



# Coaching Best Practices



The Coaching Best Practices section includes guidance on laying the foundation for adult learning through relationship building and respectful communication. It also offers practical tips and examples of how to use CHALK Coaching tools to support teacher reflection, goal-setting, and growth.

### **Relationship Building**

Principles for developing a partnership based on a shared desire for professional growth

### **Coaching Communication Skills**

Descriptions and examples of committed listening, paraphrasing, presuming positive intent and powerful questions, and reflective feedback

### **Teacher-Driven Coaching**

Guidance on positioning teachers as the leaders of their own professional growth

### **Goal-Setting Conversations**

Communication strategies to support teacher goal-setting

### **Professional Learning Communities and CHALK**

Examples of how CHALK Coaching tools can support collaborative professional development

### **Coaching Strategies**

Menu of strategies and approaches to instructional coaching such as co-planning lessons, modeling instruction, and role-playing practice.



## Relationship Building

A trusting relationship lays the foundation for adult learning and long-term growth in a teacher's practice. Through ongoing interactions, you communicate to the teacher, "I notice you, I'm interested in you and your students, and I want to get to know you even better." When you share genuine, judgement-free curiosity about a teacher's practice and invite them to open up about their thinking and decision-making, a personal connection is forged.

For example, during a conversation following an observation you might say, "I noticed you talking to Jasmine and Leo about their blocks building this morning. I'm interested in hearing about your goals for supporting their cooperative interactions, and I want to learn more about what you are thinking and doing." Interactions like this position the teacher-coach relationship as a partnership based on a shared desire for professional learning.

**Four principles strengthen the teacher-coach relationship and promote learning.**

1. **Individualized coaching fosters the development of respectful relationships essential for learning.** Coaches adjust their approach based on each teacher's communication and learning style.
2. **A strengths-based approach highlights teacher success.** Coaches observe teachers with the goal of identifying moments of effective instruction.
3. **Powerful coaching conversations enable teachers to act based on their own thinking and ideas.** Coaches intentionally use communication skills like powerful questions to foster teacher reflection and goal-setting.
4. **A reciprocal learning partnership leads to shared goals and responsibilities.** Coaches and teachers co-develop a plan of action to grow classroom practices that is meaningful for both coach and teacher.

### References

- Material in the Coaching Best Practices section was adapted from the following sources:
- Aguilar, E. (2020). *Coaching for equity: Conversations that change practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jablon, J., Dombro, A. L., Johnsen, S. (2016). *Coaching with powerful interactions: A guide for partnering with early childhood teachers*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Kee, K. M. & Anderson, K. A. (2010). *Results coaching: The new essential for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.



## Coaching Communication Skills

### Committed Listening

When you listen to a teacher with commitment, you convey that you care about what the teacher has to say and that you are listening in order to fully understand the issue from their perspective. You are also listening to gather information that will inform your feedback and to allow the teacher to refine their thinking as they speak at length and without interruption. This last point cannot be underscored enough: most of us do not listen to others for very long before we interject with questions, advice, or “me-too” anecdotes! Committed listening requires patience and the ability to quiet our own judgement of the content being presented. The benefit of committed listening is fully understanding the specific thoughts and actions the teacher is sharing before you move toward responses and co-developed solutions.

### Paraphrasing

The next communication skill, paraphrasing, is closely related to the skill of committed listening. In fact, you cannot skillfully paraphrase a teacher’s thoughts and feelings without listening deeply first. Paraphrasing is when the listener summarizes or captures the essence of what the speaker has expressed. Paraphrasing sends the message that the listener is interested in the speaker and trying to understand them. Most importantly, paraphrasing gives the speaker the opportunity to clarify their thinking in response to the paraphrase, and lays a path for thoughtful communication.

Paraphrasing is also an effective strategy to use before asking a question. Without paraphrasing, questioning may feel more like an interrogation. Your question is more likely to engage the teacher in a productive conversation when you paraphrase their concern or idea first.

