

Training **MATTERS**



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- NC Division of Social Services
- NC Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Appalachian Family Innovations
- Center for Family and Community Engagement at NC State University
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

We Want to Hear from You!

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This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by Mellicent Blythe and John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

REAP, Coaching, and You

In this time of budget cuts, it's more important than ever that child welfare agencies use an important free resource available to them: the wisdom and creativity of their staff, clients, and community partners.

Coaching is an excellent tool for problem solving issues that come up as the state and counties work together to involve stakeholders in improving services to children and families. The NC Division of Social Services is working with national and state resources to introduce coaching training through the REAP initiative.

The Connection to REAP

The Division launched REAP (*Reaching for Excellence and Accountability in Practice*) in 2010 to make the technical assistance it provides to county DSS agencies more community-centered and strengths-based. REAP is a continuation of the strengths-based, solution-focused approach our state adopted with the Multiple Response System (MRS).

Today REAP is being piloted in eight counties: Craven, Cumberland, Hoke, Pender, Pitt, Scotland, Union, and Wilson. During the pilot, a DSS staff person and a Division representative will lead local stakeholders through a community engagement and self-assessment process.

Coaching Skills Training

As soon as the REAP pilot began, it became clear that a framework was needed for developing open communication in each county. National consultants suggested coaching training would provide that framework.

To support the success of REAP, the Division created a new two-day coaching training, which it provided for the pilot county co-leads. The goal of the training was to ensure those leading the pilot have the capacity for coaching and supporting both internal agency staff and external community stakeholders. What **continued**→

To learn more about REAP, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/5vgkclx>.

| Misconception | Reality |
|---|---|
| <i>Coaching is a disciplinary method or used in reaction to an employee performance issue. ("She needs to be coached on this.")</i> | Supervisors may have to discipline staff, but coaching is not a tool for this. Supervisory coaching is just the opposite: a framework to empower workers and give them freedom to devise their own solutions. |
| <i>Coaches are outside experts who advise and mentor less experienced or less-skilled workers.</i> | Unlike a sports coach, supervisory coaching requires a partnership approach. Coaches listen and ask questions that encourage reflection and self-discovery of options/solutions; they don't dole out advice. |
| <i>Coaching is another word for what therapists do.</i> | Supervisory coaches don't explore workers' histories, patterns, or personal issues. They help staff establish work-related plans and goals for themselves and their clients. |
| <i>Coaching is a friendly way to encourage workers to do what you want them to do. ("Don't you think we should...")</i> | Coaching won't work when there is just one right approach dictated by policy or other agency realities. In a coaching conversation questions are asked only when you truly don't know the answer. |

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ever, is applicable far beyond REAP.

A child protective services supervisor from one county engaged in REAP says she believes she benefitted from attending the new coaching training: “This is really what leaders do,” she said. “We want people to grasp our vision...but really make it their own.” She added, “Coaching gives a person the opportunity to own it, to make it part of their own philosophy, whatever you’re asking them to do. It happened to be with REAP, but it really can apply to anything.”

Coaching and You

So what is it about coaching that’s so critical to supervisors and child welfare workers? “We often say that coaching is both a mindset and a skill set,” says Ginger Caldwell, a trainer with the Division of Social Services.

With strengths-based practice, workers are asked to operate from the mindset that families have the answers they need inside themselves. Coaching requires a parallel mindset: supervisors must believe their staff have the answers they need inside themselves. Workers and supervisors can also use coaching skills to strengthen partnerships with co-workers and the community.

Supervisors use a set of specific

coaching skills to give workers the time, support, and framework for accessing those answers. That skill set includes active listening, asking exploratory questions, giving feedback, and creating mutual accountability for change.

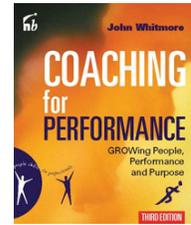
“We tell supervisors that you can’t always use coaching,” said Deb Vassar, who teaches coaching for UNC’s Jordan Institute for Families. “Sometimes there is one right answer, or specific information they have to convey to their workers. And sometimes they have administrative duties they have to attend to. But having scheduled ‘coaching conversations’ with their workers can be one of the tools in their toolkit.”

One of the strengths of the coaching approach is that it’s relevant across venues and relationships, Caldwell notes. “We began thinking about this training to be sure that the relationship between the Division consultants and their county REAP co-leads was strong.” But pilot county leaders have realized that they also need coaching skills to gain buy-in and motivate their own staff as well as their community partners.

Once training participants understand how coaching works, the

Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

— John Whitmore, author
Coaching for Performance: GROWing People, Performance, and Purpose



potential for it to enhance work with families becomes clear. As one supervisor put it, the training “reshaped our thinking to look at the other person’s perspective, to get at what they need to be able to buy into it. We spend so much time getting people to buy in to things. If we could eliminate that battle we could move so much more quickly.”

Learning Resources

As the box below indicates, the Division currently offers two courses on coaching. If you haven’t done so already, be sure to take advantage of these learning resources.

Resources for Developing Coaching Skills

Training on www.ncswlearn.org

- Coaching in the Kitchen: Guiding Parents through Teachable Moments. This three-day classroom training uses real case studies to help participants practice effective supportive coaching skills, including identifying teachable moments, using learning questions, and working step-by-step through a framework for coaching.
- Staying Power! A Supervisor’s Guide to Coaching and Developing Child Welfare Staff. This three-day classroom training introduces supervisors to advanced concepts, tools, and practices that enhance staff motivation and effectiveness.

Written Resources

- Children’s Services Practice Notes articles:
 - “Using Partnership in Supervision.” <http://www.practicenotes.org/v15n3/partnership.htm>
 - “Improving Employee Performance through Coaching.” <http://www.practicenotes.org/13n2/coach.htm>
- Stoltzfus, T. 2008. *Coaching questions: A coach’s guide to powerful asking skills*. Virginia Beach, VA: Pegasus Creative Arts.
- Whitmore, J. 2009. *Coaching for performance: GROWing people, performance, and purpose*. 4th ed. London: Nicholas Brealey. Another resource about the GROW model of coaching: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.htm.

