



THE
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ESSENTIAL HEALTH COACHING SKILLS
for
WOMEN'S HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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What is Health Coaching?

All of us struggle to do what we know is healthy and beneficial for us, and sometimes we're just not sure what to do.

That's where health coaches come in!

Being a Health Coach vs. Developing Your Health Coaching Communication Skills

Health coaching skills can be used by any health or wellness professional. For example, let's say you're a women's health specialist nurse practitioner, physical therapist, fitness professional, acupuncturist, or nutritionist.

You make skilled recommendations to your patients based on a thorough assessment, their unique challenges, and their unique goals.

Based on all of that information, you recommend specific medications, herbal supplements, home exercise programs, nutrition plans, etc.

Have you ever had the experience of a patient or client NOT following your recommendations?

Health coaching skills are communication skills that coaches and health care professionals use to support people to make healthy behavior changes.

How many people know that they should be eating more vegetables, walking more, getting better sleep, better managing their stress, etc.? A LOT! And, most people even know some ways in which they can start making healthier choices and changing their behaviors to be healthier. Most people know, for example, that they would be healthier if they ate less sugar, drank more water, or went to sleep a bit earlier each night.

But, most people are busy, stressed, and overwhelmed by the vast amount of health information available. Thus, they hesitate to begin making healthy behavior changes, and they find it even more challenging to consistently make these changes over months and years.

Of course they have trouble following your recommendations and making consistent behavior changes! We all do. So, now you have a few choices... you can change your recommendations to perhaps make them easier for the patient or client to follow, you can label that patient or client as “non-compliant,” or you can bring in your health coaching skills!

You can also choose to collaborate with a skilled health coach. Most health and wellness professionals are very busy! You might already have a full schedule of patients or clients, and you just can't imagine having any additional time to spend sitting with your patients or clients to discuss how and why they will implement your skilled recommendations. In that case, you can collaborate with a professional health coach who will support your patient or client to implement your clinical or wellness recommendations in a way that is aligned with your client's unique challenges and goals.



Health coaching is both a profession, and a skill set.

If you decide to become a health coach (or work collaboratively with one), understand that health coaches are professionals within the healthcare team.

They have a defined scope of practice and code of ethics, and they are board certified by the International Consortium for Health & Wellness Coaching (ICHWC.org.)

I highly recommend that you work with (or become) a health coach that is eligible for ICHWC board certification, as board certification will become more important as the profession matures.

Now, let's discuss some of the specific skills that are essential for all women's health coaches, and women's health and wellness professionals who want to use health coaching skills to better support their clients and patients...

To effectively use health coaching skills to better support the women in our practices, we have to develop skills in both health coaching communication and evidence-based lifestyle medicine.

Health Coaching Communication Skills for Women's Health Populations

While this list is not exhaustive, let me introduce you to some essential skills for all coaches and clinicians who want to better support their female patients and clients to make healthy behavior changes over the long term...

Keep in mind that developing these skills takes more than understanding them intellectually, you must practice them, ideally with the mentorship of a skilled and experienced health coach within the context of an ICHWC approved health coach certification program.

Also, as you read through this list, consider how using these skills might be different for those of us working with populations of women vs. those working with men or children.

Plus, what cultural considerations could come into play?

1 Creating Safe Boundaries

This starts with you setting specific boundaries for yourself in your practice. Modeling healthy boundaries is essential.

How are you managing your time? How are you managing your energy? Who are you allowing into your space - at work, at home, in your community? What are your needs for sleep, focus, nourishment, connection, etc.? Are you sacrificing your needs by allowing others to take up the time, space and resources that you need for your own care?

Then, start with having your clients and patients bring awareness to their boundaries. Do they even notice when someone has crossed a boundary? Do they know what their boundaries are? How does it feel when someone or something has crossed into their energy field, time, or physical space? Awareness is always the first step. Then,

your clients and patients can begin to better define their boundaries. Perhaps they are more loose around things or people that nourish them - even if it's not the perfect time or place. Perhaps they are very rigid around things or people that deplete their energy or other resources, or add to their symptoms.

As your clients and patients begin to notice that allowing certain boundaries to be crossed can directly or indirectly contribute to their health issues, they may be more motivated to better define and strengthen their boundaries.

These conversations are client-led. Clients take the leadership role of observing what boundaries they have (or don't have) in their lives, and how they hold them firm or allow them to be crossed. Then, the coach can ask powerful questions to help clients consider the best next steps for defining and firming their boundaries in ways that feel good to them.

