The Art of Exploration

Evoking Awareness in ICF-Aligned Coaching

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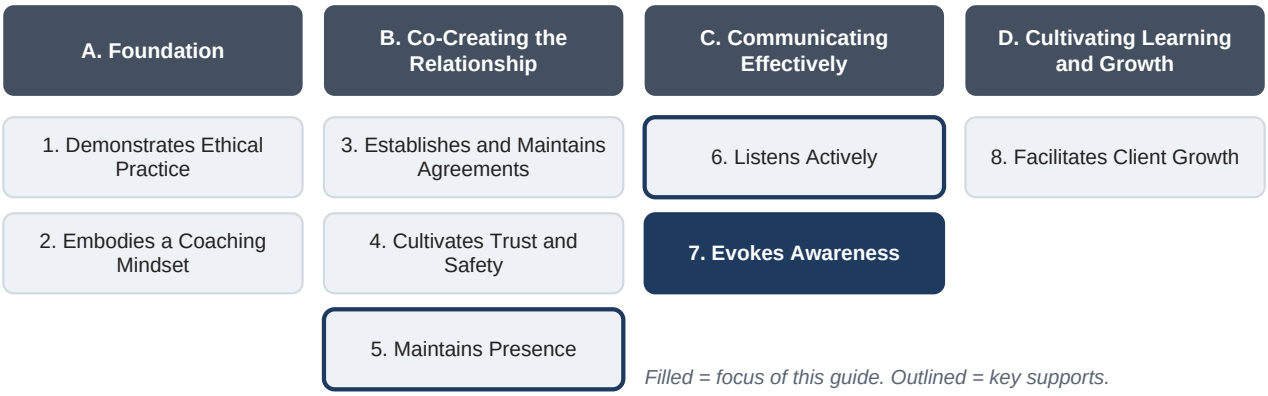
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About This Guide

In ICF-aligned coaching, the exploration phase draws mainly on Core Competency 7, Evokes Awareness. It is where the coach partners with the client to surface insight, examine the internal filters shaping their thinking, widen perspective, and move beyond current ways of seeing a situation. The coach does not impose interpretations or supply solutions. The awareness belongs to the client.

This guide organizes the territory of exploration into ten areas. Each area includes subcategories with a short description and sample questions to adapt in your own words, plus diagrams, tables and worksheets that can support a conversation. It is a map, not a script: use it to widen your options in the moment, and always follow what is alive for the client.

Where exploration fits in the ICF model



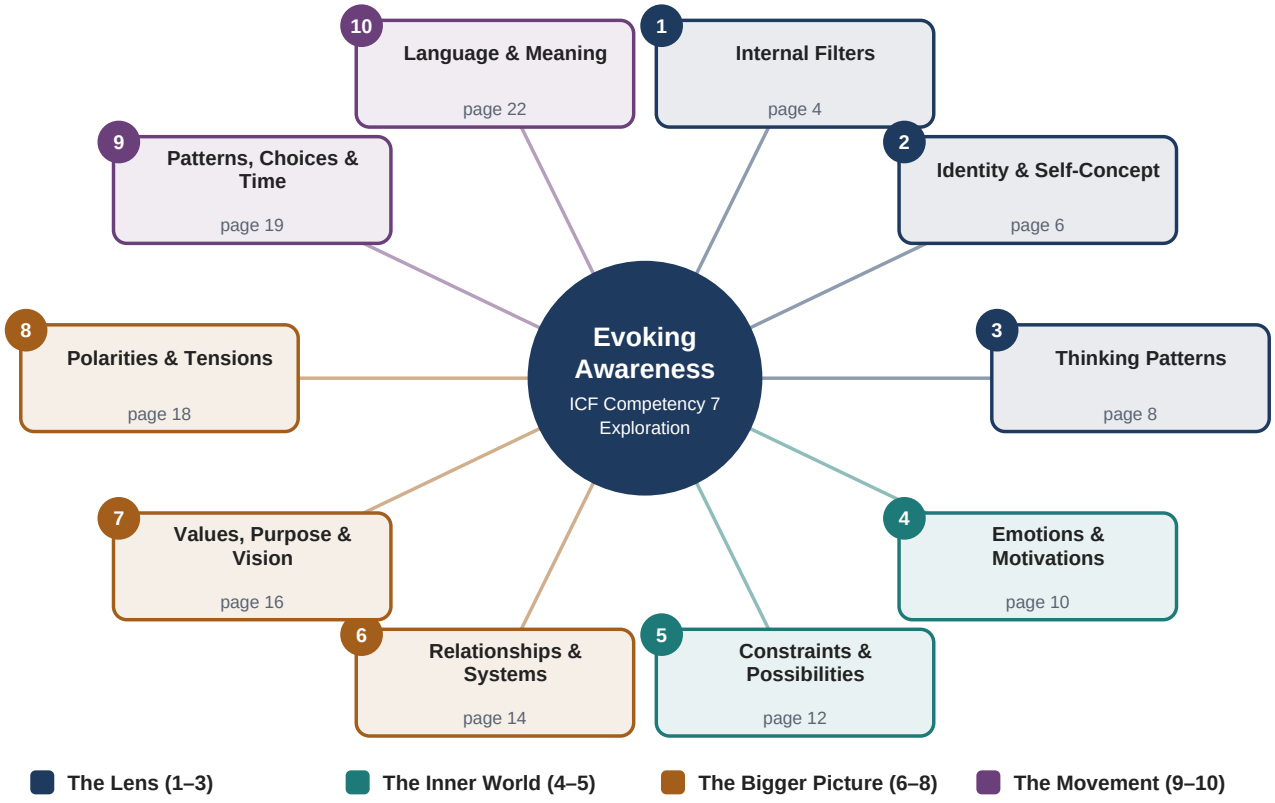
The eight ICF Core Competencies (2019 model), grouped by domain. Exploration lives mainly in Competency 7, supported by Maintains Presence and Listens Actively.

Principles that keep exploration client-centered

- **Curiosity before certainty.** Ask because you do not know, not because you have a theory to confirm.
- **Permission and partnership.** Challenge with consent: “May I offer an observation?” or “Would it be okay to look at this assumption?”
- **The client’s language.** Reflect their words and metaphors before introducing your own.
- **Context, identity and culture.** Beliefs and rules are shaped by background. Hold them with respect, not as flaws to fix.
- **Present and future orientation.** Visit the past lightly, only to serve awareness and forward movement. Coaching is not therapy.
- **Expand, then anchor.** Open up perspectives, then help the client name what they now notice and what they want to do with it.

