

Adoption Attuned Coaching Toolkit





“
Tools hold things together, connect ideas, and solidify change. They make coaches more effective and efficient. Tools allow you to awaken your client's awareness which can lead to empowerment, reveal choices, and usher in the change that the client desires.

Sally Ankerfelt

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INTERNATIONAL COACHING FEDERATION COMPETENCIES



BIASES CHECKLIST



ADOPTEEES

- Are broken
- Will have big struggles
- Should feel lucky
- Are thought of as children, as if they never grow up

BIRTH PARENTS

- Made the "right" choice
- Were not capable of parenting
- Are heroic for having the courage to place their child for adoption
- Are seen only for their role as birth parent
- Are not helpful to the child, therefore there is no need to maintain contact
- Absolutely need to be a part of the child's life
- Never grow or change beyond the relinquishment

ADOPTION

- Is always a good thing for everyone involved
- Is always a bad thing
- Saves children and gives them a better life
- Is a way to fulfill God's will

ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Did such a wonderful thing/are amazing for "taking it on"
- Use children to fulfill their own needs
- Will not be able to develop skills to be adequate parents
- Are "better" for the child than what the first parent and their situation would have been
- Adoptive families are not as legitimate of a family as first families

RACE

- Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have failed to parent/lack skills to parent/do not care for or love their children
- White people do better at parenting
- White people have a right to parent any child
- White people have more resources
- White people can give children more opportunities, especially if the children are BIPOC
- People of another race should never parent
- people of other races
America is the land of opportunity, so a child
- adopted internationally is lucky to be here
It does not matter your race or the color of
- your skin; we all are the same; we all bleed red



Quad-spective Exercise

Seeing Another's Worldview

Within the adoption community, making room to understand the experiences of other triad members can be especially challenging. The Quad-spective exercise is a way for the client to explore other points of view within the triad in a way that is tangible and active. This approach may reduce the emotional aspect of perspective-taking and may facilitate the client's self-understanding, newTake mental notes of the experiences and dialogue understandings of others in the triad and clarity about the situation at hand

Process:

1. The client arranges four chairs in a circle and identifies which chair represents themselves, the two other triad members, and the observer.
2. The client begins speaking about their experience with the situation at hand.
3. The client then changes perspectives by sitting in another chair identified as a member of the triad. The client speaks about the experience as if the client is that person, taking their imagined perspective.
4. The client then moves to the next chair identified as the other member of the triad.
5. The client finishes in the chair identified as the observer and shares what the observer noticed about the experiences of each member of the triad
6. The coach may ask the observer some questions:
 - a. What do they notice about each person present
 - b. What new insights can they offer to the person doing this exercise
 - c. What might they suggest happen next?
7. The coach then returns to the client and may ask:
 - a. What did you notice about the thoughts, feelings, behaviors of the other members of the triad? How might they experience the situation?
 - b. What new insights did you gain for yourself?/ What might the impact be?



Quad-spective Exercise Role Play - Continued



Seeing Another's Worldview

You may recall the fictitious couple, Mike and Jennifer from Lesson 1. Mike and Jennifer are experiencing infertility issues that brought them to consider adopting a child. Mike is eager to adopt, but Jennifer is not quite ready to give up yet. This exercise can be useful to help Mike and Jennifer understand each other. The coach may offer Mike and Jennifer a seat, a child another seat, and the observer the final seat. After arranging the chairs and identifying which seat will represent each person, the process begins.

Process:

Coach: Mike, would you like to begin? Why don't you go ahead and share your point of view.

Mike sits in Mike's chair: We have been through so much, Jennifer. Your body is tired. I am tired. We are draining our savings. I think it's time we stop trying and begin the adoption process. There are plenty of children out there waiting for a home. We could provide a loving, stable family for a child.

Mike moves to Jennifer's chair and speaks as if he is Jennifer: Can't you see how much it would mean for me to experience the joy of pregnancy and birth? I want to see myself in a child, to be able to hold our baby right after birth. I am not done trying. I think I have more energy left, even though I know it's hard.

Mike moves to the child's chair and speaks as if he is the child: I want you to remember that I am a person and that my life matters even now. I don't want to feel like I am just something that fulfills your desires. But, I long for a family.

