



SSSC

1. What is coaching and how can it be used?



In this section we cover:

1. what is coaching and why it is useful in social services
2. how a coaching approach can be used in different ways
3. what is involved in an informal coaching approach.

After reading this section you will be able to:

- describe what is involved in coaching and how it can be used
- show what coaching in practice looks like in the social service context
- consider what the potential roles in coaching might mean for your own practice.

1.1 What is coaching and why it is useful in social services

What is coaching?

Coaching is a developmental approach to working and interacting with other people. It can help people develop their personal capabilities, interpersonal skills and capacity to understand and empathise with others. In turn, this can help people understand more about their own challenges and make informed choices about their future. It can strengthen their ability to use a range of influencing and leadership styles. Coaching can help people feel more empowered to make a difference and improve their own effectiveness.

'We believe that coaching is a practical strategy that helps someone achieve outcomes they identify themselves. The outcomes may be about perceptions and beliefs as well as about observable behaviour and concrete action. Coaching leads to insight, discovery and forward movement, in alignment with the uniqueness of the individual, their understanding of the world, values and preferences. Relationship is the foundation of its success.'

(Jenny Bird and Sarah Gornall, 2016, p13)

Why is coaching useful in social services?

The vision for Scotland's social services is for:

... 'a socially just Scotland with excellent social services delivered by a skilled and valued workforce which works with others to empower, support and protect people, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and enablement.'

(Scottish Government, 2015, p7)

Delivering this vision means supporting people using services to develop their personal capabilities so they are able to exercise their citizen leadership to best effect (Scottish Government, 2008). It means having a workforce with the interpersonal skills and leadership capabilities to work with different people in different ways.

It means developing the culture across social services so people feel valued, empowered, enabled, inspired, motivated and able to see and take opportunities to do things differently. It means making sure the culture continues to be supported by the core social service values of:

- promoting enablement and participation
- understanding each individual in the context of family and community
- identifying and building on the strengths of individuals and communities.

(Scottish Government, 2015, p11)

If lots of people across social services are using a coaching approach more often this will start to have a broader impact on service and organisational culture. A culture in which people listen, demonstrate care and compassion, stay open to others' perspectives and new possibilities is consistent with the achievement of Social Services in Scotland – a shared vision and strategy 2015 – 2020 (Scottish Government, 2015). The development of a coaching culture will also enable individuals to develop their own capacity to self-coach.

'Organisations wishing to maximise the benefits of coaching should focus on increasing its scope and availability to create a coaching culture that permeates throughout their workforce. This means that coaching must be supported at the very top of the organisation, but not limited to senior executives, and that organisations need to devote resources to developing their internal coaching capability.'

(Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011, p2)

The typical benefits of coaching for individuals include:

- improvements in communication and interpersonal skills
- development of leadership and management capabilities
- finding sustainable solutions to personal and work-related issues
- enhanced capacity to resolve conflict
- positive changes in attitudes and motivation
- increased personal confidence
- improved management performance
- feeling more engaged, valued and supported
- feeling more prepared for a change in role or organisational change.

1.2 How a coaching approach can be used in different ways

A coaching approach can be used in different ways ranging from informal to more formal as shown in diagram A. It can take place between two people or in groups of people.

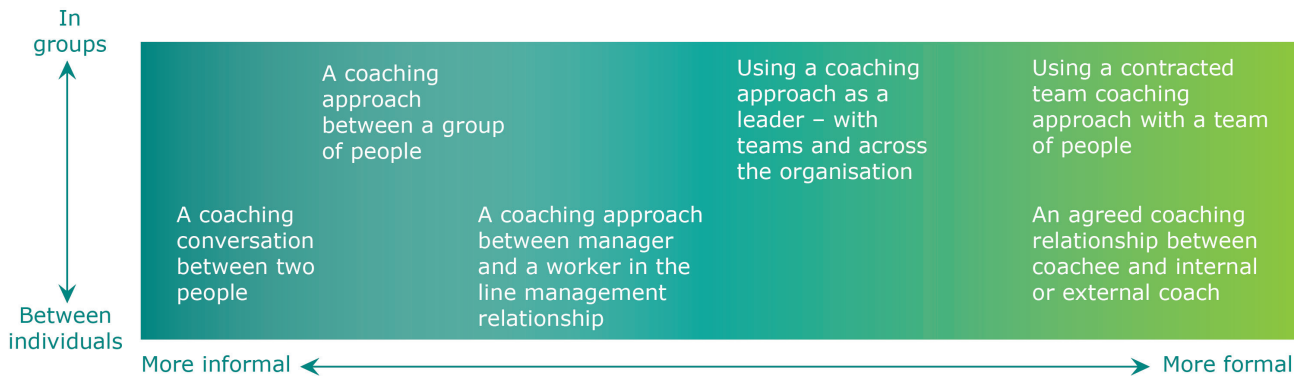


Diagram A: Range of uses of coaching

An informal coaching conversation between two people or a group of people

We can use a coaching approach informally for better conversations between people using services and between colleagues who work in social services. If you want to support others and yourself to step back and see things differently, you might consider using a coaching conversation.