You should notice during any given coaching session that you (the coach) are speaking less than 25% of the time, and your client is speaking approximately 75% of the time.

2 Holding Space

Hold space in either a physical location (like your clinical office), or if you're on the phone or a video conference with a client or group.

You will ground yourself, calm your breathing, and quiet your mind.

Enter the space after clearing your energy from your last client - this can simply be done by washing your hands, and letting their energy go.

Then, step into your treatment room, or phone or virtual meeting, and visualize a container of safe space between you and your client or group of clients.

This space is where she can safely ask anything, share anything, and receive from you what she needs.

You can share recommendations, questions, your mindful attention, and your non-judgement with her in that space.

This space is safe for both of you, and you don't need to take on any negative energy, frustration, emotion or pain that she needs to express. All of that can simply be expressed into the healing space.

[This article is a helpful description of some of the components of the concept of "holding space"](#)

3 Mindful Listening

When we mindfully listen, we listen with curiosity and openness. We bring non-judgement, and we listen to hear, and learn.

Often in healthcare, professionals are listening for “pattern recognition.” Because we are often under intense time pressure, we are listening to try to quickly figure out what the patient’s concern or diagnosis is, and what we’re going to recommend to fix it.

Our goal is to quickly put her concern into a defined pattern that we can manage with a clinical recommendation.

Additionally, the opposite of mindful listening is distracted listening. When healthcare professionals are distracted by thoughts of their home life, problems at work, or focusing on filling out paperwork or the electronic medical record while the patient is sharing her story, the professional is not giving her full attention to the patient and her story.

Thus, the practice of mindful listening starts with a mindfulness practice for the practitioner or coach. We live in a world of distraction, which is quickly getting more distracted by technology, social media, and 24/7 access to content, news, and information.

As you develop your own skill of mindfulness, you will become better and better at mindfully listening to those in your life and in your practice. Mindful listening is a skill that improves with practiced attention, openness, awareness of our own biases, focus, non-judgement, and letting go quickly of distracting thoughts or patterns.

4 Visioning

When is the last time that a health provider asked you what your vision is for a healthy, happy, successful life? For most people, the answer is never.

We can give our patients and clients a valuable gift when we give them the space and support to freely consider what their desires are. Many people go through life following a plan that may have been set for them by teachers, parents, or others in their lives without ever considering their goals.

For example, when a 17 year old girl who is a skilled soccer player comes to see you after her knee surgery, most healthcare and fitness professionals are going to

help her to fully recover with the goal of getting back to soccer so that she can get the soccer scholarship that she was pursuing before her injury. But, maybe she no longer wants to play soccer. Maybe it's not her goal to get a soccer scholarship in college? Has anyone ever stopped to ask her?

Or, when the busy working mom comes in with a chronic fatigue diagnosis, and her healthcare professional is helping her to get the energy she needs to return to her busy life. Has anyone ever stopped to ask her to clearly define why SHE wants to get her energy back and how SHE would like to spend it? Probably not.

To me, the opportunity to support clients to have the space to consider their true life and work desires is an honor that is one of the best parts of health coaching. Then, once clients have defined their visions, they are far more motivated to heal so that they have the physical ability to achieve the visions that THEY desire and are excited about.

5 Self-Awareness and The Holistic Women's Health Assessment

Using subjective tools like ***The Holistic Women's Health Assessment*** (see blank graph on the next page), women's health coaches, can help clients to identify domains of their lives where they are strong, or where they may be lacking.

Women often underestimate how important things like rest or community connection are to healing.

By using self-awareness tools, clients can consider which domains of health are strong.

For example, perhaps they already eat a nourishing diet or exercise 4-5 times per week.

Then, they can consider which domains could benefit from more attention.

Perhaps by shifting their perspective, or spending more time being creative, healing could be available to them more quickly.

When clients begin to recognize these things for themselves, they are more quickly able to make beneficial changes in their lives by starting with areas that they feel are priority.

FULL

EMPTY



Perspective



Connection



Nourishment



Strength



Contribution



Attention



Rest



6 Powerful Questions

Powerful, open ended questions challenge our clients' limiting beliefs and open their eyes to new possibilities.

When clients feel stuck, it can be helpful to challenge them to think creatively.

For example, if a client says that she is unable to sleep because she must stay up late working while her children are in bed, a powerful question could be, "What three ways could you complete your work before 8pm if you had no access to light or electricity after 8pm?"

(She might come up with creative ideas like getting some daytime child care, delegating some of her workload, or eating to reduce her brain fog so that she can work faster during the day.)

