



Adoption Attuned Coaching Certification



Course Book

Lesson 7



Trust and Safety are the bedrocks of a healthy and effective coaching relationship. In each coaching session, trust and safety need to be renewed and reinforced. This is done through a continued commitment by the coach to active listening and maintaining presence.

Coach Sally Ankerfelt

Special Considerations for Adoption Attuned Coaching



Adoption Attuned Coaching in Action

Learning Outcomes of *Lesson 7*

- Review the markers of ICF Core Competencies
- Integrate ICF Core Competencies with Adoption Attuned Coaching
- Identify barriers to effectively applying the Adoption Attuned Competencies
- Learn strategies for consistent application



LESSON 7: Prep Sheet



1. Print and Read [Lesson 7 Course Book](#)



2. Watch [Special Considerations for Adoption Attuned Coaching](#)



3. Read *the coaching exercises in the Adoption Attuned Coaching Toolkit E-book*



4. Watch the Model Coaching Sessions and Debriefs
[Mock coaching Session 1](#)
[Mock coaching Session 1, Debrief](#)
[Mock coaching Session 2](#)
[Mock coaching Session 2, Debrief](#)



5. Watch [the Quad-spective Exercise](#)



6. Complete the [Lesson 7 Session Quiz](#)



Introduction



By now, you have become familiar with the **Tri-spective Coaching Model**. Adoption Attuned coaches hold the adoptee in the center of our coaching. We also value, respect, and consider the experiences, points of view, and needs of birth parents and adoptive parents.

Maintaining a tri-spective approach while honoring the client(s) can be challenging. The ICF Core Competencies can support our efforts to be fully supportive and present with the client while considering how what happens to one person affects the others in the triad.

Throughout the previous lessons, you have gained knowledge about and understanding of common points of view of each triad member. Your new awareness is a first step to an effective Adoption Attuned Coaching practice.

In the pages that follow, we will explore the benefits of integrating ICF core competencies into your adoption attuned coaching. We encourage you to return to the previous lessons to discover how you can apply your increased understanding and the utilize the tools we offer in our Adoption Attuned Coaching Toolkit E-book.

INTERNATIONAL COACHING FEDERATION COMPETENCIES



The Importance of Partnering with Your Client



Throughout the Adoption Attuned Coaching process, you will notice the emphasis on **partnering** with your client.

A skilled Adoption Attuned coach will see themselves as a partner. Imagine that you are in a car with your client, starting off on a journey, the destination that was shared with you by your client. Your client is the driver as you set out on this journey. The client determines the starting point as you set off. Imagine that your client takes a route that includes visits to past destinations. The client uses familiar driving techniques that may be not your own.

You refrain from offering pointers or making suggestions on how to drive or where to go. Instead, you respect your client's decisions while you gain vital information to effectively partner with your client to reach their goals.

You become the watcher, the deep listener, the noticer, while as you remain client-centered throughout the coaching sessions.

- What do you notice about your client's
 - identity
 - experiences and environment
 - values and beliefs?
- How can you respect your client's insights, skills, talents, capabilities?
- How can you adapt your language, posturing, to match your client?
- How can you affirm their feelings and experiences, beliefs and and concerns while you coach?

As the coach, you are alongside the client where you can

- learn the client's point of view
- respect the road on which the client is traveling
- see what the client sees
- notice what the client may not be able to see such as
 - roadblocks
 - new options for travel
 - hidden resources
 - and other strategies for the journey
- True partnering requires us coaches to empty ourselves of our own inclinations and ideas and to be fully present with the client.

Cultivating Trust and Safety

When you integrate the above partnering techniques into your coaching practice, you can co-create a space for trust and safety to flourish. As coaches, we help cultivate trust and safety when we:

- Seek to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
- Demonstrate respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language and adapts one's coaching to the client
- Acknowledge and respect the client's unique talents, insights and work in the coaching process
- Show support, empathy and concern for the client
- Acknowledge and support the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions
- Demonstrate openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client.



The Importance of Transparency in Cultivating Trust and Safety



For any coach, trust is an important cornerstone of the coaching relationship. But, trust is especially crucial for adoption coaching, where a client may have experienced the breaking of trust, sometimes many times over.

