



When Anticipatory Guidance Isn't Enough: Parent Coaching as a Tool for Enhancing the Lives of Families

BY **JUANONA BREWSTER**, MDIV, MTS, MJ,
DIRECTOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, ICAAP

During virtually every patient visit, pediatric care providers (hereafter referred to as doctors) have the opportunity to interact with the parent(s). They can observe discipline and communication styles; learn more about parental concerns such as feeding, toileting for younger children, or limiting media exposure for all children. Doctors listen as parents express concerns about developmental issues. Typically, they try to provide anticipatory guidance and resources in the time they have to meet with the family.

Charged with meeting parents' information needs in ways that positively affect the well-being of their children is often difficult for doctors to accomplish in the time available without accessing other resources beyond office visits. In addition, when doctors are concerned that parents may not have the necessary knowledge to positively impact their children's well-being, how can the practice tap into reliable referral sources that might exist? Are there other options?

Typically, family therapy and social services have been encouraged. Often, the dilemmas with which parents struggle are not appropriate for such intervention, either from the doctor's or the therapist's perspective. For the past decade, however, a new field of support has become available—parent coaching. What is it? Is it effective? How does it work?

What is Parent Coaching?

Nancy Sander, a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Illinois, has written that parent coaching is the practice and application of guiding parents to effective and efficient parenting methods and skills, so that the parents can create their own successful parenting plan and family life.

Parenting, after all, can be a daunting task. Fundamentally, parent coaching is a process by which a person (the coach) helps parents to identify strengths and ways to address the challenges. Parent coaching advances parents' use of encouragement, motivation, training, and guidance to help their children develop healthfully and to resolve their

children's unwanted behaviors. Some, by way of example, include coaching families through developmental and social/emotional concerns; working with families on typical development issues such as potty training, sibling rivalry, or limit setting; reinforcing anticipatory guidance or specific directives such as healthy eating and lifestyle changes to positively impact the ill effects of obesity; or providing guidance on handling parental stress.

A parent coach serves families, is dedicated to making a difference, and seeks to enable parents to accomplish their parenting goals. As the parents practice the communication and other parenting skills learned, family relationships improve, and the parents are better equipped for their parenting journey ahead.

Parent coaching is an empowerment model of support. It uses challenges, goal setting, and encouragement so the parents see the power of their words and deeds and use them well. They more willingly take on accountability for their decisions and actions. Parent coaches, as the name implies, are there to serve the parents, to be a support, a mentor, and a clarifier.

How does Parent Coaching Work?

During the coaching conversations, the coach helps parents to discover constructive ways to address a situation that may be causing concern, assists them in identifying their strengths and goals, and helps with designing action steps to attain parenting goals by providing information, resources, and positive affirmation. The coach encourages parents to discover and address stresses and challenges that may impact them and their children, help them to evaluate the support systems they already have in place, and then guide them to tap into them more effectively.

It's important to note that while the parent coach has expertise in child development and parent education, the coach does not impose anything on the parent. Rather, the process of learning what works best comes from the

parent and the parent's willingness to examine, explore, and try out various ideas and strategies. The coach, through deep listening, compassionate questioning, and an invitational stance to suggestions offered—never imposed, draws out the parent's inner wisdom, intuitive knowledge, and parental priorities in energizing and highly sustainable ways. Coaching works so well precisely because it is a “shoulder-to-shoulder” relationship—a creative collaboration between coach and client that harnesses the strengths of each to result in the best possible outcomes.

Either one or both parents can be supported with this process. For instance, the parent coach will perhaps help the family to deal with stress, to communicate more effectively, or to solve discipline problems. In many family situations, parents have a specific issue. An example might be helping a child study better, or solve a particular discipline problem. Parent coaching connects with the strengths, the style of relating to the world, the temperaments, and the skills of the parents and child. As appropriate, the parents are presented with specific methodologies, template tools, and systems that align with the parents' goals and style(s).

Is Parent Coaching Effective?¹

Recently, Gloria DeGaetano, founder of the Parent Coaching Institute (PCI), and Sheryl Stoller, a PCI Certified Parent Coach® in Illinois, discussed the effectiveness of parent coaching. Gloria founded PCI in 2000 in the wake of the Columbine tragedy to ensure that all children's cognitive, emotional and social developmental needs are met through transformative parent-child interactions. In collaboration with Seattle Pacific University, she developed, and continues to refine, the twelve-month curriculum that meets the stringent requirements for graduate level credits, in order to expertly train PCI Certified Parent Coaches®.

There are indications about the effectiveness of parent coaches trained with the comprehensive coaching model such as that used by PCI. Parents have reported that such coaching reduces parental stress, provides the parents with important resources and knowledge, and helps parents see and use their strengths and their inner wisdom to come to appreciate themselves and their children in profound ways. The parents change their attitudes toward and habits of interacting with their children. The results include improvement in their children's behaviors, the family relationships, and the children's healthy development and future prospects. ●

When the pediatrician senses that the children would benefit and the parent could use support, they can offer the coaching option to the parent. Some doctors have the names and contact information for the parent coaches available the way they handle referrals to other specialists. Some have put aside a regularly scheduled time and place in their office for a parent coach to be on site. Others offer workshops by a parent coach either as a series or singly. While reimbursement to the practice is mostly self-pay, with the coaches themselves handling payment, organizations such as PCI has collaboratively won grants and works with interested agencies to also cover the coaching cost for the underserved. ●



Refer a PCI Certified Parent Coach®
Your Rx for the Parents

When the many challenges of raising children can't be addressed in the office visits, and your patients' well-being depends on their parents' receiving reliable guidance, **The Parent Coaching Institute can help.** We are the leading and sole graduate-level provider of Certified Parent Coaches in the nation. We train and refer highly skilled professionals who complete a rigorous, graduate-level program, geared toward supporting families' social and emotional needs, so you can focus on your patients' physiological needs.

Visit www.ThePCI.org/aap to find a PCI Certified Parent Coach® in your region today.
888.599.4447

pci
PARENT COACHING
INSTITUTE

REFERENCES

1. State Senator Don Harmon (39th District) has a shared vision with ICAAP that recognizes the pediatricians' need to ensure the health of children requiring that they be attuned to the health of the mothers. While the underlying principle was initially specific to post-partum depression, Senator Harmon felt it was relevant to parental support in general terms and warranted his bringing the work of the Parent Coaching Institute (PCI) to the attention of ICAAP, as an example of the effectiveness of parent coaching.