Communication Skill	Examples
Committed Listening	Waiting for the speaker to finish their thoughts before responding  Setting aside judgement, solution finding, or personal stories as you listen
Paraphrasing	“So, you’re feeling....”  “You’re noticing that....”  “It sounds like you’re wondering about....”



## Coaching Communication Skills

### Presuming Positive Intent and Powerful Questions

The language that we use matters as we form relationships with teachers and engage them in coaching conversations. Presuming positive intent refers to a mindset and a related communication style that effective coaches and leaders develop. Coaches who presume positive intent operate with the assumption that teachers want to be their best and do their best. Using positive language encourages positive actions. In contrast, expressing negative assumptions can lead to defensiveness and derail the conversation.

Consider the difference between these two questions:

Negative	Do you have a plan for teaching math? I don't see that in your daily schedule. <i>This question presumes that the teacher has not planned for math.</i>
Positive	What has been helpful as you plan for math activities throughout the day? <i>This question presumes that the teacher has already started thinking about incorporating math into their day, even if there is no evidence in their schedule yet.</i>

The positive question assumes that the teacher has already thought, planned, or done what is being discussed. Powerful questions based on the language of positive intent have the potential to inspire a teachers' best self and lead to greater outcomes.

## Powerful Question Examples

### Negative

Don't you think there's a lot of wasted instructional time in the morning as you get ready for circle time?

Did you ask inferential questions during story time today?

Have you thought about teaching your students a calm-down strategy?

### Positive

How do you and your co-teacher help each other with lesson and materials preparation? In your experience, what systems work best?

What type of questions do you like to ask during story time?

What have you found to be your best strategies for supporting students' emotional regulation?



## Coaching Communication Skills

### Reflective Feedback

Feedback has a powerful effect on learning for both students and adult learners, including teachers. However, the type of feedback and how it is provided determines its effectiveness. Unfortunately, the most common forms of feedback that we receive are not as valuable as they could be. These include judgement (“Great lesson” or “Important information was missing”), personal observation (“I like the way...”), or questions (“Are you planning to...”).

Reflective feedback supports the teacher’s thoughtful reflection and decision making. This type of feedback flows naturally after you have spent time engaging in committed listening and paraphrasing during a conversation with a teacher. Teachers perceive reflective feedback that presumes positive intent as honest, respectful, and thoughtful. There are three main options for reflective feedback: asking for clarity, identifying value in the teacher’s idea or plan, and posing reflective questions that support teacher thinking and goal-setting.

CHALK coaching questions and prompts are examples of reflective feedback.

## Reflective Feedback Types and Examples

### Clarify

This type of feedback ensures that coach and teacher are talking about the same thing. It gives the teacher an opportunity to clarify their idea or thought.

“How did your students respond to the process?”

“How do you see this curriculum as different from...?”

### Value Potential

A coach communicates that the teacher’s idea or action has positive elements and moves towards building on them.

“You have really thought deeply about..”

“The strength of the idea is....”

### Reflective Questions for Possibilities

These types of questions create space for the coach and teacher to discuss concerns, considerations, or options toward improvement.

“What learning gaps, if any, did you notice in your students’ during that activity?”

“What next steps are you thinking will be important for you to take?”



## Teacher-Driven Coaching

**Teachers do the critical thinking.** Effective coaching draws on principles of adult learning theory and findings from neuroscience. The essential idea is that teachers need to think through issues or scenarios for themselves to be truly committed to new actions (Kee et al., 2010). CHALK is designed to engage teachers in analyzing instructional practice data from their own classroom. The coach supports teachers' interpretation of the data and answers questions about the observation tool used to collect the data. However, teachers will feel empowered by their insights only if they go through the process of making connections between the data and their practices themselves (Costa & Garmston, 1991).

**Teachers choose what they want to learn.** After the data conversation, the coach follows another principle of adult learning- respecting teacher choice regarding their professional learning. The coach's role is to notice where the teacher has the energy or desire to work on a skill or build knowledge. There are many ways to achieve growth within each CHALK practice. For example, teachers can use different strategies in an effort to reduce transition time. One teacher may be motivated to partner with their co-teacher to implement a more efficient hand-washing procedure. Another teacher may wish to provide individualized visuals and supports for two children who have difficulty with transitions.