The purpose of a coaching conversation is to encourage thinking and reflection. It can create the opportunity for people to see things from a fresh perspective. This can help them develop their capabilities, make sense of their situation and make clear choices about what to do next.

A coaching conversation has different qualities to everyday social or work based conversations. It differs in the quality of the listening and the space it provides for those involved. The quality of this space can help people make sense of their situation and make clear choices about what to do next. It requires listening to each other more intently, using open questions and avoiding jumping too quickly to our own conclusions. In this way, you will help the other person see their situation more clearly.

It means staying open for longer to the possibilities being explored in the conversation rather than simply sticking to our own point of view. It means being able to recognise the difference between what is actually being said and our perceptions or assumptions about what is being said (or not). It can help groups of people work more collaboratively and come up with new approaches together.

Example of using informal coaching

A group of people working in social services want to find new ways of managing and developing a particular service. They decide to use a number of group coaching conversations. Through their coaching conversations, the group is able to step back from their current situation and develop new insights. The space for reflection helps them to identify some improvements and make choices about new ways of working.

An informal coaching approach between line manager and worker

Managers and workers in social services can make their working relationships more effective if they use a coaching approach. A line manager can enable a worker to identify their own issues and come up with their own solutions rather than imposing solutions on them by having coaching conversations. Central to a coaching approach is providing timely, clear and specific feedback.

'A coaching conversation is unlike most other discussions. It involves an unusually high level of trust and candour on both sides.'

(Jenny Rogers, 2004, p27)

Leaders at all levels of social services use coaching as one of a range of leadership styles

A coaching approach to leadership means the leader's focus is on enabling other people to develop their capabilities and find their own solutions. It means listening more and trying to understand points of view rather than imposing your own views and approaches.

Coaching can also provide valuable support and challenge to people who are in formal and/or informal leadership roles by helping them explore their issues and concerns in a safe, supportive way.

There is a clear link between using a coaching approach in leadership and the leadership capabilities outlined in the Strategy for developing leadership capacity in Scotland's social services, 2013-2015 (Scottish Social Services Council, 2014).

Formal coaching

Formal coaching can be used for learning, development or performance improvement. The purpose of the coaching is agreed between the person being coached (coachee) and their coach. The coach discusses and agrees a contract with the coachee, which includes the focus or purpose of the coaching, the coaching process and how the boundaries around the coaching will be managed.

It can be one-to-one between a coachee and an internal coach working in social services who has undertaken formal development as a coach. Alternatively, it can be one-to-one between a coachee and a coach who works external to the coachee's organisation and is formally qualified as a coach. It can also be with a team or group of people who are being facilitated by an internal or external team coach (or team of coaches).

See section 3 for a further explanation of the formal applications of coaching and how to practice as a formal coach.

1.3 What is involved in an informal coaching approach?

Values and behaviours

In an informal coaching approach, you have the positive intent to focus on the other person, on their strengths and their challenges and on the qualities they bring. Using a coaching approach is about providing the space in which you and others are able to reflect and understand more about each other's points of view. A genuine coaching approach is based on trust and mutual respect.

Core coaching skills

For a coaching approach, you need to use a core set of coaching skills.

- Attending to the other person involved in a coaching conversation, building rapport with them and seeking to understand what is going on for them.
- Listening 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 in 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.

What are the roles in informal coaching?

The people involved in a coaching conversation are equals. In an informal coaching approach, any or all of the people involved might take on the coach role at different points. The coach role involves supporting the other person (or people) by making skillful use of listening, summarising, open questions and feedback.

Everyone involved in a coaching conversation needs to pay attention to creating the right conditions of trust, mutual respect, and positive intent. They need to be aware of

the importance of the core skills for coaching and be willing to develop their ability to use these skills.

It is important to be clear about the purpose and nature of a coaching conversation and it is the choice for the person (or people) involved. At the start it is helpful for those involved to be clear about what they are hoping to get from the conversation. This clarity about expectations will help everyone make the most useful contribution.

The coach will not typically provide advice or solutions to the person (or people) being coached. This might feel strange at first and it is important to acknowledge the difference.

Being clear about the boundaries of a coaching conversation is particularly important when it is taking place between a line manager and a member of his or her team. Both people need to be clear about the purpose of the coaching. For example, if the coaching conversation is taking place as part of the performance management process, the line manager has a particular responsibility for assessing the performance of the individual and this will change the nature of the coaching conversation. On the other hand, it is possible for a line manager to have a coaching conversation with a member of his or her team which is purely developmental in focus.

