NCPMI

UNPACKING COACHING Webinar Series

The Canary in the Coal Mine: Looking Within to Address Common Challenges with Coaching

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Abby Taylor, Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health

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National Center for Pyramid Model INNOVATIONS
ChallengingBehavior.org

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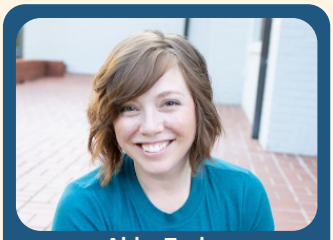
Session Facilitators



Sarah Basler
Vanderbilt University



Abby Taylor
Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health

Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health

Wisconsin Pyramid Model

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Connect
WHAT VIBE ARE YOU GIVING TODAY?
PIGEON WITH ZERO BRAIN WAVES
COLD PIECE OF MEAT-LOVERS PIZZA
SMALL RAT IN A PARTY HAT
ONE SILLY SOCK
error
BROKEN GAMEBOY (CIRCA 1992)
TOASTY CINNAMON ROLL
@cozynerdythings
Picture by TandA

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Agenda
• Introduction to “canary in the coal mine” analogy
• Creating space for compassion and reflective practice
• Describe common “coaching canaries” and possible solutions
• Share a resource to guide your reflection
Picture by TandA

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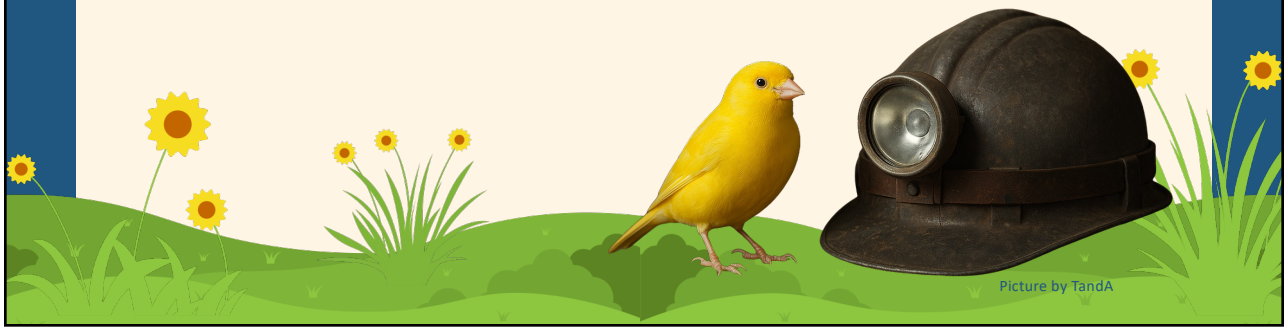
A “Canary” in the Coal Mine

A "canary in the coal mine" refers to an early warning sign of danger or a problem.



Picture by TandA

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Coaching Challenges



Use the chat box:
What are some of the coaching challenges that you are currently facing?