Map of Areas

The ten areas fall into four themes, shown by color. Each box links to its section when the PDF is opened in a viewer that supports links.



The four themes

Theme	The question it answers	Areas
The Lens	How does the client see this?	1 Internal Filters, 2 Identity & Self-Concept, 3 Thinking Patterns & Cognition
The Inner World	What does the client feel, and what is in the way?	4 Emotions, Motivations & Inner Experience, 5 Constraints, Possibilities & Resources
The Bigger Picture	Who and what surrounds the client, and what matters most?	6 Relationships, Context & Systems, 7 Values, Purpose & Vision, 8 Polarities & Tensions
The Movement	What does the client repeat, choose and say?	9 Patterns, Choices, Agency & Time, 10 Language & Meaning-Making

How to use this guide

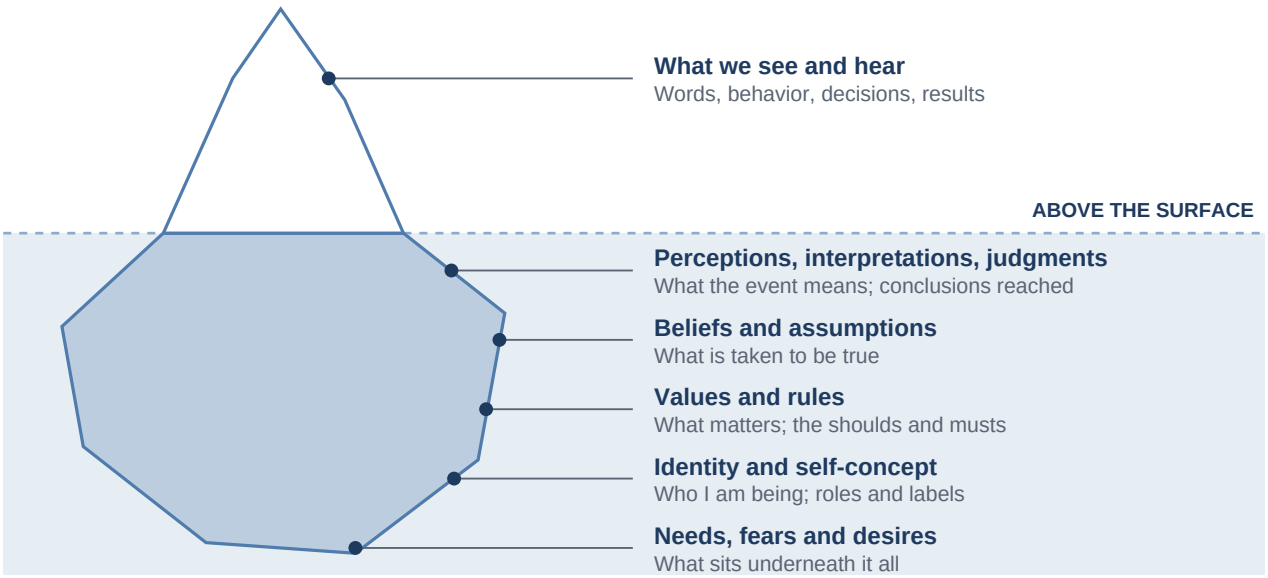
1. **Start with the client.** Begin with their agenda and what they bring today. Choose one or two areas that seem alive; do not work through the list.
2. **Adapt the questions.** Treat sample questions as starting points. Use the client's own words, metaphors and cultural context.
3. **Use the tools lightly.** Diagrams, tables and worksheets are optional. Offer them with permission and let the client lead how they are used.
4. **Close the loop.** Invite the client to name what they noticed and what they want to do with it.

1

THE LENS · HOW THE CLIENT SEES

Internal Filters

Internal filters are the lenses through which a client perceives, interprets and decides. Most operate outside awareness. The coach helps make the invisible visible so the client can choose how much weight to give each one.



The iceberg of internal filters. Words and behavior sit above the surface; coaching works mainly below it, with the client's permission.

Beliefs — convictions held as true about self, others, the situation or the world.

- *"What do you believe about this situation?"*
- *"Where did that belief come from, and how has it served you?"*
- *"What would you have to believe for this to feel possible?"*

Assumptions — unexamined "facts" that may or may not be accurate.

- *"What are you assuming is true here? How do you know?"*
- *"What if the opposite were true?"*
- *"Which assumption, if wrong, would change everything?"*

Values — what matters most; the compass behind choices.

- *"What is most important to you in this?"*
- *"Which values are being honored, and which are being compromised?"*
- *"How will you know a decision is in line with your values?"*

Judgments and conclusions — verdicts already reached about people, events or self.

- *"What conclusions have you already reached?"*
- *"What evidence supports them, and what challenges them?"*
- *"If you simply described what happened, without judging it, what would you say?"*

Interpretations and meaning-making — the significance attached to an event.

- *"What meaning are you giving this event?"*
- *"What else could it mean?"*
- *"Which interpretation would be most useful to you right now?"*

Perceptions — the angle of view the client is looking from.

- *"How are you viewing the situation?"*
- *"What might you be seeing, or not seeing, through this lens?"*
- *"How would this look from a much higher vantage point?"*

Rules, shoulds and musts — inherited or self-imposed standards of how things have to be.

- *"What rules are operating here for you? Whose rules are they?"*
- *"What would happen if you broke that rule?"*
- *"Which "should" would you like to turn into a "choose"?"*

Mindset — whether abilities and situations feel fixed or open to development.

- *"Do you see your ability to handle this as fixed, or as something you can grow?"*
- *"What would a learning mindset notice here?"*
- *"What is this situation teaching you so far?"*

Listening for filters in the client's words

The client says	Filter at work	A curious question
"Everyone expects me to say yes."	Assumption about expectations	*Everyone? Who specifically, and how do you know?*
"Leaders don't show doubt."	Belief or rule	*Where did you learn that? What would showing doubt do?*
"She ignored my email, so she doesn't respect me."	Interpretation and judgment	*What else could the silence mean?*
"Honesty matters most, but I can't tell him."	Values in tension	*What value sits on the other side of honesty here?*
"This is a threat to my role."	Perception	*How would you see it if it were an opportunity?*
"A good manager always has the answer."	Rule or should	*Whose definition of a good manager is that?*

> **Coach's note.** Listen for certainty words such as always, never, obviously and everyone knows. They often point to a filter operating below awareness. Reflect the word back and invite curiosity rather than naming the filter for the client.