**Teachers value relevant PD.** Professional development is relevant when it's practical. Instead of adding to a teacher's workload, CHALK can complement a teacher's ongoing effort to improve their instruction. After learning more about the CHALK practices, teachers can decide which practices align with their instructional priorities and ongoing work. Coaches may wish to support teachers in making connections between CHALK practices and the teacher's goals and aspirations. For example, teachers focusing on classroom management might use the CHALK Transition Time tool. Teachers who wish to support children's social-emotional skill development might use the Associative and Cooperative Interactions tool. Some teachers may be working on goals associated with specific curriculum or program-wide goals based on trends in formal observation data. The CHALK crosswalks section (p. 78) describes the connections between widely-used early childhood curriculum (e.g., the Pyramid Model; Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2013, and *Conscious Discipline*®; Bailey, 2014), classroom observation tools (e.g., CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), and CHALK practices.



### Goal-Setting Conversations

An effective goal-setting conversation will lead to a detailed action plan and set the coach and teacher up for success. Some teachers will review their CHALK observation data and generate their own goal and action steps. Other teachers may want more support from their coach in reviewing the data, identifying an area for growth, and crafting a goal. In this scenario, the coach can listen and notice where the teacher has energy or motivation to work within a CHALK focus area, then use questions (see examples below) as the teacher develops a goal and determines how to achieve it.

The coach may begin with broad questions like, “What will it look like when you have achieved this goal?” to encourage teachers to envision their goal. Working backwards from the goal and breaking it down into parts is an effective method for generating specific, realistic action steps.

Once a teacher has brainstormed several strategies, the coach encourages them to select and refine 1-3 key action steps that will have the greatest impact on their instruction and student learning. The coach and teacher also consider who else might support the teacher’s work, such as a co-teacher or the coach themselves, and include those individuals in the action steps.

### Language for the Goal-Setting Conversation

What does progress on this goal look like?

What five strategies are you thinking....

Which of these would you want to begin with?

What kinds of supports will you need?

Who would ideally support you and/or collaborate with you?





## Professional Learning Communities and CHALK

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a collaborative form of professional development that brings small groups of teachers together to focus on shared topics. The pre-k teachers at a childcare center may meet during their planning period twice a month to review children's math achievement data and develop shared goals around specific math strategies they want to try in their classrooms. A group of pre-k teachers from different elementary schools might gather virtually several times over the school year to expand their knowledge of high-level questioning strategies, co-write lessons together, and then reflect on how children responded to their questions. Coaches or program leaders often act as facilitators or participants to support teacher learning during PLCs.

CHALK Coaching tools and professional development materials can support and complement the collaboration that occurs during PLCs. The table below describes a few examples of how CHALK can enhance various forms of in-person and virtual collaborative professional development: teacher collective inquiry, video observation, and shared goal setting.

PLC Activity	CHALK Tools
<b>Collective Inquiry</b> Teachers select a content area, a specific practice, or set of strategies to explore together.	<b>Training:</b> Concepts videos, instructional practice definitions and examples  <b>Resources:</b> Powerpoint presentations, handouts, guiding questions for discussion about specific practices
<b>Shared Goal Setting</b> Teachers share and discuss children's work, such as emergent writing from journals. They identify strategies that will support children's writing development, then create a shared goal to implement specific strategies. In between PLC meetings, the coach observes each teacher using the strategies.	<b>Literacy Training:</b> Teachers review and discuss the stages of emergent writing and instructional strategies in the practice definitions and examples.  <b>Action Plan Tool:</b> Teachers make a plan for achieving their writing strategies goal.  <b>Writing Observation Tool:</b> Coach observes teachers with a focus on their shared goal from the PLC.
<b>Video Observation</b> The coach brings a video clip of a math lesson to the PLC meeting. Teachers use the CHALK math instruction observation tool as they view the video. They discuss their results and the math activities and teacher strategies that they observed.	<b>Math Instruction Observation Tool:</b> Teachers use the observation tool on a shared example video.  <b>Math Coaching Questions:</b> The coach uses the coaching prompts to facilitate a discussion about what teachers observed in the example video and how it applies to their own instruction.