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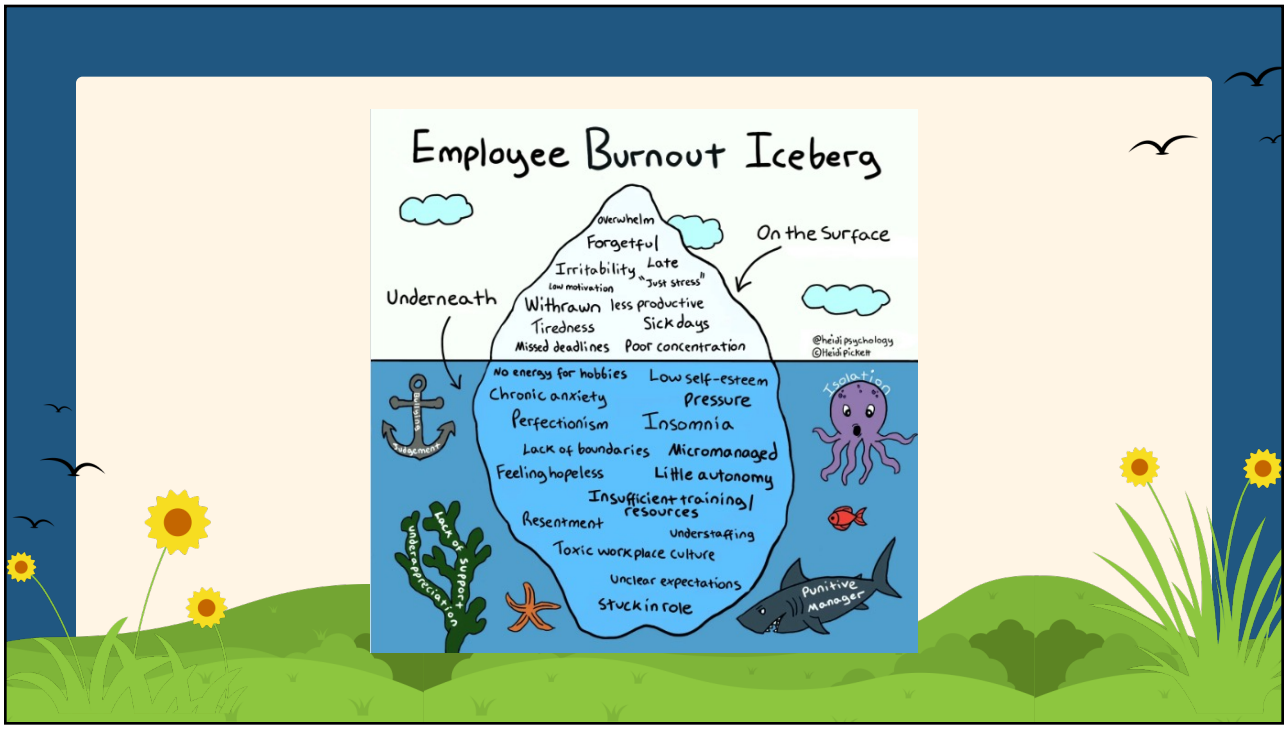
Employee Burnout Iceberg
On the Surface
Underneath
Overwhelm
Forgetful
Irritability
Late
"Just stress"
Low motivation
Withrawn
less productive
Tiredness
Sick days
Missed deadlines
Poor concentration
@heidi.psychology
@HeidiPicket
No energy for hobbies
Low self-esteem
Chronic anxiety
Pressure
Perfectionism
Insomnia
Lack of boundaries
Micromanaged
Feeling hopeless
Little autonomy
Insufficient training/ resources
Resentment
Understaffing
Toxic workplace culture
Unclear expectations
Stuck in role
Isolation
Lack of support/ underappreciation
Punitive Manager