2

THE LENS · HOW THE CLIENT SEES

Identity & Self-Concept

How clients see themselves strongly shapes what they believe is possible. Exploring identity helps separate who the client is from the roles, labels and expectations they have absorbed.



Logical levels of change, adapted from Robert Dilts. Questions at higher levels (beliefs, identity, purpose) often unlock movement that questions at lower levels cannot.

Identity (the "who") — the sense of self the client brings to this situation.

- *"Who are you being in this situation?"*
- *"Who do you want to be as you move through this?"*
- *"Which parts of you are showing up, and which are staying quiet?"*

Self-image and self-concept — the picture the client holds of themselves.

- *"How do you see yourself right now?"*
- *"How would you like to see yourself?"*
- *"What would people who know you well say about you here?"*

Roles — the hats the client wears, such as leader, parent, expert or caretaker.

- *"What role are you taking on in this situation?"*
- *"Which roles feel natural, and which feel forced?"*
- *"What would change if you stepped out of that role for a moment?"*

Labels and stories about self — fixed descriptors such as "I'm not a people person."

- *"What labels are you giving yourself or others?"*
- *"How useful is that label to you today?"*
- *"When has the label not been true?"*

Desired and emerging identity — the self the client is growing into.

- *"If you were already the person who handled this well, who would that person be?"*
- *"What would that person do differently tomorrow?"*
- *"What small step could you take as that person this week?"*

Self-talk and the inner critic — the running commentary the client has about themselves.

- *"What do you say to yourself when this happens?"*
- *"Would you speak to a friend that way?"*
- *"What would a more supportive inner voice say?"*

Authenticity and masks — the gap between how the client shows up and how they feel inside.

- *"Where are you showing up differently from how you feel inside?"*
- *"What would it cost, and what would it give you, to be fully yourself here?"*
- *"Who in your life sees the unfiltered you?"*

Role audit worksheet

Role	Chosen or inherited?	Energy (+ / –)	Keep, change or release?
Leader or manager			
Parent or caregiver			
Expert or problem-solver			
Partner or friend			
Other: _____			

The client fills this in or talks it through. Ask: Which role gives you the most energy? Which one are you ready to renegotiate?

> **Coach's note.** Identity work can feel personal. Move at the client's pace, honor cultural and family definitions of self, and avoid interpreting what a label "really means." Let the client attach the meaning.

3

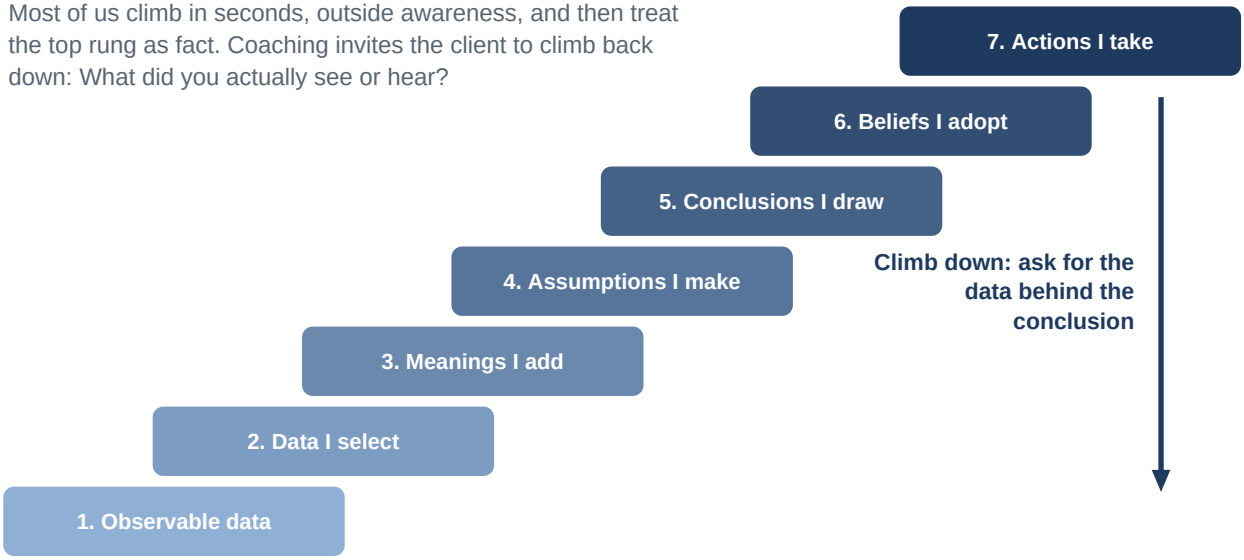
THE LENS · HOW THE CLIENT SEES

Thinking Patterns & Cognition

Thinking patterns are the habitual ways the mind organizes experience. Naming them gives the client distance from their thoughts and more choice about which ones to follow.

Climbing the ladder

Most of us climb in seconds, outside awareness, and then treat the top rung as fact. Coaching invites the client to climb back down: What did you actually see or hear?



The ladder of inference (after Chris Argyris): a fast mental climb from observable data to action.

Rung	Coach question (always with curiosity)
1. Observable data	*What exactly happened? What would a camera have recorded?*
2. Data I select	*What did you notice first? What might you have missed?*
3. Meanings I add	*What meaning did you give it? What else could it mean?*
4. Assumptions I make	*What are you assuming? How do you know?*
5. Conclusions I draw	*What did you conclude? What else could be true?*
6. Beliefs I adopt	*What does this now make you believe about yourself or others?*
7. Actions I take	*What are you doing as a result? What other action is possible?*

Stories and narratives — the plot the client tells about what is happening and why.

- *"What story are you telling yourself about this?"*
- *"How would you describe this experience in a single sentence?"*
- *"If this story had a different ending, what would it be?"*

Mental models and frameworks — the structures used to make sense of a situation.

- *"What framework or model are you using to understand this?"*
- *"What does that model help you see, and what does it leave out?"*
- *"What other model could you borrow from another part of your life?"*

Biases and blind spots — predictable ways attention and judgment skew.