The process continues with Jennifer taking her turn in the chairs:

Jennifer sits in Jennifer's chair: I am really torn. It makes me so sad to think that we might be done trying. But, I am truly tired, not just my body but my heart is tired of the rollercoaster ride. I would be devastating to let go of my dream. But, maybe I could love a child not birthed by me. I just don't know.



Quad-spective Exercise Role Play - Continued



Seeing Another's Worldview

Jennifer moves to Mike's chair and speaks as if she is Mike: I see what this is doing to you, Jennifer. It's hard on you and it's hard on me. I am worried about us. I am worried about this breaking the bank. I know I can love and parent a child who is adopted. I know you would be able to, also.

Jennifer moves to the child's chair and speaks as if she is the child: I need a mom who can love me for me. I think I would feel your sadness and your confusion if you adopted me now. Please think about that.

Coach invites Mike and Jennifer to each sit in the observer's chair.

Coach: As the observer, what do each of you notice about the thoughts and feeling of the others?

Mike: I noticed that Jennifer is not ready yet and that Mike's certainty might put pressure on her. Just because it's easy for Mike to say, "Let's stop trying," it's not easy for Jennifer. I noticed that Mike is forgetting about the child who might be adopted. A child cannot just be a solution to their problem. The child is a human being.

Jennifer: I noticed that Mike has a legitimate concern about money. I was impressed in Mike's confidence that Mike and Jennifer could parent and love a child not born to them. I also noticed the vulnerability of a child, if Mike and Jennifer would adopt when Jennifer is still uncertain and grieving and Mike is moving on. Children pick up on things easily and it wouldn't be fair to a child to bring them into a home where Mike and Jennifer are still working through the pain and grief of infertility.

Coach: Now that you have had a chance to do this exercise, what have you learned about what you might do next?

Mike and Jennifer agree: We need to talk more. It's not time yet to decide. To decide now would not be fair to us and, most importantly, to a child. Let's slow this down, take our time and just "be" for a while: pause trying and wait to make a decision on adopting a child.

Positive Intent of Action Exercise

Uncovering Positive Intent Behind Behavior

Adoption Attuned Coaching holds that all behavior means something. We go further to say that behavior, no matter how destructive, has a core reason that is “positive.” The client may benefit from discovering the deeper “why” for their own behavior or the behavior of their loved one.

The discovery of positive intent can open the client up for self-understanding and a shift to life-giving action (vs. destructive action), growth and forward movement.

This exercise also can assist a client who is seeking to relate to another person in the adoption triad. When the client considers the positive intention that may be underlying the other’s actions, the client can be open to new approaches to the relationship.

You may recall the story of Jasmine, the single mother, who adopted Bill. Bill, now a teenager is starting to be argumentative with Jasmine. He also is showing interest in his birth father and his birth father’s Native American heritage. He is struggling in school and getting into fights with his classmates.

In this scenario, Jasmine is seeking some coaching around how she can get Bill to listen to her. She shares how she becomes so frustrated with Bill. Because he will not listen to her, she winds up shouting at him.



Positive Intent of Action Role Play

Coach asks a question to evoke the positive intent: What are you hoping for when you shout?

Client (Jasmine) responds: I want him to listen to me!

Coach: You want Bill to hear you and listen to you. What is important about that?

Jasmine: Well, I never would have walked away from my parents when they were talking to me. It's so disrespectful. I also am trying to be there for him to guide him, raise him to be a healthy, happy and responsible person. He's getting in trouble at school, too. It's getting hard to be around him and that makes me mad - no, I guess I would say that it makes me sad.

Coach: (exploring possible positive intent) What makes you sad about the current state of affairs with Bill?

Jasmine: I don't know, I guess it would be that we no longer are close. We don't connect like we used to. He seems very distant to me.

Coach: (summarizing positive intent behind yelling) So when you yell, you deep down want to connect with Bill.

Jasmine (with tears in her eyes): Yes. I feel I am losing him. Plus, he has been attending tribal rituals and the local tribe has really embraced him. He seems like he doesn't want me anymore.

Coach: (Invites a perspective shift within the context of positive intent) I can see how all of this is really hard. (Pause) How does your child respond to you when you yell?



Continued: Positive Intent of Action Role Play



Jasmine: Well, obviously, he doesn't like it. Sometimes he even yells back, runs to his room and slams his door. (realization that the negative action of yelling does not accomplish the positive intent) Yeah, the yelling doesn't get me what I really want. It's just pushing him further away.