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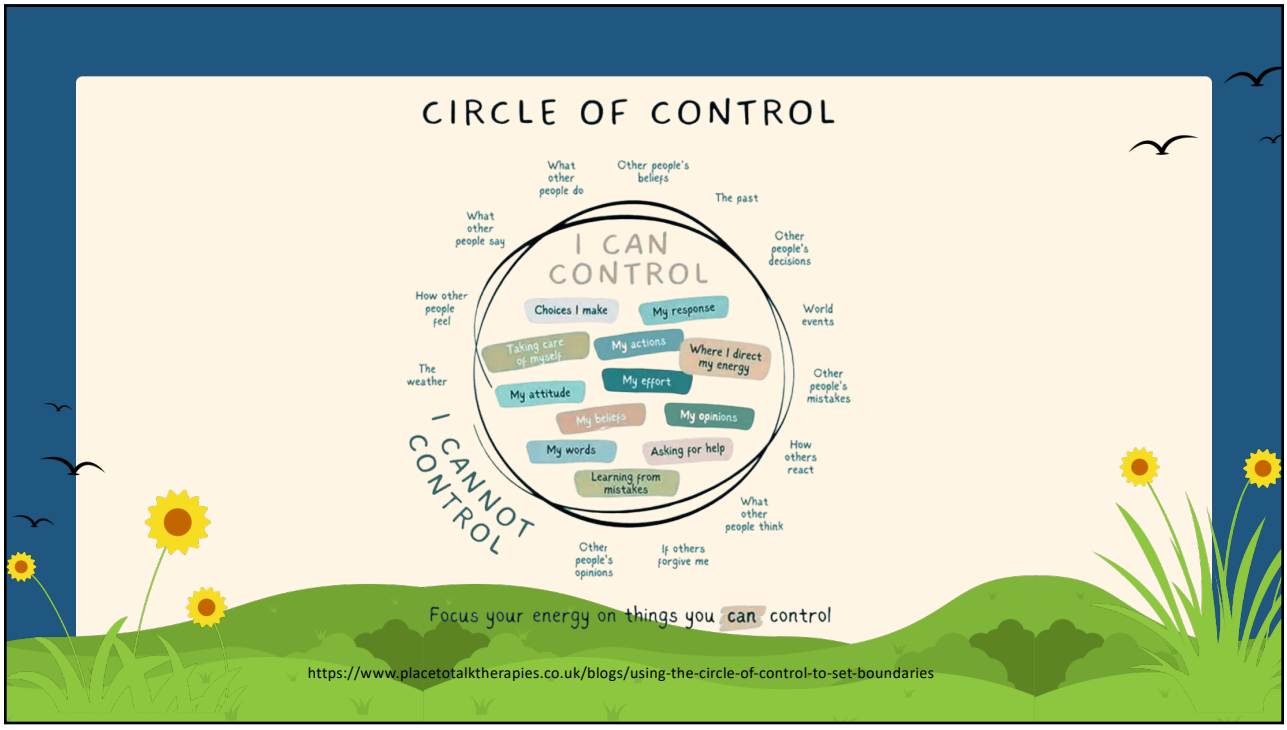
CIRCLE OF CONTROL
I CAN CONTROL
Choices I make
My response
Taking care of myself
My actions
Where I direct my energy
My effort
My attitude
My beliefs
My opinions
My words
Asking for help
Learning from mistakes
I CANNOT CONTROL
What other people do
Other people's beliefs
The past
What other people say
Other people's decisions
How other people feel
World events
The weather
Other people's mistakes
How others react
What other people think
Other people's opinions
If others forgive me
Focus your energy on things you can control
https://www.placetotalktherapies.co.uk/blogs/using-the-circle-of-control-to-set-boundaries

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"The human capacity for finding strong ground depends on the ability to be both tough and tender, to be able to lock in and lock through. Anything that sees our human spirit as one or the other is half-hearted."

-Brené Brown

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"The kids are napping, things look calm, I'm hungry and it's been a hard morning but I want to look professional for my coach and look ready..."

-Teacher



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"Abby, some people really value when you take the time to say 'hi how are you'..."



Everyone's "locking through" looks unique!

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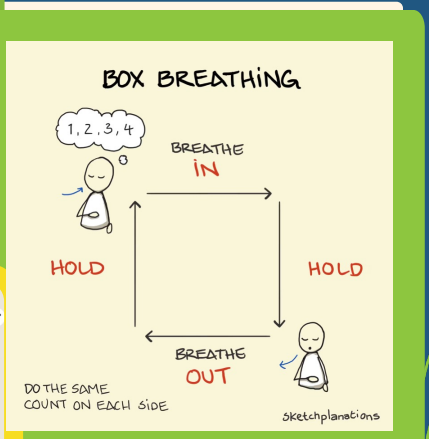
Connect & Shift the Energy

- Mindful check-ins
- Brain dump: take a moment to write down what's on your mind
- Slow down: time to pause & breath
- Nourish your body: get a snack or drink some water
- Re-center: do a guided meditation
- Shift your energy: take a walk





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Reflection



What helps you transition to a new activity or task?



What does it look like for you if you don't have a chance to use that strategy?



What does it feel like when you have had the chance to transition?



What might you encounter in coaching if you offer transition strategies?

