourage them to say more:

- ‘tell me more about that’
- ‘say more ...’
- ‘what else do you want to say about that?’.

There are some key points to remember about asking questions.

Ask simple questions

Simple questions are short questions that usually start with what, how, where, who or when. Questions starting with what and how are most common, for example:

- what would success look like for you?
- how would you know that you have achieved your goal?
- where else in your life have you achieved something similar?
- who do you need support from to help you achieve your goal?
- when did you last celebrate your achievement?.

Ask one question at a time

If you are part way through a question and start adding to it, it will become too complicated and confusing. Trust your original question and stick with it. If the other person does not understand the question, let them tell you and you will have the opportunity to rephrase it.

Ask fewer questions

The fewer questions we ask, the more space we provide for the coachee to think and reflect on their answers. Think about the quality and purpose of each question rather than the number of questions. Sometimes it can be more powerful to leave space for the coachee to think before speaking. Staying quiet and leaving silence for the coachee to reflect can be a more powerful intervention than another question.

Ask questions to help the other person discover more

In everyday conversations, we ask questions that help us understand better (to support our level 1 listening). In coaching conversations, we ask questions to help the coachee understand more about their own situation. The question should follow the interest of the coachee; it should emerge from what the coachee has just said. These questions help the coachee discover more about their own situation.

Ask questions that balance support and challenge

For coaching conversations to be effective we need to find the right balance between support and challenge. Too much support and we might as well be having a good discussion with a friend or partner. Too much challenge and the coaching turns into an inquisition.

Supportive questions are asked in an understanding way and will help the coachee understand more about what is going on for them. Challenging questions are more probing. They look to get at what is going on behind the issue, verify the facts and enable the coachee to discover further options. Challenging questions need to be asked in a way that conveys possibility and the coach's belief in the resourcefulness of the coachee.

Watch this short [video](#) about powerful questions by Professor David Clutterbuck (shared on YouTube by Horizons Unlimited).

See resource 1 for practical tools and tips on the use of questions in coaching.

Questioning styles to avoid in coaching conversations

There are no bad questions as long as the coach leaves space for the coachee to reframe the question.

However, there are some styles of questioning to avoid in coaching conversations.

Asking closed questions

Closed questions typically produce a yes or no answer. In the main, closed questions are unhelpful in coaching as they do not move the issue forward. A coaching conversation aims to help the person understand more about their own situation and find their own solutions. Questions which are open and thought provoking are more likely to support this kind of exploration.

Leading questions

Coaching is about helping the person understand more about their own situation in their own way. A question which leads the coachee to a particular point of view will not help their thinking. A leading question is one which contains a suggested answer, for example: 'How did you feel about that – upset?'

Rephrasing rather than re-using the coachee's own words

A sign of good listening is that the coach picks up on the coachee's choice of words and uses these words to reflect back. But if the coach rephrases what the coachee has said rather than using their words, it can cause the coachee to lose their train of thought.

Questions that break rapport

How a coach asks a question is as important as the question itself. For example, if a coach has been asking supportive questions and then suddenly uses a challenging question without any warning, this risks breaking the rapport between coach and coachee. In this case, it would be better to signal a move to a more challenging question: 'I wonder if I could ask you a more challenging question at this point?'

Too much of the why question

The danger with questions which begin with the word why is that they can result in a defensive response. When asked why, the other person typically feels they have to find reasons to justify their action. Sometimes this is to do with the tone in which the question has been asked. In a coaching conversation it is usually best to change a why question to a what question.

- 'Why did you do that?' becomes 'What was your thinking behind that?'
- 'Why did you feel that way?' becomes 'What led you to feel that way?'

Being prepared to give honest, clear and specific feedback

We all need feedback to grow and learn by understanding more about our impact on other people. Being prepared and able to give honest, clear and specific feedback is a core skill in coaching. It is important that feedback is given in a way which makes sure the relationship stays positive and open.