- *"What might you be overlooking?"*
- *"What is the opposite possibility, and what would support it?"*
- *"What would someone who disagrees with you notice here?"*

Language and metaphors — the words and images that keep recurring.

- *"You called it "a battle." What does that word bring with it?"*
- *"If this situation were an image, what would it be?"*
- *"What metaphor would give you more room to move?"*

Common thought patterns — all-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing, mind-reading, personalizing.

- *"What thinking pattern do you notice repeating here?"*
- *"What is the worst case, the best case and the most likely case?"*
- *"What facts do you have, and what are you filling in?"*

Perspective-shifting — deliberately viewing the situation from another position.

- *"How would a trusted mentor see this?"*
- *"How will this look in five years?"*
- *"What would you advise someone you care about in this exact situation?"*

Inner dialogue and competing voices — different parts of the client that want different things.

- *"Is there a part of you that wants one thing and another that wants something else?"*
- *"What does each voice want for you?"*
- *"What would it take for those voices to work together?"*

Common thinking traps

Pattern	What it can sound like	A curious question
All-or-nothing	*"It's either perfect or a failure."*	*What is in between? What would 70 percent look like?*
Catastrophizing	*"If this goes wrong, everything falls apart."*	*What are the worst, best and most likely cases? What would you do?*
Mind-reading	*"They think I'm not capable."*	*How do you know? What else might they be thinking?*
Personalizing	*"It's my fault the project slipped."*	*What share is yours? What else played a part?*
Overgeneralizing	*"I always mess up presentations."*	*When have you not? What was different then?*
Emotional reasoning	*"I feel like a fraud, so I must be one."*	*What do the facts say, apart from the feeling?*
Should statements	*"I should be further along by now."*	*Who set that standard? What would enough look like?*

> **Coach's note.** Metaphors carry feeling and meaning in a few words. Use the client's metaphor, extend it with curiosity, and let them decide whether to change it. Naming a thinking trap is for the coach's awareness; let the client discover it in their own way.

4

THE INNER WORLD · WHAT THE CLIENT FEELS AND FACES

Emotions, Motivations & Inner Experience

Emotions carry information about what the client values, fears and needs. Exploring them adds depth that thinking alone cannot reach, including what the body is saying.

Start in the middle: What is the core feeling?



Move outward: What is a more precise word for it?

A simple feelings wheel. Clients often start with a broad word such as "stressed"; moving outward helps them find a more precise one.

Emotions and feelings — the felt experience of the situation.

- *"What are you feeling as you talk about this?"*
- *"Where do you notice that feeling in your body?"*
- *"What is that emotion trying to tell you?"*

Fears and concerns — what the client is protecting against.

- *"What concerns you most?"*
- *"What is the fear underneath that?"*
- *"If that fear came true, what would you do?"*

Needs — what must be met for the client to feel whole or effective.

- *"What do you need right now, or in this situation?"*
- *"Which need is not being met?"*
- *"How could you begin to meet that need yourself, or ask for support?"*

Desires and wants — what the client truly longs for beyond what they think they should want.

- *"What do you really want?"*
- *"What would "enough" look like?"*
- *"If no one were watching, what would you choose?"*

Motivations and drivers — the energy behind action or inaction.

- *"What is driving you in this?"*
- *"Is this motivation moving you toward something or away from something?"*
- *"What would make this feel like your own choice?"*

Energy and somatic experience — what the body reports about alignment and strain.

- *"What do you notice in your body when you talk about this?"*
- *"What gives you energy here, and what drains it?"*
- *"What is your gut telling you?"*

Appreciation and positive emotion — what is already working and worth building on.

- *"What are you proud of in how you have handled this?"*
- *"When did you last feel fully engaged? What was happening?"*
- *"What would you like more of?"*

Self-compassion and wellbeing — how the client treats themselves through difficulty.

- *"How are you treating yourself through this?"*
- *"How is this affecting your sleep, health or balance?"*
- *"What would caring for yourself look like this week?"*

Feelings and what they may point to

Feeling	May point to (a hypothesis to test)	A curious question
Frustration	A blocked goal; a need for progress or autonomy	*What outcome do you want that is not happening?*
Anxiety or worry	A need for safety, certainty or preparation	*What are you trying to protect or prepare for?*
Overwhelm	A need for clarity, priorities, support or capacity	*What is the one thing that matters most right now?*
Resentment	An unmet need or an unspoken expectation	*What needs to be said or asked for?*
Guilt	A value that feels crossed	*Which value feels crossed? What would make it right?*
Disappointment	A hope or expectation not met	*What were you hoping for? What remains possible?*
Boredom or flatness	A need for meaning, challenge or growth	*What would make this feel alive or meaningful?*
Envy	Something the client wants for themselves	*What does their situation show you that you want?*
Pride or excitement	A value being honored	*What value is being honored? How can you have more of it?*

These are hypotheses for the coach to hold lightly, not interpretations to announce. Ask, and let the client say what the feeling means to them.

> **Coach's note.** Name emotions without amplifying them. If distress goes beyond the scope of coaching, pause, check in with the client and discuss whether another form of support, such as therapy or counseling, would serve them. This is part of ethical coaching practice.

5

THE INNER WORLD · WHAT THE CLIENT FEELS AND FACES

Constraints, Possibilities & Resources

Clients arrive aware of what blocks them. Exploration separates real constraints from assumed ones, then turns attention to strengths, options and the conditions that make progress easier.

Sorting obstacles

	Within my control	Outside my control
Real obstacle	**Plan and act** What is the first step? What resources do you need?	**Adapt and influence** What can you influence? How do you want to respond?
Assumed obstacle	**Test it** What small experiment would show whether this is true?	**Check the evidence** What facts support this? Who sees it differently?

Ask the client to place an obstacle in one of the four boxes, then explore the move that fits.

Limiting beliefs — convictions that quietly cap what the client attempts.

- *"What might be holding you back?"*
- *"Is that a fact or a belief?"*
- *"What would you do if that belief were not true?"*

Perceived obstacles — barriers that may be real, assumed, or both.

- *"Is this obstacle real, assumed or both?"*
- *"What would make it smaller?"*
- *"Who has gotten past something like this, and how?"*

Opportunities and possibilities — options not yet seen or taken seriously.

- *"What possibilities exist that you have not fully considered?"*
- *"If there were no constraints, what would you try?"*
- *"What is the smallest experiment that would teach you something?"*

Resources, strengths and capabilities — what the client already brings.