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Common "Canaries" and Your Response



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Coachee Buy-in
Coaches have said:
• Coachee doesn't want my support
• Coachee does not engage in session (e.g., doesn't want to reflect, coachee does other things when we meet to debrief, doesn't take my suggestions)
• Coachee does not think they need support

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Suggestions
1
Revisit the purpose of coaching with transparency
2
Offer choices
3
Get to know the coachee, the children, the struggles they are facing in their role
4
Offer support in a different way

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The “Fixer” Trap
Coaches have said:
• There are so many practices the coachee needs to put into place
• If the coachee would just do it this way, it wouldn’t be an issue, would run smoother, etc.
• They aren’t implementing ANY of the practices we selected

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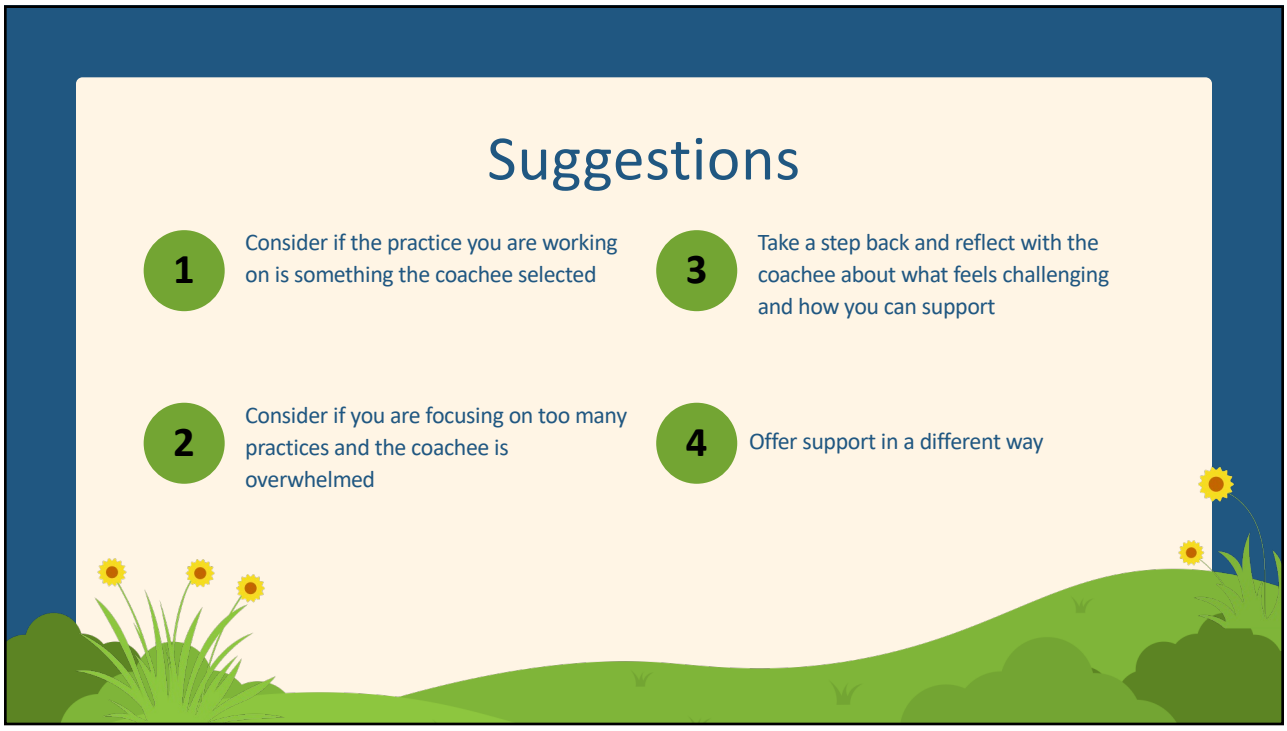
Suggestions
1
Consider if the practice you are working on is something the coachee selected
2
Consider if you are focusing on too many practices and the coachee is overwhelmed
3
Take a step back and reflect with the coachee about what feels challenging and how you can support
4
Offer support in a different way

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Time for Coachi
Coaches have said:
• My coachee is always cancelling
• My coachee can only meet for a short amount of time
• I have too many coachees to meet with in an individualized way
• I don't have time to do a full cycle