In the context of a coaching conversation, the coach provides feedback in the moment and in response to what they are experiencing about the coachee. This kind of feedback can be helpful to the coachee because it might reflect something about how others are experiencing them.

Watch Meg Wheatley talking about the importance for leaders of seeking and hearing honest feedback. **Let go and lead**: Meg Wheatley – leaders need honest feedback (on YouTube).

2.3 The scope of a coaching conversation and how to manage it well

In an informal coaching conversation, you do not need to have an expert understanding of the other person's role or context. In fact, it can be helpful if the coach works in a different field or comes from a different perspective. If you do work in the same field or system, it is important to be open about what this might mean for how you engage in a coaching conversation.

In any kind of coaching conversation, it is important to be aware of the limitations of your own professional competence and the boundaries around the conversation. In formal coaching, the coach is bound by ethical practices which include knowing when to refer someone for other professional support (for example counselling) or developmental support.

In informal coaching conversations, there are some simple guidelines for preparing for and managing the conversation. See resource 1 for further tools and tips around managing coaching conversations well.

Clarity of purpose

Make sure everyone involved in the coaching conversation is clear about its purpose. You could ask:

- 'what are we hoping to achieve by having this conversation?'
- 'what is the background and context for this conversation?'
- 'what would a good outcome from this conversation look like?'

Clarity of scope

Make sure everyone is clear about the scope of the conversation. You could ask:

- 'who is involved in this conversation?'
- 'what are the roles of each person involved in the conversation, eg coach, coachee, co-coach?'
- 'what are the boundaries of this conversation and how will we collectively manage these boundaries?'

Manage the process

Think about how you are going to manage the coaching conversation. You could use a simple framework such as: beginnings, middles and endings.

Begin the conversation clearly and well

Make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in the coaching conversation. Agree some ground rules about how you are going to work together in the coaching conversation, paying attention to the values and behaviours for coaching. Give the coachee space to set out the issue they wish to explore in the coaching conversation.

Pay attention to what the coachee needs from the conversation

Manage the conversation carefully making sure the coachee has enough time and space to explore their coaching issue. Attend to the balance between support and constructive challenge. Notice and pay attention to the patterns in the conversation. Enable the coachee's insights and deeper awareness in line with what they wanted to get from the coaching conversation.

Manage the ending with care

Make sure you leave enough time and space to manage the ending of the coaching conversation well. Provide support and constructive challenge around moving to action if this is what the coachee was looking for. Enable the coachee to take responsibility for the outcomes of the coaching conversation and to exercise choice about these outcomes.

See section 3 for more information about formal coaching and the range of different coaching models and tools.

Using the Continuous Learning Framework as a coaching tool: Social Work Professional Development Team, Scottish Borders Council

Background

The Continuous Learning Framework (CLF) (SSSC/IRISS, 2008) sets out the skills and behaviours that social service workers need to work well in social services. It describes personal capabilities needed for managing self and relationships. It supports self-assessment against each capability as a way of identifying strengths and areas for development. The CLF has been used as a coaching tool with individuals and teams working in social services in Scottish Borders Council to support their professional development.

Approach

I was working in social work staff development when the CLF was launched and started using it as a coaching tool with individuals and groups of staff. In my current role in social work professional development I intend to use the CLF again in the wider context of enhancing the professional identity of social work and in alignment with the new national vision for social services (see figure 1).

Changes at the higher levels of the pyramid in figure 1 (above the orange line) significantly impact the lower levels. Traditionally training is about giving information to staff up to the middle (orange) line. Professional development starts above the middle line. Coaching can reach and engage all levels.



