V is for Virtual Learning

Supporting Young Children's Development and Learning From a Distance

Virtual learning environments involve the use of technology. When adults learn virtually about using *effective practices*—actions or behaviors that support young children's development and learning—we refer to this as virtual coaching. Virtual coaching allows those who are coaching ("coaches") and those being coached ("coachees") to interact using devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, laptops) and video conferencing platforms across school, home, and community settings. For example, an early interventionist could use a video conferencing platform to help a parent with strategies to include their toddler in reading routines at home. Understanding how to use technology effectively as part of virtual coaching leads to an impactful learning experience.

Tips for a Successful Virtual Coaching Experience

Successful coaching experiences (virtual or in person) involve:

- Gathering and sharing information about effective practices that will support children's development and learning.

- Developing shared practice goals and action plans to guide coaching and always confirming that the goal and action plan reflect the coachees' practice priorities.

- Focusing observations of interactions between a coachee and child(ren) in their everyday routines and activities as the coachee is using the practices related to their goals.

- Sharing reflection and feedback about practice use as well as children's development and learning in response to practice use.

To enhance these coaching experiences, follow these technology tips:

Before the Virtual Coaching Experience

- Make sure devices are plugged in or fully charged.

- Always use secure (e.g., password protected) platforms and portable devices (e.g., tablets) for sharing files and videoconferencing.

During the Virtual Coaching Experience

- Place devices on stable surfaces and use external microphones (e.g., USB microphone) so the coaches and coachees can see and hear each other clearly.

- Wait for the other person to respond when having a conversation. Sometimes there is a delay when using the telephone or videoconferencing platforms, depending on the speed of the Internet connection available.

Gathering and Sharing Information About Practices

Adults who are engaging in virtual coaching should gather and share information with each other about effective practices that can be used to support children's development and learning. For example, a caregiver might want to learn effective practices for supporting a child's communication skills and may ask the child's early interventionist for useful information.

Tips for Virtual Gathering and Sharing Information About Practices

- Share information about the purposes and processes of coaching and agree on which technology platforms or applications will be used.
- Encourage coachees to gather and virtually share relevant information and observations from other adults in the child's life (e.g., a pediatrician).
- Use a videoconferencing platform for virtual face-to-face conversations about prior knowledge and experiences.

Developing Shared Goals and Action Plans

Once the practices adults can use to support young children are gathered and shared, the coaches and coachees work together to develop shared goals and action plans. These goals and action plans ensure everyone understands the focus of coaching and how they will work together to achieve the goal(s).

Tips for Virtual Goal Setting and Action Planning

- Use technology, such as communicating via email, to share goals and action plans before virtual coaching sessions so coachees and coaches can see and refer to it during coaching interactions.
- When using video conferencing to write or review goals and action plans, use screen sharing so coaches and coachees can look at goals and action plans together.

Doing Focused Observations

During a focused observation, the coaches see the coachees using effective practices with children related to the coachees' goals and action plans. Videoconferencing and video technology can be used to conduct focused observations. Consider which type of virtual observations (recorded or live) will be most effective.

Type of Virtual Observations	Pros	Cons
Recorded Video (The coachees record themselves and share video with the coaches)	Ability to rewind, pause, or fast forward video for more in-depth observations and feedback	Feedback about practice implementation is not immediate
Live Video (The coaches watch the coachees live)	Immediate feedback and support about practice implementation during everyday activity or routine	Often not able to review practice implementation after the observation is completed

Tips for Virtual Focused Observation

- Use a video camera and a secure file sharing platform or virtual coaching platform for coachees to share video with the coaches.
- Use videoconferencing with a portable device like a cellular phone, webcam, or tablet to review coachees' use of effective practices during everyday activities and routines to make coaching support more meaningful.

Sharing Reflection and Feedback

Shared reflection and feedback help coachees use effective practices confidently and consistently. When giving feedback, describe what coachees said or did during the focused observation. In virtual coaching, reflection and feedback can happen in a variety of ways (e.g., telephone, videoconferencing, online virtual platform, email).

Tips for Virtual Reflection and Feedback

- When using video or online coaching platforms, identify specific times in the video as part of reflection and feedback.
- Discuss specific examples of what coachees said or did during the focused observation and allow time to review video related to those examples.

What We are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and our collaborators are supporting projects that use practice-based virtual coaching and caregiver virtual coaching in home, school, and community settings. We work with our collaborators to use these evidence-based virtual coaching practices and to examine outcomes of virtual coaching.