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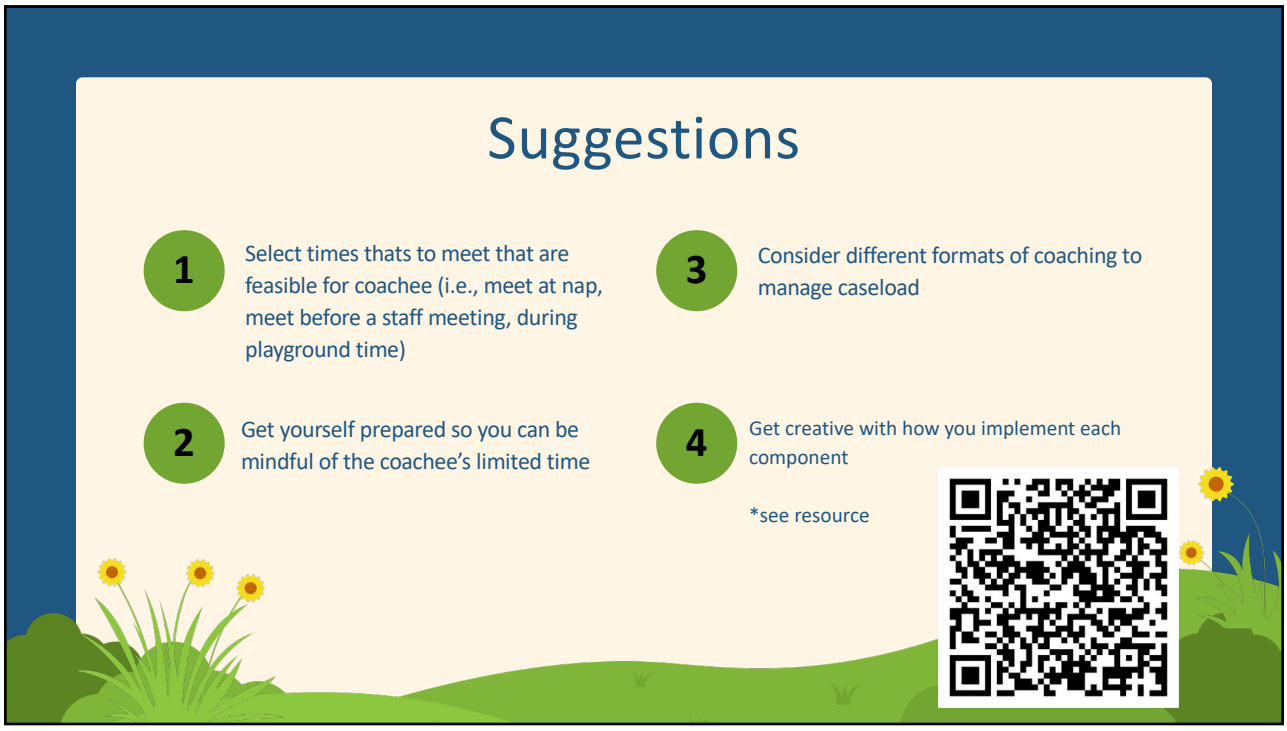
Suggestions
1
Select times thats to meet that are feasible for coachee (i.e., meet at nap, meet before a staff meeting, during playground time)
2
Get yourself prepared so you can be mindful of the coachee's limited time
3
Consider different formats of coaching to manage caseload
4
Get creative with how you implement each component
*see resource

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Conflict Avoidance
Coaches have said:
• That's not related to their action plan so I'll just ignore it
• I'm not sure what to do
• I'm not confident to address this issue
• I'm too stressed/burnt out to deal with this

