

Practice-Based Coaching: What Early Interventionists Want to Know!

What is Practice-Based Coaching (PBC)?

Practice-Based Coaching (PBC) is a coaching framework that supports practitioners in using specific practices (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2022). PBC occurs within a collaborative partnership. Coaching is delivered in cycles that always include action planning, observation, reflection, and feedback to support an early interventionist's use of recommended practices.

Why would I want to participate in PBC?

PBC is a job-embedded, professional development strategy that helps you to use effective practices within your early intervention role and with the families and caregivers you support.

A coach can bring an outside perspective and new strategies to help you as you provide early intervention services to children and their families. PBC is predictable, supportive, and non-evaluative. It's designed to help practitioners (e.g., early interventionists) strengthen specific practices (e.g., Pyramid Model) that improve caregiver support, the provision of early intervention, and child outcomes. In PBC, practitioners receive coaching that is supportive and focused on a partnership that honors their strengths and professional goals.



What can I expect in the PBC process?

A goal of PBC is to ensure that coaching is a safe place where the support and growth of the early interventionist are the priority, and that conversations are confidential. In PBC, you will work in a collaborative partnership with a coach. The process begins with the coach learning more about you and your work through reflective conversations and observation. You will meet to review your strengths and needs and collaboratively develop goals for implementing specific practices that are important to you in supporting the families, caregivers, and children you serve. Once you have goals, your coach will work with you to create a step-by-step action plan to implement them.

Your coach will observe you as you work on your goals with caregivers, then meet with you to reflect on your implementation, note what is going well, and discuss how to improve your practice. These components – goals and action plans, focused observation, reflection/feedback meetings – are referred to as coaching cycles. Coaching cycles are ongoing, and once your initial goals are met, the coach will work with you to develop new goals for continued coaching cycles.

How is the observation in PBC different from my performance evaluation?

PBC and performance evaluations both involve observation, but they serve entirely different purposes (i.e., professional development versus accountability to an employer). PBC is built on a collaborative partnership designed to support your growth, learning, and skill development in your implementation of evidence-based practices. Observations are focused on the specific practices you are working on in your action plan. A performance evaluation is based on a supervisory relationship that evaluates all aspects of your job performance.

How do we get started?

The first step is to meet your coach and develop a coaching agreement about what you can expect from the coach and what the coach will expect of you. Your coach will explain the process for the strengths and needs assessment and the process you will use to develop goals and your action plan. Below are some tips that may help you as you work with your coach.

1. **Share information** with the coach about your work, the caregivers you are supporting, what is challenging, and what you think is going well. The more your coach knows about your experiences as an early interventionist, the better they can provide the support you need.
2. **Be assertive about your goals.** Are there aspects of your work that are challenging? Do you need new ideas for supporting caregivers in preventing behavior or for helping children develop social-emotional skills? Are there some caregivers who seem to need more support or are experiencing challenges that are difficult to address? Remember that the coach's role is to help you meet your goals.
3. **Be honest with your coach.** Let your coach know what aspects of coaching you might feel apprehensive about and what you are excited about. Be clear with your coach about the strategies you are comfortable with and those you do not want them to use. For example, do you want them to model during their observation, or would you rather they watch while observing? Are you OK with being observed while you are with a family, or would you prefer to record your session and share it with your coach?
4. **Ask for the assistance you need to meet your goals.** Let your coach know what you will need to meet your goals. If you are unsure of what materials you might offer a caregiver, ask your coach to help you create the list. If a suggestion your coach has made doesn't work for you, ask the coach to help you figure out another approach.
5. **Be ready and open for reflection and receiving feedback.** Your coach will ask you to reflect on your efforts with the practices in your goals and your action plan. Be ready to share your thoughts. Your coach will also provide both supportive and constructive feedback. It's useful to have the coach's perspective on how what you are doing positively affects the engagement of the caregivers you support and their interactions with the child. It is also helpful to have a coach provide concrete suggestions for improving your practice or supporting an individual caregiver or child.

Helpful Resources to Learn More

NCPMI Practitioner Coaching Resources. Many resources, including videos and tools related to practitioner coaching. <https://www.challengingbehavior.org/implementation/coaching/pbc/>

Head Start Practice-Based Coaching Resources. Many resources, including videos and tools related to practitioner coaching. <https://headstart.gov/professional-development/article/practice-based-coaching-pbc>

Reference

Snyder, P., Hemmeter, M. L., & Fox, L. (2022). *Essentials of Practice-Based Coaching: Supporting effective practices in early childhood*. Brookes Publishing.