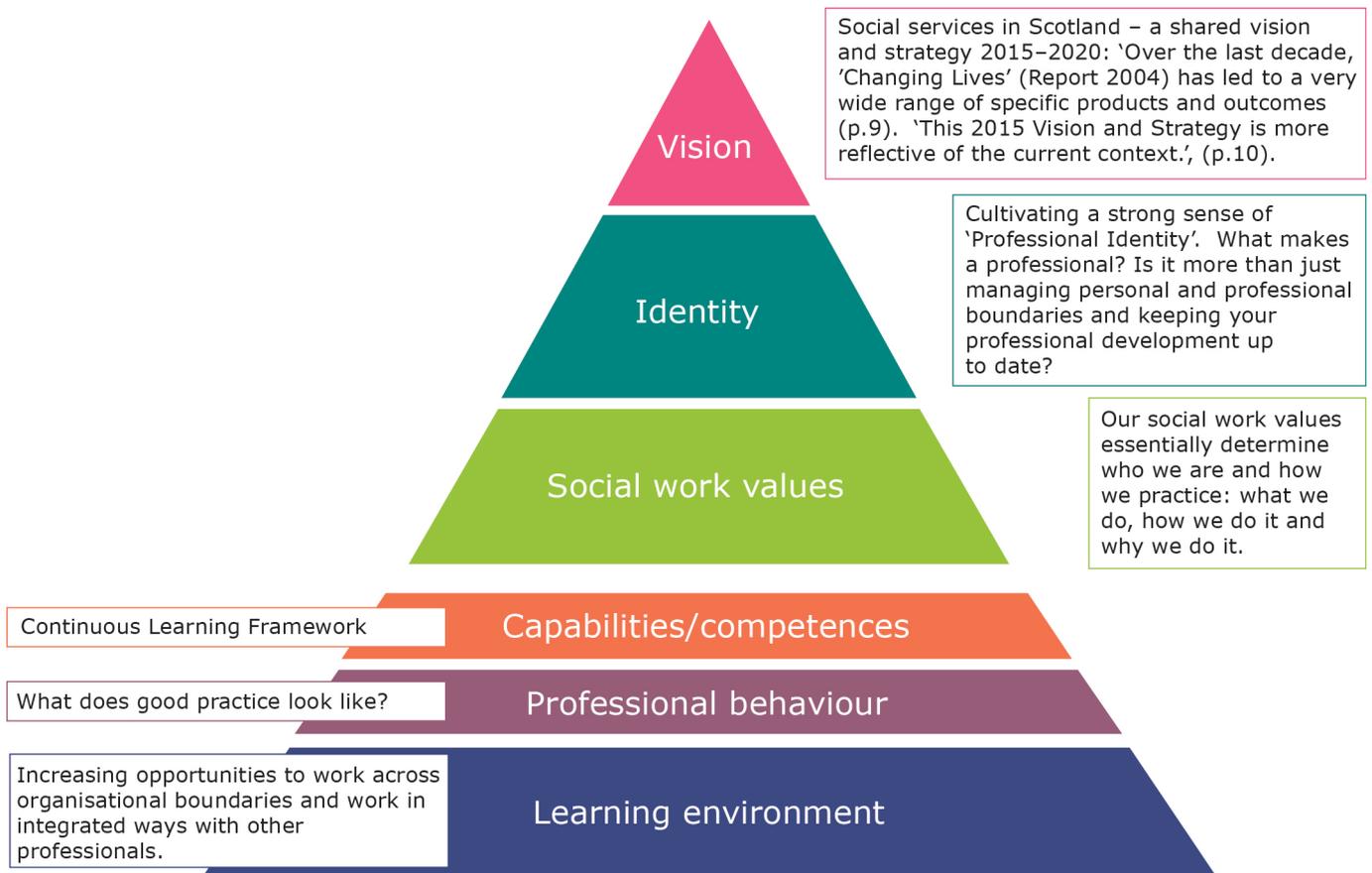
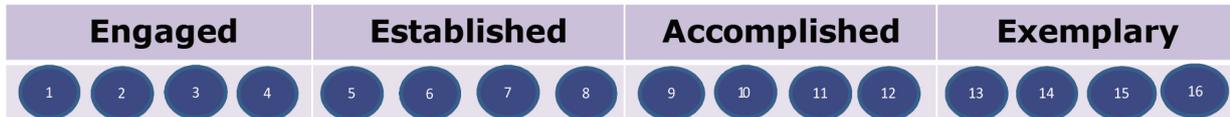