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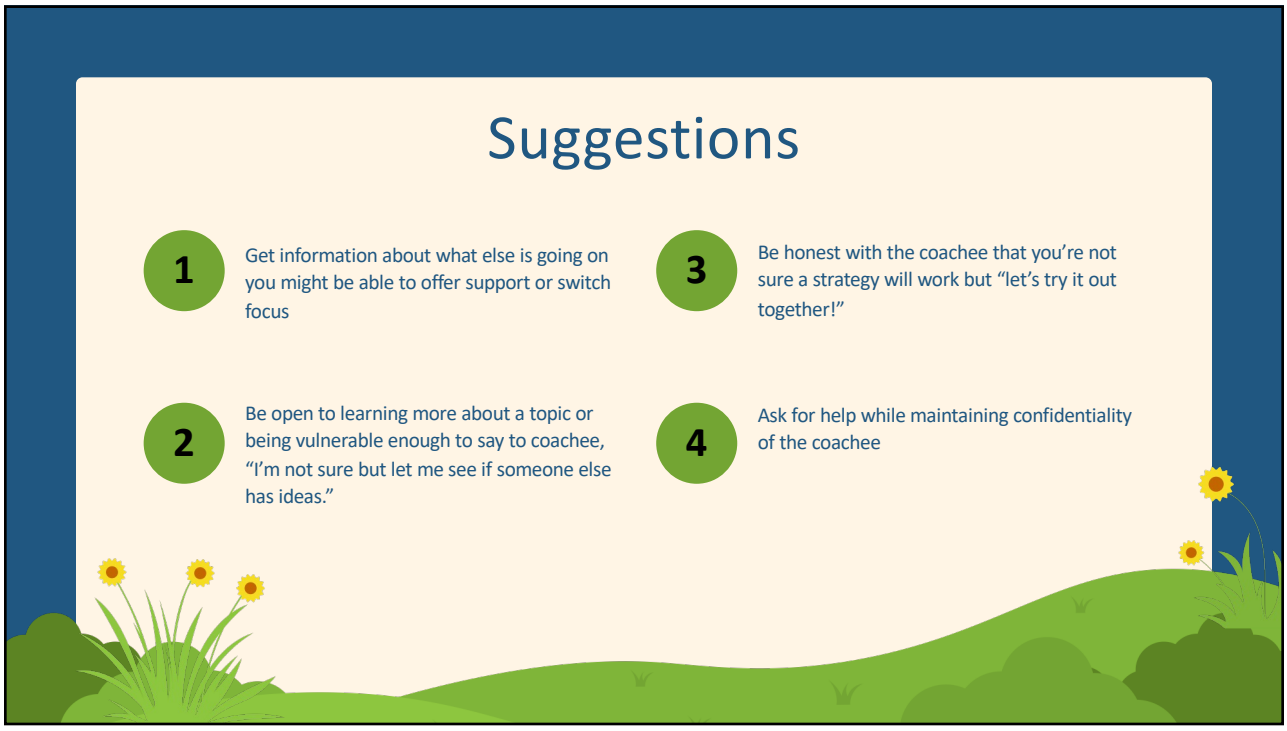
Suggestions
1
Get information about what else is going on you might be able to offer support or switch focus
2
Be open to learning more about a topic or being vulnerable enough to say to coachee, "I'm not sure but let me see if someone else has ideas."
3
Be honest with the coachee that you're not sure a strategy will work but "let's try it out together!"
4
Ask for help while maintaining confidentiality of the coachee

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Coaching "Canaries" still a struggle?



Picture by TandA

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Why are you stuck?

- Get curious and reflect
  - What is coming up for me?
  - What am I communicating to the coachee?
- Be vulnerable
  - "I'm feeling stuck right now."
  - "It feels like we are struggling with X where do you think we should go next?"
- When is it appropriate?



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Reflection Resource

Directions: Use this handout to reflect about common challenges you face in coaching.

A "canary in the coal mine" refers to an early warning sign of danger or a problem. Coaching "canaries" refer to early warning signs of a problem or struggle related to coaching.

Coaching Frustration Map

Coaching "Canary"	How You Feel	Impacts on Coaching Partnership

Common Coaching "Canaries"

Coaching "Canary"	What might the canary be telling you?	What is within your control?	How might you address the canary?

Basler, S., Taylor, A. (2026, July 15). *The canary in the coal mine: looking within to address common challenges with coaching* [Webinar]. National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations.

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What happens if every coaching session becomes about something other than coaching?



Did you co-create expectations from the beginning?



Consider IMH consultation vs coaching support



It's ok to stay in your lane.



It's ok to say "now's not the right time. what other ways can I support?"

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Questions?

Use the Q&A panel to submit your questions.



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Visit us online at ChallengingBehavior.org



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Thank You

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