For more practical information on the values and behaviours, core skills, and the process for an informal coaching approach see section 2.



Using coaching skills informally: a practice case from Gowrie Care

Background

Frontline workers in Gowrie Care were feeling challenged by having to explain the company's processes and ways of working to new recruits. They were keen to support their colleagues but the rate of staff turnover meant they were experiencing an almost constant pressure to solve practical problems for new team members. A high turnover of staff in social care is not uncommon and it is important for new workers to understand the care setting and ways of working.

Approach

As Learning and Development Officer, I was asked to deliver a 'bite-sized' introduction to coaching skills course for this group of frontline workers. The group was made up of 23 assistant support workers and support workers and one assistant manager. During the three hour session, I introduced them to the concept of coaching and gave them a chance to practise their coaching skills through the application of a simple coaching model based on GROW (see note*).

At first, some participants were nervous and not sure what to expect. Gradually during the session they began to relax and feel relieved when they realised they don't have to have all the answers. Many of them understood how similar coaching skills are to the caring skills they use in their daily work. By using a coaching approach, they are able to provide support while enabling their newer colleagues to understand more and find their own answers to the challenges they are facing. At its heart, a coaching approach is empowering for the new members of staff and supports them to take responsibility for their own learning and development. It also helps build rapport and positive working relationships between workers.

Impact

The aim of the coaching skills course was to explain the potential value of a coaching approach for staff in their interactions with new workers. By the end of the course, participants understood this potential. Using a coaching approach may take more time at first but it has longer term positive impact for the learning of the individuals involved. Participants also realised the potential of using good listening and questioning skills in their day-to-day practice with people using services to help them address and solve their own issues in a self-directed and supported way. There are plans to run further introduction to coaching sessions open to workers at all levels in the organisation.

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*Note: for more information on the GROW model see resource 1 and references in resource 2.

What to expect from coaching: a practice case from Turning Point Scotland

Background

Turning Point Scotland is a national social care organisation that provides care and support to adults with complex needs. There is a richness and diversity to our work extending across learning disability, substance misuse, homelessness, mental health and criminal justice. Our whole focus is about being person-centred and empowering people to live their lives to the best of their ability.

Approach

Central to achieving high quality support with people is to make sure staff are equipped with the right values and supported with the right skill sets for their work. Coaching is key to achieving this across the organisation. It is part of our DNA to coach people, to support them, to enable them to achieve things or find solutions for themselves.

By promoting a coaching approach in our staff learning, we feel staff have the opportunity to show leadership capabilities and behaviours at all levels. Coaching lends itself to having a major impact on motivating, inspiring and empowering people.

Testimony to the organisation's top to bottom approach comes from one of our service managers.

'Being positive about coaching helps to underpin the values and principles we implement in social care. I see it day in and day out in the way staff support each other and how they support the people we work with. It just feels like the right way to do things'.

Examples of coaching practice

1. In our courses for making the most of and offering effective supervision we have included sections on coaching to help develop and empower staff in how they approach working with colleagues. The vast majority of frontline and supervisory staff will attend these courses. We also run bespoke coaching workshops in some services.
2. Coaching is a key element of our Gateway to Leadership Programme for service managers and functional managers. This looks at learning styles, coaching questions, coaching models and encourages reflection on real examples that people bring to the course. There is also one-to-one coaching input from a highly respected external organisation which really gets people thinking about what they need to do next in their own development.

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Turning Point Scotland www.turningpointscotland.com

What to expect from coaching: experiences from coaches and coachees in the Scottish Coaching Collaborative (Workforce Scotland, 2014)

The Scottish Coaching Collaborative interviewed some of their coaches and coachees and invited them to share what coaching means to them. Watch the interviews to learn a little bit more about how coaching is helping these individuals to develop insight.

You will hear Helen Carlin, Chief Executive and Kirstie McGregor, Coordinator of Rowan Alba, talk about their experiences of coaching and being coached in Rowan Alba.

You will hear Sharon Millar, Leadership Consultant in NHS Education for Scotland and Laurena Charles, Development Manager in Scottish Government, talk about the potential of coaching supported by the Scottish Coaching Collaborative.

You will also hear Jim Kerr, Governor of Shotts Prison, talk about his experience of being coached.

Scottish Coaching Collaborative developing insight [videos](#).



Questions for reflection at the end of section 1

1. What do you understand about informal and more formal coaching approaches?
2. How do you think that having more coaching conversations might be helpful to you in your role?
3. What benefits do you think there might be if more people were having more coaching conversations?

For people using services

For people who work in social services

4. What more do you want to know about coaching?