- *"What strengths, skills or resources do you already have?"*
- *"What have you drawn on in the past when things were hard?"*
- *"How could you use that strength here?"*

Support and conditions — what the environment and relationships offer.

- *"What conditions or support would make progress easier?"*
- *"Who could you ask for help, and what would you ask for?"*
- *"What could you change in your environment to make the next step easier?"*

Past successes — evidence of capability worth building on.

- *"When have you handled something like this well?"*
- *"What did you do then that worked?"*
- *"What would you tell your earlier self about what you have already overcome?"*

Risk and courage — the willingness to act despite uncertainty.

- *"What would you do if you were not afraid?"*
- *"What is the risk of acting, and what is the risk of not acting?"*
- *"What would courage look like in the next 48 hours?"*

Testing a limiting belief

Limiting belief (example)	Questions that test it	A belief the client might choose
"I'm not good enough."	*Compared to what or whom? When have you been good enough?*	*"I'm learning, and I have strengths that fit here."*
"It's too late for me."	*What makes it too late? Who started later and succeeded?*	*"There are paths still open to me."*
"I don't have time."	*Where does your time go now? What matters more?*	*"I make time for what matters most."*
"I can't ask for help."	*What would asking cost? What would it give you?*	*"Asking for help is a strength."*
"What if I fail?"	*What would failing teach you? What is your plan B?*	*"Failure is information I can use."*

The right-hand column is an example only. The client writes their own words.

> **Coach's note.** Resist the urge to rush to solutions. A client who feels truly heard on constraints is more likely to generate their own possibilities. Let the options come from them.

THE BIGGER PICTURE · CONTEXT, VALUES AND DIRECTION

6 Relationships, Context & Systems

No client works in isolation. Exploring the people, culture and systems around them reveals pressures, supports and levers for change that individual reflection can miss.



Me
Who am I being here? What do I need?

Close circle
Whose expectations matter most? Who supports me?

Work and community
What norms, pressures and opportunities exist here?

Culture and society
How does my background shape what feels normal or possible?

Systems around the client. Ask the client to place the people and pressures in their situation on the rings.

Expectations — what others, and the client, expect of them.

- *"Whose expectations are influencing you?"*
- *"How do those align with your own?"*
- *"What expectation would you be willing to renegotiate?"*

Stakeholder perspectives — how others see the situation.

- *"How might others see this?"*
- *"What might they need or value that you have not considered?"*
- *"Who is most affected by this, and how do you want to engage them?"*

Cultural, social and environmental influences — background and context shaping the view.

- *"How does your background, culture or upbringing shape how you see this?"*
- *"What is considered normal or expected in your environment?"*
- *"Which of those influences do you want to keep, and which would you question?"*

Systems and broader context — team, organization, family or community dynamics.

- *"What is happening in the larger system that affects this?"*
- *"What patterns repeat in this team or family, and what part do you play?"*
- *"What would change in the system if you acted differently?"*

Power dynamics and influence — who holds sway and how that is experienced.

- *"Where do you have influence here? Where do you feel limited?"*
- *"Who holds power, and how does that affect you?"*
- *"What is within your sphere of influence, even if small?"*

Boundaries — what is the client's to own and what is not.

- *"What boundaries would be helpful here?"*
- *"What is yours to own, and what is not yours?"*
- *"What would saying no make room for?"*

Communication and impact on others — how the client's choices land elsewhere.

- *"How do you think your approach is landing with others?"*
- *"What conversation have you been avoiding?"*
- *"What do you want people to experience when they work with you?"*

Stakeholder worksheet

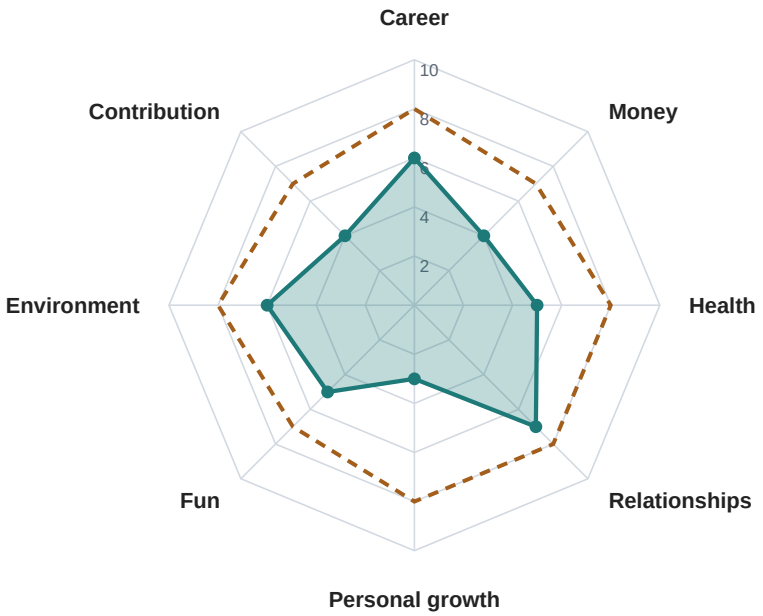
Stakeholder	What they expect of me	What I expect of them	Influence on my goal
Example: line manager	*Delivery on time*	*Clear priorities*	*High*

Ask: Whose view do you most need to understand? Where do expectations conflict with your own?

> **Coach's note.** Cultural context is not a variable to be corrected. Ask with respect, avoid assuming norms, and let the client define what their culture means to them.

7 Values, Purpose & Vision

Purpose and values give direction. Exploring them helps the client check whether their goals truly reflect what matters, and builds a pull toward a future worth creating.



A wheel-of-life style exercise. Scores are a conversation starter, not a diagnosis.

How to use the wheel

Ask the client to score each area from 0 (center) to 10 (outer ring) for today, then for where they would like to be.

Explore the gaps, not only the lowest scores: Which gap matters most? What is different about the areas that score high?

Let the client choose or rename the areas. Sample scores here are for illustration only.

— Today (sample)

- - - Desired (sample)

Purpose and meaning — the deeper reason a goal matters.

- *"What matters most about this?"*
- *"How does this connect to your larger purpose or direction?"*
- *"What gives this meaning for you?"*

Vision and desired outcome — a vivid picture of success.

- *"What does success look like? What would you see, hear and feel?"*
- *"Who do you want to be when this is handled?"*
- *"What is different in your life a year after this succeeds?"*

Future self — a wiser, later version of the client.