### Coaching Strategies

#### Observe Instruction

The coach and teacher decide in advance what the coach will observe and collect data on in ways that will support the teacher's growth. The data and information collected during the observation provides the foundation for a coaching conversation and enables the teacher to reconstruct and analyze what happened while they were teaching.

#### Provide Reflective Feedback

Reflective feedback refers to coaching questions that promote deeper, more detailed thinking and lead to more productive decision-making. Reflective feedback also includes comments that emphasize the value and strength of the teacher's ideas and goals. See page 46 in the manual for further description and examples.

#### Co-Plan Lessons

The teacher and coach create a lesson plan together. This provides the coach with an opportunity to 1) learn about the teacher's planning process and 2) ask questions that may deepen the teacher's analytical thinking about their instruction and anticipated student responses.

#### Role-Play Practice

The teacher and coach role-play scenarios in order to practice and build new skills. For example, the coach might play a student as the teacher practices introducing new concepts or explaining a procedure. Then, they might reverse roles so that the teacher can experience the scenario from a student perspective.

#### Model Instruction

The coach demonstrates a teaching strategy or practice in the classroom as the teacher observes. To facilitate the most effective professional learning experience, the teacher and coach meet beforehand to discuss the strategy to be modeled and create a note-taking form for the teacher to use while observing the coach. They also make a plan to debrief afterward.

#### Video-Record and Reflect

Video is a powerful professional learning tool because it helps educators see exactly what teaching and student learning looks like. Video-recordings help coaches and teachers get specific about actionable next steps. Video should only be used when teachers and coaches have discussed the purpose of this coaching strategy and agree on the focus for the video-recorded lesson. Small groups of teachers can also come together during professional learning time to watch and discuss lesson clips. Video enables teachers to visit their peers' classrooms virtually and deepen their craft knowledge together.

#### Share Resources

Coaches provide the teacher with resources to support their professional growth. These may include tangible resources such as articles, instructional materials (e.g., storybooks, visuals, manipulatives), websites, or lesson planning templates. Coaches may also connect teachers to interpersonal resources, such as colleagues who seek to enhance their instruction and student learning through collaboration.



### Coaching Resources

#### Books

- Aguilar, E. (2020). *Coaching for equity: Conversations that change practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Costa, A. & Garmston, R. (1991). Cognitive coaching: A strategy for reflective teaching. From Northeast Georgia RESA. Teacher Support Specialist Instructional Handbook. Winterville, GA: Northeast Georgia RESA, pp. 91-94.
- Dufour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (Second ed.) Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Jablon, J., Dombro, A. L., Johnsen, S. (2016). *Coaching with powerful interactions: A guide for partnering with early childhood teachers*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Kee, K. M., Anderson, K. A., Dearing, V., Harris, E., Shuster, F. (2010). *Results coaching: The new essential for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012). *Coaching Matters*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.
- Knight, J. (2014). *Focus on Teaching: Using Video for High-Impact Instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

#### Websites

Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation, eduTOOLBOX resources

<https://www.edutoolbox.org/>

National School Reform Faculty, Harmony Education Center

<https://nsrfharmony.org/>

Bright Morning: Every Conversation Counts

<https://brightmorningteam.com/free-tools/>

All Things PLC

<https://www.allthingsplc.info/>

#### Early Childhood Curriculum and Assessment Resources

- Bailey, B. A. (2014). Introduction to conscious discipline. In J. Ruffo (Ed.), *Conscious discipline: Building resilient classrooms* (pp. 8–29). Oviedo, FL: Loving Guidance, Inc.
- Hemmeter, M. L., Fox, L., & Snyder, P. (2013). A tiered model for promoting social-emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior. In V. Buysse, & E. Peisner-Feinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of response to intervention in early childhood* (pp. 85–101). Brookes.
- Hemmeter, M. L., Fox, L., & Snyder, P. (2014). *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool: Research edition*. Brookes.
- Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System manual*. Pre-K. Brookes.