Jasmine: Well, obviously, he doesn't like it. Sometimes he even yells back, runs to his room and slams his door. (realization that the negative action of yelling does not accomplish the positive intent)

Yeah, the yelling doesn't get me what I really want. It's just pushing him further away.

Coach: (Moves towards life-giving action based on positive intent) Thinking about your son and all that you told me is going on in his life, what might he need from you in order to feel connected to you and hopefully open up space for hearing from you?

Jasmine: I don't know. I want to say that he needs space to explore who he is. But, maybe he also needs me to just be with him and just to listen to him, not to try to change him right now.

I haven't shown much interest in his experiences with the Native American community. I guess because I have felt threatened by it. But, I wonder if I could lean into it more by being excited for him when he goes to an event.



Continued: Positive Intent of Action Role Play



Coach: I notice your face lights up when you talk about this. How would it look if you replaced the yelling with these ideas?

Jasmine: Well, I think I would have a much better chance of staying connected to Bill during this time of his life. My actions could tell him, "I want to stay connected to you. I love you." That might break down the defensiveness I think my son has built up.

Probably he yells because I yell. If stopped to listen and then kept my voice calm and quiet, that may make a difference in how he responds to me. Then we can talk about how to move forward.

Positive Intent → **Negative Action** → **Negative Result**
Wants to be heard stay connected Screams at son Son disengages

Positive Intent → **Positive Action** → **Positive result**
Wants to be heard, stay connected Listen, be with Begins to engage



Exploring Positive Intent More Deeply

Explore how both Jasmine and Bill might also be dealing with one or more of the seven core issues of adoption. For example, Jasmine might be wrestling with:

- **guilt** because she couldn't provide her son a father everyday life
- **guilt** because she withheld and/or didn't know much about his heritage and/or made no effort to incorporate it
- **fear** that Jim's interest in his dad and heritage might cause him to reject her issues around decreasing connection (**loss of intimacy**)
- both of them might be grasping for more control as a coping mechanism...
- **Tri-relational** issues might be swirling underneath their interactions Each represents an example of positive intent that may or may not bring about a positive result positive



The Deep Dive Exercise

Engaging the Client in Deeper Thought

The Hidden Layers of Our Mind

Imagine a swelling wave. The wave is what we show and are conscious of, but beneath the water lies the elements that created that wave. Our minds work similarly. A client may express a particular thought or feeling, but there's often a lot more happening beneath that initial layer. By diving deeper into our client's thoughts, they can uncover hidden beliefs, fears, and desires that influence their behaviors and emotions.

Going Beyond the Surface

Ask your client, "If you were to go deeper with this thought, what else might you see?" This question prompts your client to look beyond the obvious. For instance, let's consider Sarah, who found out she was pregnant during her first semester of college and who had the disappointment of her child's father leaving town, never to be heard from again. Sarah made an adoption plan with Shelia and Henry, which included only having a relationship with her birth son, Jim, when he was old enough to make that decision for himself.

Sarah hires an adoption coach, with her goal of preparing herself for a possible reunion with Jim. She cites that her primary goal is wanting to feel comfortable meeting her birth son. The coach may ask:

If you were to go deeper with the thought of feeling comfortable, what else might you notice?

What makes feeling comfortable important to you?

How do you imagine a reunion taking place?

What might be some of your unspoken expectations of meeting Jim?

Uncovering Deeper Thoughts

The next step is to take that additional thought and delve even further. Ask your client:

"What might be underneath that additional thought?"

This process of continual exploration can reveal core beliefs and patterns that shape the client's goal.

Continuing with the previous example, Sarah may discover that she is worried about what Jim might think of her and her decision to place him for adoption. This worry may be linked to a deep-seated belief that she not good enough or lovable. By bringing these hidden layers into awareness, you can start to help Sarah address her fears and hopes in a way that best prepares her to meet her son.