- *"What would you, at your best a year from now, say to you today?"*
- *"What does that future self know that you are still learning?"*
- *"What would they encourage you to start or stop?"*

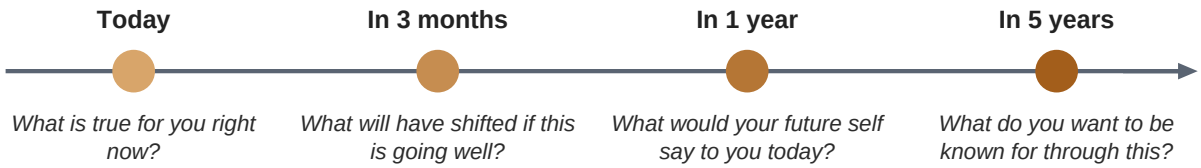
Legacy — the lasting impact the client wants.

- *"What do you want to be known for through this?"*
- *"What would you like others to say about how you handled it?"*
- *"What do you want to leave behind?"*

Alignment and integrity — fit between values, words and actions.

- *"How well does this goal fit your values?"*
- *"Where are you saying yes but meaning no?"*
- *"What would bring your actions closer to your values?"*

Future-self timeline



Today	In 3 months	In 1 year	In 5 years
What is true for you right now?	*What will have shifted if this is going well?*	*What would your future self say to you today?*	*What do you want to be known for through this?*

Ask the client to speak from each point in time, using the questions as prompts.

Values prompt list

Achievement	**Adventure**	**Authenticity**	**Autonomy**	**Balance**
Belonging	**Compassion**	**Contribution**	**Courage**	**Creativity**
Curiosity	**Fairness**	**Family**	**Growth**	**Health**
Honesty	**Learning**	**Recognition**	**Security**	**Spirituality**

Invite the client to circle five values that matter most right now, narrow to three, and describe what each looks like in action. The list is only a prompt; the client may add and define their own words.

> **Coach's note.** Values words mean different things to different people. Ask what "growth" or "fairness" looks like for this client instead of assuming a shared definition.

8

THE BIGGER PICTURE · CONTEXT, VALUES AND DIRECTION

Polarities & Tensions

Many dilemmas are not problems to solve but tensions to manage. Naming both sides lowers the pressure of choosing one.

A polarity map (example)

	Pole A: Achievement	Pole B: Rest
Upsides: what each pole gives	Progress, recognition, a sense of purpose	Energy, health, perspective, relationships
Downsides: when overdone	Burnout, neglected relationships, never feeling it is enough	Stalled goals, guilt, missed opportunities

Ask the client to name two poles and fill each box in their own words. Overdoing one pole's downside tends to pull attention toward the other. Then ask: How could you gain the upsides of both while limiting the downsides?

Competing needs and values — two things that both matter, pulling in different directions.

- *"What competing needs or values are in tension here?"*
- *"What does each side protect or offer?"*
- *"How might both be true?"*

Both/and thinking — looking for ways to honor both poles.

- *"What would it look like to honor both?"*
- *"What would you gain by holding the tension a little longer?"*
- *"What small experiment could test a both/and approach?"*

Ambivalence — mixed feelings about change.

- *"What part of you wants to change, and what part wants to stay?"*
- *"What does the part that resists want to protect?"*
- *"What would help you feel safer taking the next step?"*

Either/or traps — seeing only two options when more exist.

- *"Where are you seeing only two choices?"*
- *"What would a third option look like?"*
- *"What would you do if you did not have to choose right now?"*

> **Coach's note.** Do not push the client toward resolving a tension too early. Sometimes the awareness that both sides matter is the insight.

9

THE MOVEMENT · PATTERNS, CHOICES AND LANGUAGE

Patterns, Choices, Agency & Time

Awareness becomes movement when the client sees their patterns, owns their choices and decides what to do with their time and energy.

Habits and default responses — automatic reactions that may or may not serve.

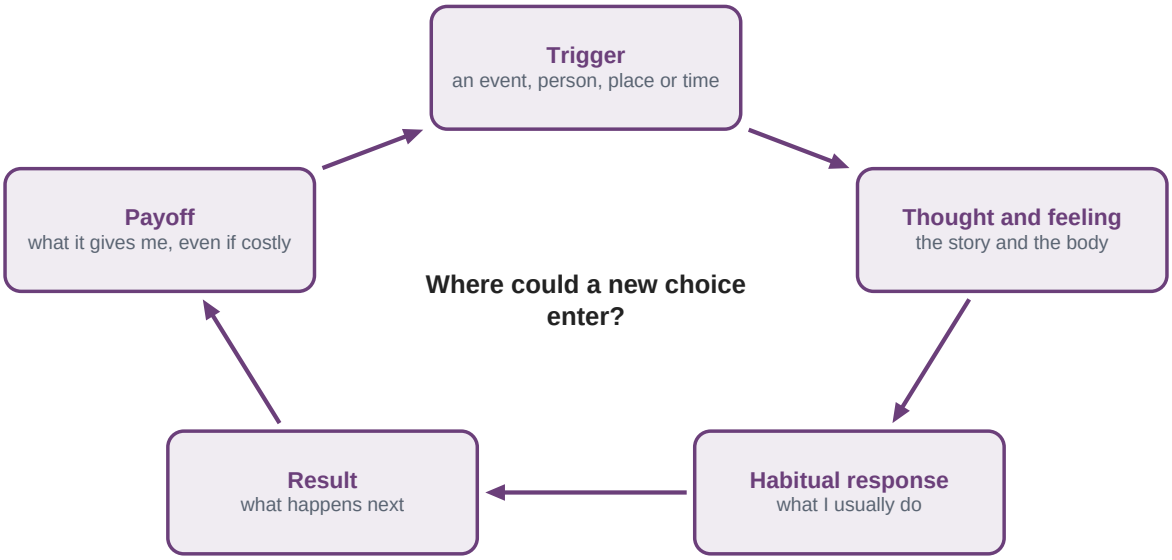
- *"What do you usually do in situations like this?"*
- *"How well is that serving you now?"*
- *"What would a different default look like?"*

Triggers — what sets off a reaction.

- *"What sets off this reaction?"*
- *"What happens right before you react?"*
- *"What could you do in the pause between trigger and response?"*

Past influences (light touch) — earlier experiences that echo in the present.