Potential examples of trust violations within the triad:

- Adoptees
 - Adoptive parents do not share entire adoption story with their child or withhold the fact the child was adopted, only to be discovered from a third party
 - meetings with birth parents are cancelled
- Birth parents
 - adoptive parents do not follow through with contact agreement
 - placement agency makes promises that are not fulfilled
- Adoptive parents
 - receive inaccurate information during matching process
 - are given promises of timeline or cost that change during the process

This common experience of a triad member having their trust violated can create a hesitancy to believe that the coach is not hiding information or manipulating the conversations to the coach's liking. These delicate dynamics make transparency critical to trust and safety in the coaching relationship.

What Does Transparency Actually Mean in Coaching?

Transparent coaching is when you, the coach, openly share the purpose and rationale behind a particular thread of questions or set of coaching practices. Transparency can help solidify and deepen trust within the relationship.

When you are upfront as a coach, such as saying, “I ask these questions because I sense that there may be something deeper to explore,” the client can stay in the driver’s seat of the coaching. You demonstrate to the client that:

- they are capable of having all of the information, including your thought process
- there is nothing secret, nothing you will not share with your client
- that they deserve to be treated with openness and respect

The client has the ability to respond, to answer the questions or to decline. The very sharing of your thought process signals to the client,

Transparency says to the client,

“I trust you to be able to know what I’m doing in this coaching relationship.”

Active Listening



Active listening supports the client's experience of openness, trust, and safety.

Adoption triad members often do not encounter an active listener, especially within the helping community. Instead, after taking the risk of being vulnerable and sharing, they will hear:

- words of advice
 - *you should try this*
- minimization
 - *I don't think they really meant it*
 - *Look on the bright side*
 - *It can't be as bad as you just described it*

When a coach becomes prescriptive (advice) or questions the client's experience (minimization), the client receives the message that the coach is not trusting the client's own judgment or experience. This is devastating to the client and instantly creates an unhealthy and often damaging coaching experience.

Instead, the coach demonstrates active listening when the coach:

- focuses solely on what the client is saying - or not saying
- listens to understand the client
- reflects and summarizes what the client is saying
- expresses neutral curiosity
- acknowledges emotions, non-verbals, or shifts in energy
- mirrors the client's body language, volume, etc.
- notices patterns over the course of sessions

A client who experiences actively listening by a coach may very well be one of the first times the client feels heard and therefore, hopeful for implementing the change they desire. They may be thinking, "Finally, someone who is listening and not trying to change me, challenge me, or direct me!"

Active Listening Practices



Coaches can improve their active listening by practicing specific techniques:

- **Focused listening**

Focused listening is when we hear and understand the words *and* the feeling behind the words. Words have power. If you are listening to a client who continues to refer to their loved one as “selfish” and you hear an anger in their tone, take note of the power of that word for the client. You may choose to explore both the word and the feeling behind the word with the client.

- **Global Listening**

Global Listening blends together our clients’ fullness and experience with our own experience within the coaching relationship dynamic.

- Perceive the unspoken messages and the subtle cues that reveal the client’s inner experience
- Notice body language, facial expression
- Recognize energy shifts with the client *and* within yourself

- **Recognizing Energy Shifts**

Energy shifts can be a powerful indicator for a client, something they may not be aware of at the moment. When you as the coach, see a change in a person’s face, or feel more energy behind their words, or notice a forward posturing, your own body registers this change.

You, too, within the relationship, may have a similar shift, change in my face or tone or posture. You are mirroring the client. You may say, “I am really sensing a shift here.” Then invite the client to reflect. Oftentimes, the client pauses for a moment to realize that, indeed, that is true. There was a shift.

Ways to Enhance Active Listening



- **Pick up on word usage. Respond with the same modality**
 - Visual - I see so many challenges before me
 - Feeling - I feel challenged at every turn
 - Hearing - All I hear are challenges to my decisions
 - Technical - When I try to calibrate my own life, I get challenged
- **Notice body posturing, facial expressions, energy shifts**
- **Listen for the client's context and environment** (imagine you are standing together, looking at a painting. See the landscape the client sees).
- **Affirm the client's identity, values, beliefs and experiences**
- **Summarize what the client says**, using their word modality mentioned above
- **Create space** by allowing for some pauses
- **Ask the client if there is more that they are trying to communicate** behind the words and ideas they are sharing with you
- **Pick up on any trends in the client's words, behaviors, or emotions**
- **Respect the client's language, style, culture, perspective, beliefs**
- **Support the client in their feelings, concerns and joys**

The Power of Noticing:

Do not gloss over emotions or shifts in energy. Instead, offer a word of noticing. Even a brief, "I noticed how much passion you had in your voice just now" can have a huge impact. When we use the words, "I noticed," the other person often hears, "I notice *you*. I see *you*."