The Elephant in the Room Exercise

Asking Powerful Questions to Reveal What Is Not Stated

Clients may be hesitant to state what is really on their mind. They may:

- struggle to trust another person with deeper thoughts
- be afraid that they may fall apart
- may fear the response
- may not trust themselves with what they are thinking or feeling

Through active listening, the coach may notice a shift in the client such as:

- a change in body position, voice or facial expression
- a longer pause in the conversation that is out of character for that client
- a shift in mood or in speech

If a coach notices such changes, the coach may ask with neutrality and curiosity:

- What is something you are noticing but not saying?
- What else may need to be considered that may be difficult to talk about?
- I want to check in with you. I am noticing...what else might you want to say?
- What might be wanting to come to light right now? I can see your mind thinking hard about something...I wonder if there is something else that wants to have a voice in this conversation

The coach also may:

Mirror the changes the coach sees to maintain rapport with the client

When a client chooses to speak about the “elephant in the room,” the coach acknowledges the thoughts and validates the client before proceeding with more questions and exploration.



Imaginary Timeline

Situation Then vs. Situation Now

The coaching mindset holds that clients are resourceful - even more than they may realize. Even past behaviors that may seem detrimental now, may have been helpful at the time.

The first step to establishing the Imaginary Timeline is to invite the client to **appreciate past behaviors** as a resourceful way to manage or live through a situation. They may even find it useful to thank themselves for finding ways to survive or even thrive.

The second step is to invite the client to consider **how that strategy or behavior may not be useful or needed anymore**.

The third step is to work with the client to identify how their innate resourcefulness can be used to **create new strategies towards the client's goal**.

In this exercise the coach is evoking awareness and creating space for growth by inviting client to see the resilience in themselves, to notice current patterns of behavior and to open themselves up for different choices



Imaginary Timeline

Situation Then vs. Situation Now

Reminder of Imaginary Timeline Process:

1. Appreciate past behaviors as resourceful
2. Consider how past behaviors may not be needed or work anymore
3. Bring the resourcefulness into the present, create new strategies towards the client's goals

Scenario: Birth father, Joseph, comes to you for coaching. Joseph is Native American and active in his tribe. He learns from that his birth son's (Bill's) adoptive parent, Jasmine, that Bill is interested in learning more about his Native American heritage and wants to join Joseph in tribal activities. Joseph is looking for help developing a plan but he is experiencing internal roadblocks to the point where he has not responded to the request from the adoptive parent, Jasmine.

Coach: What would you say is one of the major internal roadblocks? This question may need exploration before a roadblock is identified.

Client: I don't know exactly. Actually, I think it is because I have been able to manage my life okay by keeping my birth son at a distance, even though I always had a deep desire that this day would happen, that my birth son could be in my life.

Coach: It sounds like you created a strategy to manage your life that involved keeping a distance from your birth son. What did the strategy involve?

Client: Every time I thought of Bill, I told myself that he was better off without me, even though I really didn't believe it. But, eventually, it worked and I could move on.



Imaginary Timeline

Situation Then vs. Situation Now

Coach: What if I used the word “resourceful” in reference to your strategy since it helped you keep going with your life?

Client: Hmm. Yes, I suppose it was resourceful.

Coach: You are resourceful!

Client: Yes...I had not thought it if that way before.

Coach: When you consider the current situation, now that you have this request from Jasmine and learned about this need from your birth son, what other strategy might work better for you now?

Client: Well, stuffing it down by telling myself that he didn't need me isn't going work anymore. I could start telling myself that my son needs me. He needs to know his heritage. So, it's worth the risk to open myself up to that.

Coach: Ahh. How would that show up in the choices you make going forward?

Client: Well, first I could put that on a post-it note and set it on my mirror so I see it every day. I then can reach out to Bill's adoptive mom, Jasmine, and just start a conversation. We then can make a plan, eventually with Bill's input. Yes, a detailed plan would be helpful - not only for me and Jasmine but especially for Bill.

Coach and client then can proceed to explore the plan.



Adoption Attuned Coaching Resources for Creating Agreements



Coaching Plan Templates

- [Coaching Agreement Template](#)
- [General Coaching Plan Worksheet](#)

Sample Customized Coaching Plan Worksheets

- [Adult Adoptee](#)
- [Teen Adoptee](#)

- [Birth Parent](#)
- [Adoptive Parent](#)
- [Prospective Adoptive Parent](#)
- [Adoptive Parent and Adopted Child](#)

Onboarding Client Questionnaires

- [Adult Adoptee or Adopted Child](#)
- [Birth Parent](#)
- [Adoptive Parent](#)
- [Adoptive Parent Currently Parenting/Child-Centric](#)
- [General](#)