- *"When have you experienced something similar? What did you learn then?"*
- *"What from that experience is useful now, and what no longer is?"*



A habit loop. Ask the client where in the loop they have the most room to choose differently.

Decision criteria and trade-offs — how the client weighs options.

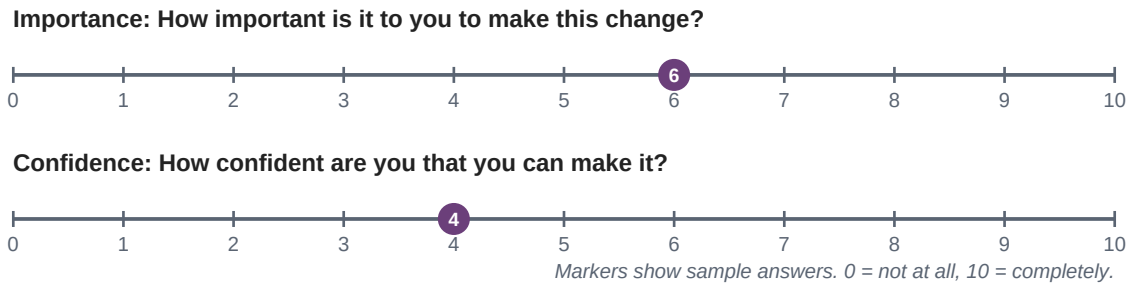
- *"What criteria are you using to decide?"*
- *"What are you willing to trade off, and what are you not?"*
- *"Which option would you choose if no one else's opinion mattered?"*

Cost of staying the same and hidden benefits — what the current situation costs and gives.

- *"What is the cost of not changing?"*
- *"What do you gain by keeping things as they are?"*
- *"What would you lose, and what would you gain, by changing?"*

Readiness and commitment — how prepared the client is to act.

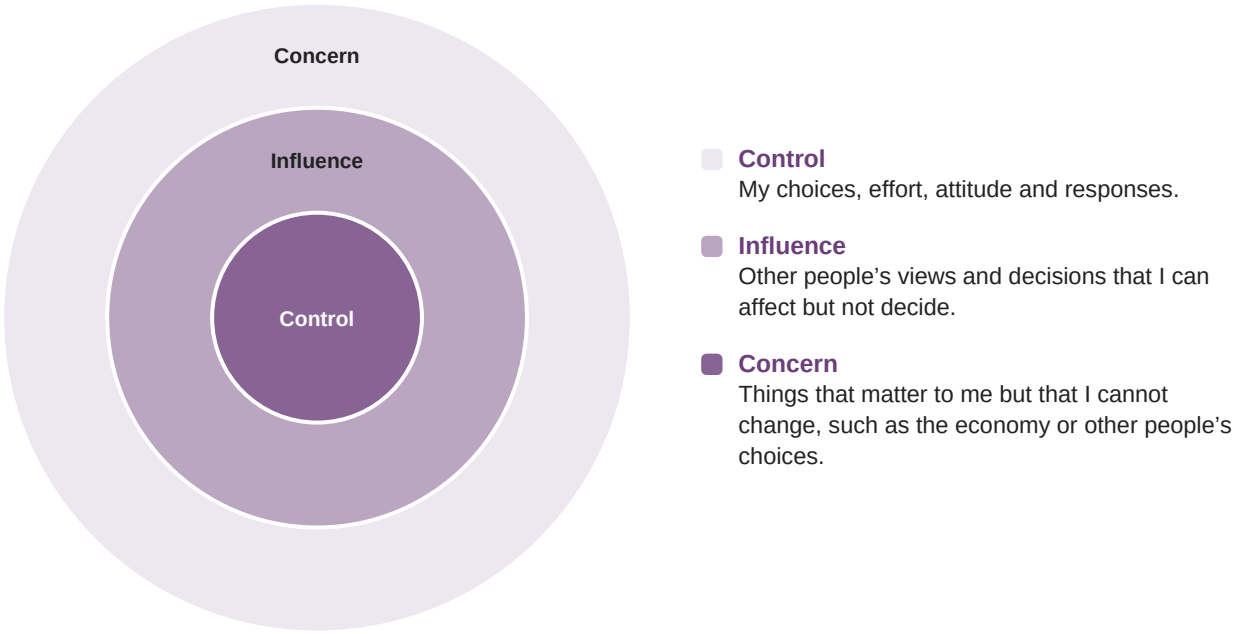
- *"On a scale of 1 to 10, how ready are you to act? What makes it that number?"*
- *"What would move it up one point?"*
- *"What would a 10 look like?"*



Importance and confidence rulers. Follow up with: Why that number and not a lower one? What would move it up by one point?

Control, ownership and responsibility — where the client has agency.

- *"What is within your control, and what is not?"*
- *"What part is yours to own?"*
- *"What choices do you have right now?"*



Circles of control, influence and concern. Ask: Where would you like to put more of your energy?

Time and priorities — how the client allocates attention.

- *"What matters most right now?"*
- *"What is urgent, and what is truly important?"*
- *"What would you need to let go of to make room? Why now?"*

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	**Do now** What needs attention today, and why?	**Plan** What deserves protected time, and when?
Not important	**Limit or delegate** Who else could take this? What is the minimum?	**Let go** What would you stop doing?

Urgent and important sorting, with a coaching question for each box.

Learning and feedback orientation — how the client learns from experience.

- *"What are you learning about yourself through this?"*
- *"How do you typically respond to feedback?"*
- *"What new skill or awareness would help most?"*

> **Coach's note.** Patterns are information, not verdicts. Notice them across sessions and offer them back as an observation with permission: "I have noticed this theme a few times. Would it be useful to look at it?"

10

THE MOVEMENT · PATTERNS, CHOICES AND LANGUAGE

Language & Meaning-Making

The client's choice of words is data. Small shifts in language often signal and create shifts in thinking.

Listen for	What it may signal	A curious response
I should, I have to, I must	A rule or an outside expectation	*Who says so? What changes if you say "I choose to"?*
I can't	A perceived obstacle or limiting belief	*What would it take to make it possible? What exactly stops you?*
I'll try	Low commitment, or fear of failing	*What would "I will" sound like? What makes it risky to commit?*
Always, never, everyone, no one	Overgeneralization	*Is that always true? When has it been different?*
Yes, but…	A competing need or an unspoken objection	*What is the "yes" part, and what is the "but" part?*
They made me; it just happens	A low sense of agency	*What part of this is yours to choose?*
I'm just, it's only, kind of	Minimizing or hedging	*What happens if you drop "just"? What are you protecting?*
I don't know	Overwhelm, caution, or an answer not yet ready	*If you did know, what might it be?*
It's complicated; it's a mess	Unsorted complexity	*If you had to name the one strand that matters most, what is it?*

Word choice — words like should, have to, can't and try.