Figure 1: Adapted learning levels showing CLF in a wider context

Uses of the CLF as a coaching tool

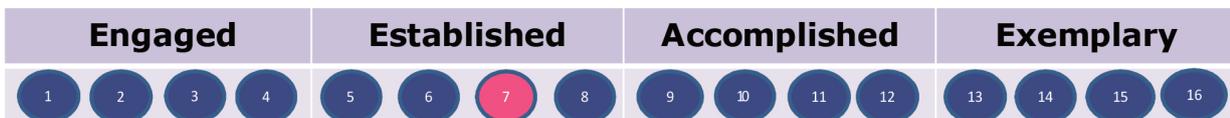
Two ways for using the CLF as a coaching tool with individuals, groups or teams are shown in figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2: Using the CLF as a coaching tool with an individual



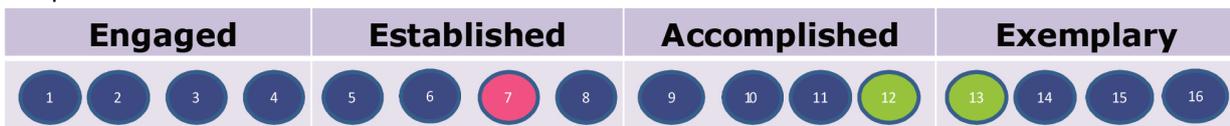
1. CLF as a coaching tool. The Continuous Learning Framework lends itself to being easily adapted and used as a coaching tool.

2. Stages of progression. The four stages can be further divided into four, making a sliding scale from 1 to 16.



3. Self-assessment. In this example, an individual has self-assessed as established at point 7 (red circle).

4. Coaching conversation. Reflecting on the journey taken and what is working well at this stage of progression, identify future learning and development needs and options for the next step or stretch.

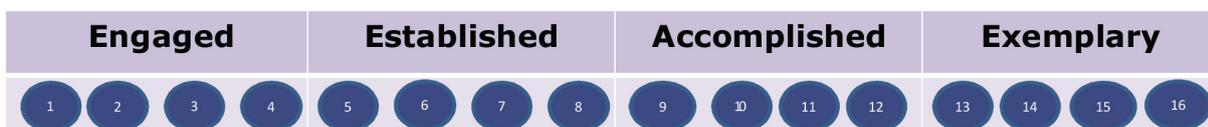


5. Peer feedback. In this example, the individual has asked for comment from two colleagues (shown by the green circles).

6. Coaching conversation. Discuss the different perspectives to update the individual's sense of self and perceived level of competence and any relational aspects.

In this example, there is a need to recognise the individual's progress, contribution and achievements.

Figure 3: Using the CLF as a coaching tool with an individual, group or team



An alternative way of using the CLF as a coaching tool. The markers can be used as a table top exercise or as floor markers to stand on. This more embodied application can be intense allowing more exploration of body sensations and feelings. It requires a clear contracting process or working agreement to be established with the individual, group or team.



Professional Development and Coaching Team
Leader, Social Work Professional Development Team, Scottish Borders Council

Questions for reflection at the end of section 2

1. What do think about the values and behaviours associated with a coaching approach?

Which of these values and behaviours come naturally to you?

Which of these values and behaviours do you need to focus on more?

2. How are you already using the core skills of coaching in your conversations?

Attending

Listening

Summarising

Questioning

Providing feedback

3. Which are your strengths?

How could you build further on these strengths?

4. Which are your key areas for development in terms of the skills for coaching?

What support do you need to develop your skills in these areas?