Evoking Awareness and Facilitating Client Growth



Adoption Attuned Coaching is an adoptee centric, tri-spective coaching process. The skills of evoking awareness and facilitating growth require a coach to be **client-centered**. All questions, analogies, or metaphors are for the client's awareness, not for the coach's needs.

An Adoption Attuned Coach will move with the client, adjusting as needed.

A coach embarks upon reframing, challenging or inviting a different perspective, especially the perspective of another triad member only after rapport and trust has been established and always in the context of exploration and growth rather than persuasion or judgment, lest the coach risk minimizing or invalidating the client's experience.

This means that:

- All questions, analogies, or metaphors are for the client's awareness, not for the coach's needs for clarification or for instruction
- An Adoption Attuned Coach will move with the client, adjusting as needed.
- Reframing, challenging or inviting a different perspective, especially the perspective of another triad member occurs only after rapport and trust has been established and always in the context of exploration and growth rather than persuasion or judgment, lest the coach risk minimizing or invalidating the client's experience

Evokes Awareness



Evoking Awareness creates an avenue for your client to gain new insights and spur an energy to move forward with their goals. You can use many techniques throughout your session with a client such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor, or analogy. Curiosity and open-ended questions can create awareness.

Curiosity and Open-ended Questions

For adoption coaching, the techniques of curiosity and opened-ended questions are especially useful.

Curiosity has a neutral feel. If I am curious, I am not as attached to the outcome or the answer.

“I am curious about the feeling you just described” opens a client up to share more not for the sake of satisfying any pre-conceived notion of the coach.

Open-ended questions are a coach’s friend. When possible, begin questions with “what” or “how” rather than “do” or “would.”

Closed questions:

“Do you feel sad about that?”

“Would you like to see another option?”

Open-ended questions:

“How do you feel about that?”

“What other options might you see?”

Challenge Questions

Adoption coaches are careful about challenge questions since there is a risk of minimizing or invalidating the client’s experience.

- Example for a less confrontational way to challenge a parenting approach:

“Some people say that adoptive parenting requires parenting skills that usually are not found in traditional parenting. What do you think about that?” or “What other skills do you see might be helpful?”

- Example for challenging past behaviors:

“I see how that action has been really helpful for you in the past. How do you feel about that action now?”

Facilitates Client Growth



The nature of coaching moves with the client towards growth. In adoption coaching, all the coaching techniques and the coaches themselves generate fertile ground for growth.

Within the safety, trust, and transparency of the relationship, and the valuing of the client and their experiences, growth can take root.

Questions and statements that invite and facilitate growth:

“How can you use your new awareness going forward?”

“It sounds like you are developing a sense of how to move forward.”

“I am so excited for you!”

“How did it feel for you to make that shift?”

“What resources can you use to make your new plan work for you?”

Exercises that Evoke Awareness or Facilitate Client Growth*



I. **The Deep Dive Exercise:** Deeper level awareness

- If you were to go deeper with this thought/idea/feeling/experience what else might you see?
- Taking it even further, what might be underneath that additional thought?

II. **Inviting the Elephant in the Room Exercise:** Asking powerful questions to reveal what is present but not stated

- 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 might be wanting to come to light right now?

III. **Intent of Action Exercise:** What is the positive intent of the action?

- What are you hoping for when you [do that action]?

IV. **Imaginary Timeline approach:** Thank self for past resourcefulness and invite looking at the situation then vs. situation now

- Considering where you are at now, what other activities might work even better now for you?

V. **The Quad-spective Exercise:** The client explores other points of view within the triad

- How might the other members of the triad experience the situation?