- *"You said "should." Who says so?"*
- *"What changes if you say "choose to" instead of "have to"?"*

Absolutes — always, never, everyone and no one.

- *"You said "always." Is that completely true? When has it not been?"*

Ownership and agency — who is the actor in the client's sentences.

- *"You said "they made me." What part of the choice was yours?"*
- *"How would you say that starting with "I"?"*

Reframing — offering the client room to see it another way.

- *"How else could you describe this?"*
- *"What would you call this if it were an opportunity?"*

Reframing examples (the client chooses)

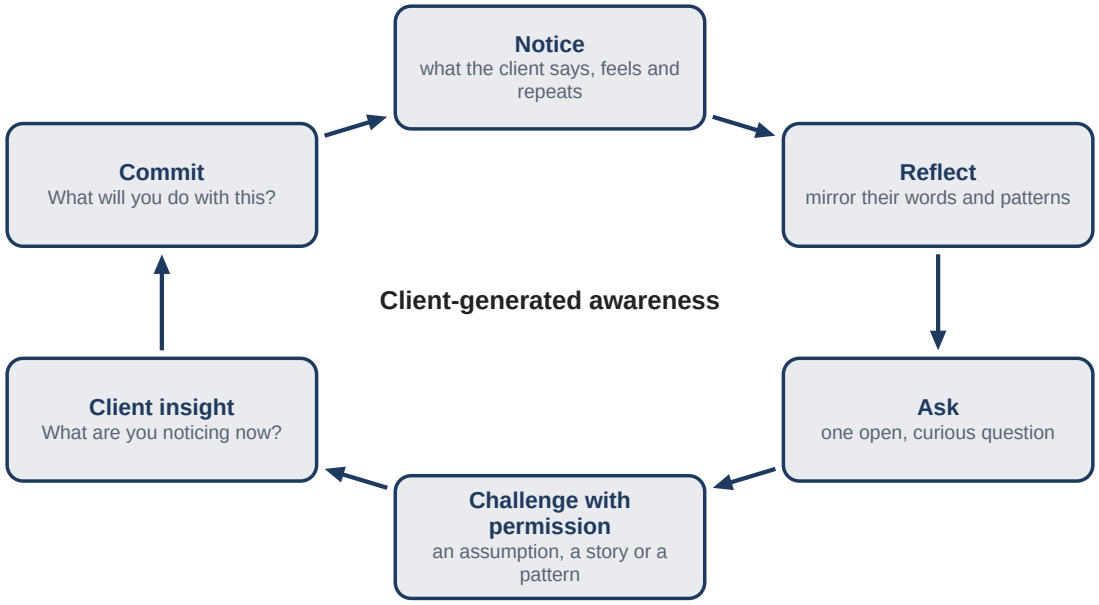
Client's frame	A wider frame to wonder about
I have to	*I choose to, because…*
I can't	*I haven't yet. What would it take?*
Problem	*A challenge, a question or a decision point*
Failure	*Information about what to try next*
Stuck	*Pausing at a choice point*

Offer a reframe only with permission. A reframe the client builds themselves lasts longer than one the coach supplies.

> **Coach's note.** Reflect the client's exact words before exploring them. Quoting a word back, such as "I heard you say 'trapped'," helps the client hear themselves.

Putting It Together

Exploration is a cycle rather than a checklist. The coach notices, reflects and asks, challenges only with permission, and then checks what insight has emerged and what the client wants to do with it.



The exploration cycle. The cycle repeats as many times as the conversation needs.

Questions to avoid, and what to try instead

Instead of	Why it can get in the way	Try
“Why did you do that?”	Can sound like blame and trigger defending	*What led you to that choice? What mattered to you in that moment?*
“Don’t you think you should talk to her?”	Advice disguised as a question	*What options do you see for that conversation?*
“Is it fear or lack of time?”	Closed and leading	*What is getting in the way?*
“How do you feel, what will you do, and who can help?”	Stacked questions confuse	*Ask one question, then wait.*
“Have you tried…?”	Offers a solution and narrows thinking	*What have you already tried? What else might be possible?*

Question stems by purpose

Purpose	Sample stems	When to use
Clarify	*What do you mean by…? Tell me more about… What is the most important part of that?*	When words are vague or loaded
Deepen	*What is underneath that? What does that mean to you? What is the cost of that?*	When a feeling, value or belief is close to the surface
Challenge (with permission)	*May I offer an observation? What if the opposite were true? What evidence supports or challenges that?*	When a pattern or assumption repeats and trust is established
Expand	*What else? Who else is involved? How would a trusted person see this?*	When thinking narrows to one option or view
Anchor	*What are you noticing now? What has shifted? What will you do with this?*	When an insight appears, to turn it into movement

Practical notes

- **Do not run the list.** Pick one or two areas that seem alive for the client and go deeper.
- **Use open, non-leading questions.** Avoid hiding your own opinion inside a question.
- **Reflect before you ask.** Mirror the client’s words, then invite more.
- **Challenge with permission.** “May I challenge that assumption?” or “What if…?”
- **Balance current reality and expansion.** Understand where they are, then open new perspectives and reframes.
- **Notice patterns across sessions.** Recurring beliefs, emotional themes and roles are worth naming, gently.
- **Leave space.** Silence gives the client time to think. Resist filling it.

Session Checklist

A quick review after a session, or before the next one.

- [ ] I started from the client's agenda and what they want from this session.
- [ ] I listened to the client's words, metaphors and emotions, not to my own solutions.
- [ ] I asked one open question at a time and gave the client time to think.
- [ ] I asked permission before challenging an assumption or offering an observation.
- [ ] I explored at least one internal filter, such as a belief, value, story or rule.
- [ ] I invited a wider view: other perspectives, possibilities or resources.
- [ ] I checked the client's insight: "What are you noticing now?"
- [ ] I linked awareness to action, and the next step was the client's own.
- [ ] I stayed within the scope of coaching and noted anything better suited to other support.