Other examples of powerful questions include:

- If you were not limited by time or resources, how would you ideally like to spend your typical work days?
- Can you detail a typical Tuesday schedule if you could choose how to spend your time through the whole day?
- Why do you want to have more energy on the weekends?
- How will you spend that energy?
- What are you willing to give up so that you can spend more time each week attending yoga or practicing mindfulness?
- How can you reach out in your community to find a few friends who might enjoy helping you to cook more often for your family, or with whom you could share meals?

7 Resources for Change and The Web of Support

Without support, it's very difficult for anyone to overcome a chronic health condition. While a client or patient can be supported by her team of healing professionals, it's also important that she cultivate a web of support from her community of friends, family, acquaintances, and colleagues.

In The Women's Health Coach Certification Program we use ***The Web of Support tool*** (see *printable example on the next page*) to help our clients bring awareness to the importance of community support, and to create a supportive community to help them to implement healthy behaviors for the long term.

Additionally, our clients bring resources to the table that can help them to implement healing behaviors.

For example, some clients are very organized, others are social, and still others are goal-oriented. When clients are coached to recognize their strengths in other areas of their lives, such as at work or school, or strengths that they use as mothers or friends, they can then apply those strengths to help them navigate health-related behavior changes.

Focusing on and helping a client to develop her strengths is a very positive and rewarding way to help her to reach a new goal.

There are many more communication skills that can be learned and developed to support women to make sustainable health behavior changes.

Additional essential health coaching skills that we teach in our Women's Health Coach Certification Program include, values assessment, reflections, goal setting, assessing readiness for change, overcoming barriers to change, accountability strategies and tools, and designing maintenance programs for sustainable health behavior change.

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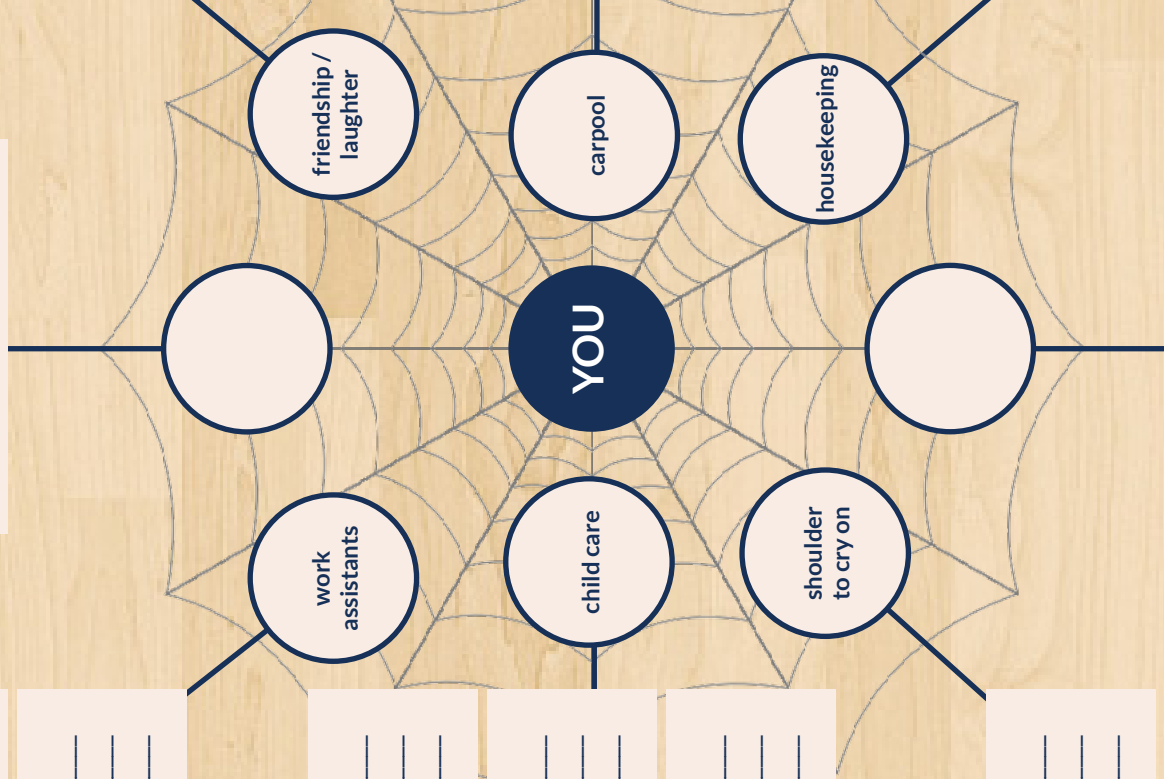
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Evidence-Based Lifestyle Medicine Recommendations for Women’s Health Populations

Helping clients to overcome barriers to change and to create sustainable behavior change is the key, distinctive role of health coaches and those practitioners using health coaching skills.