VI. **Imagining Your Dream Child:** Assists prospective adoptive parents in developing realistic expectations for their future child

*All exercises located in the Adoption Attuned Coaching Toolkit E-book

Establishes and Maintains Agreements



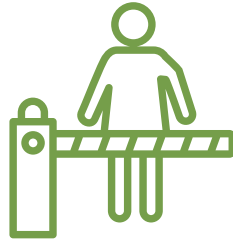
Agreements allow for a clear understanding of the coaching relationship, the process of coaching and the direction of coaching (the plans and goals). Agreements in adoption coaching have the underlying function of offering agency and autonomy for those in the adoption triad.

Why Agreements Matter in Adoption Attuned Coaching.

Agreements:

- Encourage agency
- Allow the client to be in control and can help restore a sense of control over a client's own life
 - Adoptees: choice to be adopted was not theirs; they can feel like they have to fit in or be someone they are not, leading to a lack of agency in their life
 - Birth parents: can feel little control over situations in their life that led to placement and little control/influence over the course of their child's life
 - Adoptive parents: can feel they have little say or control over the adoption process, over-controlled and scrutinized, and while parenting, less competent on how to handle difficult situations, thus diminishing their trust in their choices
- Communicate trust in the client's ability to discern what is best for themselves
- Use a capability mindset that creates space for the client to determine the goal(s) they would like to achieve during the coaching sessions, rather than what the coach thinks is best
- Are a platform to explore the benefits of achieving the goals, and how those goals would be accomplished for the sake of the client's own clarity, not for someone else's (i.e. the coach's) need for clarity

Barriers to Creating a Clear Coaching Agreement



- Client is under-empowered to the point of not being able to know what goal they have in mind, only that they want a goal
- Client is not yet trusting the relationship and process
- Client is accustomed to hearing other people's opinions and directions



Techniques to overcoming barriers

- Send a rough draft of a plan that the client shared with you verbally in the session
 - The act of the coach writing down the client's words, verbatim, then compiling those words into a coaching plan validates the client's thoughts and feelings and may help them identify goals
 - shows the client that their thoughts are received as they were presented rather than revised to fit another person's view
- Take your time in creating a coaching plan and getting a clear agreement during sessions
 - Assure client that there is no rush
- Coach the person rather than the outcome
 - Notice word choices to evoke awareness
 - Reflect on facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, energy around certain thoughts
 - Use the power of reflecting what is said *for the sake of the client gaining clarity, not for the coach to gain clarity*
 - When reflecting, have the image in mind of you, the coach, standing alongside the client, looking at the client's worldview
- Check in about pacing of sessions



Common Barriers to Adoption Attuned Coaching



Holding strong opinions about adoption:

Aside from our own experiences with adoption being a barrier, holding strong opinions about adoption can become a roadblock in our coaching. Some common strong opinions that we see are:

- Adoption should never happen/is all “bad”
- Adoption always ends “bad”
- Adoption is the “right” choice when considering abortion
- Adoption is something that does not have a lifelong impact/is an experience people can and should get over
- If adoption happened, it was “meant to be”

Holding Opinions about Triad Members

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

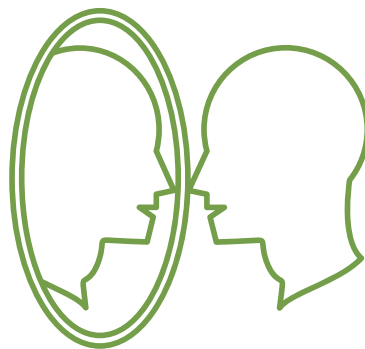
ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- ☐ 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 & CULTURE

- ☐ 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

The Importance of Working on Yourself



Prior to becoming an adoption coach and continually thereafter, it is imperative that we do our own work around our own adoption experience.

At some point in our coaching career, a client will touch a tender part of us that may take us by surprise. We may have an internal response that might cause us to stop listening to the client, give a response or ask a question that is not client-centered or is judgmental in nature and tone.

When this happens, we need to take a moment to redirect ourselves either through mindful breathing or some other technique you may implement for yourself, like touching a ring or tapping your foot, to remind yourself to be present and recenter yourself.

If you find yourself in a situation where this happens more than once, use your coaching supervisor or a trusted, confidential professional to piece out what happened so that you can continue to be fully present for your client.

If after appropriate supervision and consultation, the distraction, bodily responses, or internal dialogue continues in your coaching relationship, it is time to review the ethics of coaching and consider referring this client to another coach or professional.