The Art of Trust and Safety

Cultivates Trust and Safety in ICF-Aligned Coaching

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About This Guide

In ICF-aligned coaching, Cultivates Trust and Safety is Core Competency 4. It means partnering with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely, and sustaining a relationship of mutual respect and trust. Clients take real risks in coaching: naming what they want, admitting what is hard, trying what is new. They do that only where it feels safe.

This guide organizes the competency into ten areas. Each has subcategories with sample questions and phrases to adapt in your own words, plus diagrams, tables and worksheets. It is a map, not a script: trust is built with each client, in their way, over time.

Where trust and safety fit in the ICF model



The eight ICF Core Competencies (2019 model). Trust and safety is Competency 4, closely linked to Establishes and Maintains Agreements and Maintains Presence.

What the competency asks of the coach

In plain words (paraphrased from the ICF model)	Where in this guide
Seeks to understand the client within their context: identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs	Area 2
Shows respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language, and adapts to them	Area 3
Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions	Areas 4 and 7
Shows openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust	Area 5
Supports a safe space through clear agreements, confidentiality and boundaries	Area 6
Sustains the relationship, including repair when trust is strained	Areas 8 and 9

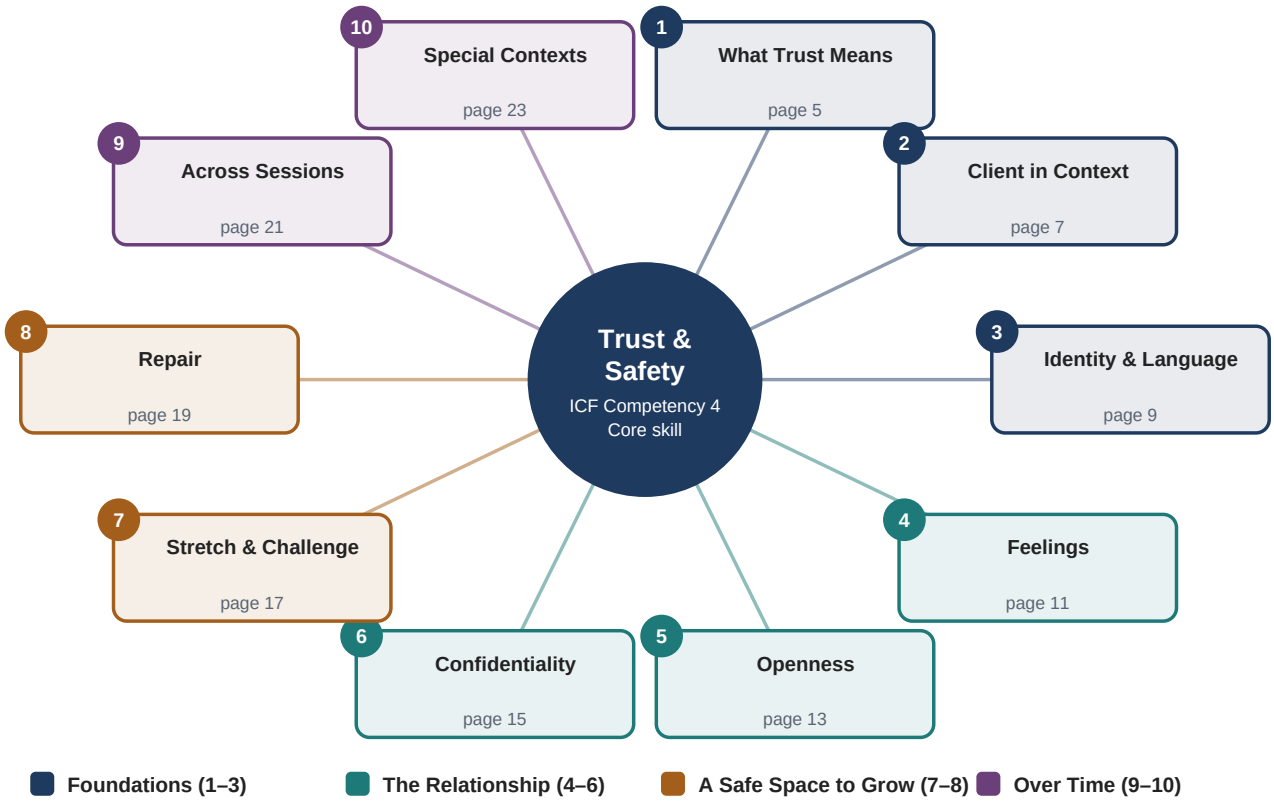
Paraphrased summary. The last two rows connect the competency to related ones. For the official wording, see the ICF Core Competencies on coachingfederation.org.

Principles that keep trust client-centered

- **Safety is felt by the client, not declared by the coach.** Ask how it is going; do not assume.
- **Trust is built in small, repeated moments.** Being on time, remembering details and keeping agreements all count.
- **Respect comes before technique.** No question lands well in a relationship that feels unsafe.
- **Safe does not mean comfortable.** Clients can feel challenged and still feel safe.
- **Transparency models trust.** Say what you are doing and why.
- **The coach is responsible for the relationship.** When trust is strained, the coach moves first to repair 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
Foundations	What does the client's trust rest on?	1 What Trust & Safety Mean, 2 Understanding the Client in Context, 3 Respecting Identity, Language & Style
The Relationship	How do we handle feeling, openness and rules?	4 Acknowledging & Supporting Feelings, 5 Openness, Transparency & Vulnerability, 6 Confidentiality, Boundaries & Agreements
A Safe Space to Grow	How can the client stretch and recover?	7 Safety for Risk, Stretch & Challenge, 8 Repair: Mistakes & Difficult Moments
Over Time	How does trust deepen and endure?	9 Building Trust Across Sessions, 10 Trust in Special Contexts & Growth

How to use this guide

1. **Start with one area.** Choose a theme to focus on across a few sessions.
2. **Adapt the phrases.** Use your own voice and the client's words.
3. **Use the tools lightly.** Share worksheets with clients only if they find them useful.
4. **Ask for feedback.** The client is the best judge of how safe the space feels.