In addition, health coaches are also responsible for helping clients to set a “foundation of health.”

When clients are carrying out foundational health behaviors on a long-term, consistent basis, any other clinical recommendations made by their healthcare professional team, such as medications, surgeries, personalized nutrition plans, or physical therapy interventions, are more likely to be maximally effective.

Nutrition

While not all health coaches are qualified to offer skilled nutrition consultation, and some countries and states limit personalized practice of nutrition by health coaches, all health coaches must have foundational nutrition skills. The fact is that most women are not covering their nutrition basics. They are not hydrating appropriately, they are not chewing enough, they are eating in stressful situations, and they are not eating adequate vegetables or protein.

Depending on your area of focus and your location of practice, health coaches need to develop nutrition skills to be able to collaborate with other healthcare professionals, such as nutritionists, acupuncturists, physical therapists, or physicians, and educate their patients on nutrition for chronic symptom management.

Unfortunately, many healthcare professionals lack nutrition skills. Plus, many healthcare professionals are not prioritizing their own nutrition. At a recent medical conference, I asked the crowd of over 200 physicians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, mental health professionals, and nurses if any of them were on the “Coffee in The Morning, Wine to Relax at Night Diet,” and about 80% of the room raised their hands. Clearly this is an area where health professionals and women with health challenges alike can use better education and support.

In addition to nutrition, women’s health professionals need to continuously stay up-to-date on the evidence regarding effective lifestyle medicine in a variety of domains. Movement, stress reduction and stress management, sleep hygiene, and community support all contribute to a girl or woman’s foundation of health.

It is well understood, for example, that “The effect of social support on life expectancy appears to be as strong as the effects of obesity, cigarette smoking, hypertension, or level of physical activity.” (Ozbay et al., 2007) It’s also clear that women with sleep disorders are at a higher risk of having an autoimmune disease (Hsiao, et al., 2015)

There is deep and wide support in the scientific literature for the effectiveness of specific lifestyle medicine tools and strategies to improve health.

Understanding and applying this research is an important domain of health coaching.

While all health professionals should be emphasizing foundational aspects of health, some simply don’t have time in their practice settings. Thus, for those with more time to spend with their patients, gaining health coaching skills is critical.

And, for those with less time, collaborating with skilled health coaches is critical.

Become a Women’s Health Coach: Learn Health Coaching Communication Skills to Add to Your Existing Women’s Health Clinical or Wellness Practice, or Start a New Career

Becoming a women’s health coach is a valuable skill and growing career option for those who desire to support girls and women to make healthy behavior changes, sustainably.

There are many roles that health coaches can play as there is a growing epidemic of chronic disease globally for which the solutions often involve making healthy behavior changes.

Many examples of chronic diseases occur in women only or at higher rates in women such as many autoimmune diseases, chronic pelvic pain conditions, cardiovascular diseases, female cancers, hormonal imbalances, chronic fatigue, and conditions affecting fertility.

Health coaches have valuable skills that vitally support girls and women to consistently choose nourishing foods, value relaxation and stress reduction, exercise and move consistently and safely, sleep more optimally, and surround themselves with nourishing communities.

Let me introduce you to some of our Women's Health Coach Certification students and graduates.

I hope that these brilliant women will inspire you to create the women's health coaching career that you desire, or strengthen your women's health coaching skills to build or expand your women's health practice.

Check out the platforms and practices of some of our students and graduates who are improving women's health and wellness around the world!

[Dr. Laura Ricci](#)

[Caroline Zwickson](#)

[Bella Physical Therapy](#)

[Casie Danenhauer](#)

[Fem Fusion Fitness](#)

[The Pelvic Expert](#)

[Belly Guru](#)

[Nicole Jardim](#)

[Robin Randisi](#)

[Ananda Body and Mind](#)



In addition to these brilliant coaches and practitioners, we have graduates who are working for non-profit organizations, in physician owned fertility and other women's health clinics, and with health coaching companies like [Vida](#).

The future of health and wellness coaching is bright. Having skills to better connect our clients to their goals, support them to make sustainable health behavior change, and motivate them to consistently maintain a foundation of health allows us to be a part of the transformation of women's health around the world

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