



An introduction to **THE NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD COACHING GUIDEBOOK:** **Competencies for Professional Practice**

This document outlines a common set of principles or standards for coaching in early childhood education settings. It is based on an in-depth analysis of the skills and dispositions required for coaches to be effective in fostering growth and learning, while promoting quality outcomes for early childhood educators, children and/or families.

This document also serves as a reflective tool for coaches to assess their own competencies in the following areas: Setting the Foundation, Co-Creating the Relationship, Facilitating Learning Through Coaching Strategies, and Assessing the Success of the Coaching Partnership.

Introduction: Why and How the Competencies Were Developed

In the spring of 2017, representatives from various early childhood education coaching initiatives in Nebraska began meeting regularly to identify ways to provide professional development to Nebraska coaches working in a variety of coaching settings and initiatives. As the work progressed, they identified a need to gain a better understanding of the scope and nature of early childhood coaching projects around the state. In addition, the group wanted to explore how a common set of principles or standards for coaching, and more systematic professional development opportunities for coaches, might support our work and promote stronger outcomes for our coaching efforts. The group adopted the name the Nebraska Early Childhood Coach Development Team (as part of the Nebraska Early Childhood Coach Collaboration Team). A statewide survey of coaching initiatives showed that a significant amount of coaching is being done, with common broad goals but great variability in practice. The Nebraska Early Childhood Coach Development Team determined that a set of shared standards, in the form of coaching competencies, could be helpful in guiding coaching work around the state. In 2019, the team began crafting a set of coaching competencies for the early childhood field in Nebraska. Using coach competency documents developed by other states as a springboard, the team completed an in-depth analysis of the skills and dispositions required for effective coaching with early childhood educators seeking to provide high quality services to children and families in Nebraska.

The competencies described are not meant to be used as requirements for hiring or by which coaches would be evaluated, but rather as a description of best practice. The team believes that the Early Childhood Coaching Guidebook: Competencies for Professional Practice can be a useful resource to support coaching work in the following ways:

- To inform ongoing conversation on the role of coaching in early childhood education professional development and how to support coaching efforts in Nebraska
- As a coach self-assessment tool to review and strengthen skills and dispositions
- As a guide for selection of professionals interested in becoming coaches
- As a tool for strengthening professional identity among early childhood educators who are doing coaching

There is still a great deal to be learned about “best practice” in coaching. Under what circumstances is coaching likely to be most effective? Are specific approaches more effective with coachees who have particular backgrounds, skills, or education? How long does it take to create sustainable change and what other factors contribute to success? Given these and other unknowns, this is meant to be a “living” document. We expect that as we learn more about what works and why in this relatively new profession, the competencies described here may change and grow. As we share this document around the state, the team will be seeking avenues for all stakeholders to continue to share what is being learned from our collective experience.

Underlying Themes

Some underlying themes are woven (or implied) throughout each section of the competencies that have emerged as core values and beliefs. While coaching is viewed as a relationship between “co-learners”, we believe that the coach’s primary role is to be responsive to the goals and needs of the person being coached, in the service of positive outcomes for children and families. In order to accomplish this, effective communication is critical in all aspects of a coaching relationship.

Additional themes include:

- Coaching requires authentic collaboration; to be effective it must be a partnership.
- Coaching requires respectful, professional regard for the coachee.
- Coaching is not static; being in a learning relationship is a dynamic process.
- Coaching goes beyond the surface of quality practice to explore the roots of what supports children’s growth and development.
- Coaching relies on being open to possibilities and welcoming the unexpected.
- Coaching promotes self-reflection and experimentation as primary learning strategies.
- Coaching is a parallel process. The coach practices and models behaviors and dispositions that support the coachee’s learning.
- Coaching should assist coachees to develop self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-directed action to benefit the children and families whom the coachee serves.

Definition of Coaching

Coaching is a learning process based on a collaborative relationship that is intentionally designed to promote sustainable growth in the necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge of the coachee to effectively implement the best practices for the development of young children and their families.

At present, early childhood coaching initiatives in Nebraska typically are designed to achieve specific outcomes for children, teacher/administrator professional development, and program quality, with the understanding that there are various ways to achieve these outcomes and that they may be expressed in different ways in different programs. Coaching activities may include technical assistance or consulting, collaborating, or cognitive coaching. Technical assistance includes providing information, expertise, or resources to a coachee. Collaborating refers to working side-by-side with a coachee as a teaching strategy (for example, to arrange interest centers in a classroom). In cognitive coaching, the coach is facilitating the coachee’s problem-solving processes by supporting self-reflection and clarifying and testing ideas. Any one interaction between a coach and a coachee may include any, or all, of these approaches.

As defined here, coaching is most effective when it is embedded in a broader professional development system that includes opportunities for practitioners to learn about the theoretical foundations of early childhood education, to see effective instructional and leadership strategies demonstrated, to try out new strategies, and to receive feedback. Coaching is particularly effective in supporting the reflection required to successfully translate new learning into practice.

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