1

FOUNDATIONS · WHAT TRUST RESTS ON

What Trust & Safety Mean in Coaching

Trust is the client's confidence that the coach is competent, honest and on their side. Safety is the sense that it is okay to say what is true, to not know, and to try something new, without being judged. Together they are the ground that every other competency stands on.



A trust equation, adapted from The Trusted Advisor (Maister, Green, Galford). Trust grows with credibility, reliability and closeness, and shrinks with self-focus.

Psychological safety — feeling free to speak, ask and err without punishment.

- *"What would help you feel free to say what is true for you?"*
- *"What would make it easier to speak openly with me?"*
- *"Is there anything that would make this space feel unsafe?"*

Credibility and competence — the client's belief that the coach can help.

- *"What would you like to know about how I work?"*
- *"What do you need from me to feel confident in this process?"*
- *"How would you like me to describe my approach and experience?"*

Reliability and consistency — doing what was agreed, every time.

- *"What can you count on from me?"*
- *"What matters to you about how we handle time and follow-up?"*
- *"How will we know if we're keeping our agreements?"*

Warmth and closeness — genuine care and a human connection.

- *"How are you arriving today?"*
- *"What's alive for you right now, before we begin?"*
- *"What would make this feel like your space?"*

Reducing self-focus — putting the client's agenda ahead of the coach's ego.

- *"What would be most useful for you today?"*
- *"Am I steering this, or following you?"*
- *"What do I need to let go of to serve this client?"*

Safety versus comfort — a safe space can still be challenging.

- *“Is this stretching you in a helpful way?”*
- *“What would help you stay with this when it gets uncomfortable?”*
- *“How will you tell me if it becomes too much?”*

Signs of trust and of distance

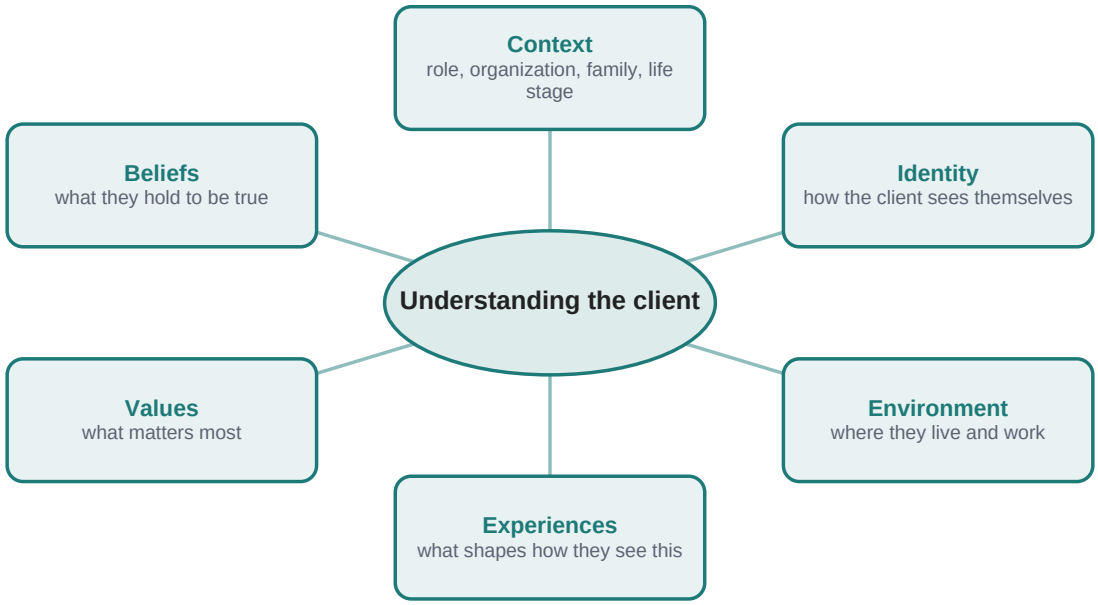
Area	Signs trust is growing	Signs of distance or guardedness
Sharing	Volunteers what is hard, uncertain or personal	Stays general, polite or on safe topics
Questions	Asks the coach for honest views	Waits for the coach to lead
Disagreement	Says when something does not fit	Agrees quickly, then does not follow through
Emotion	Lets feelings show	Keeps feeling out of the conversation
Silence	Comfortable, thinking	Tense or filled quickly
Follow-through	Tries things and reports honestly	Goes quiet about actions or cancels

> **Coach’s note.** Trust is not a technique. You cannot make a client trust you; you can be trustworthy, create the conditions and check how it feels to them.

FOUNDATIONS · WHAT TRUST RESTS ON

2 Understanding the Client in Context

People feel safe when they feel understood as whole human beings, not as a problem to be solved. Seeking to understand the client's context, identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs tells them that all of this belongs in the room.



Six lenses for understanding the client. Ask about them; do not assume them.

Curiosity about the whole person — interest beyond the coaching topic.

- *"Tell me about yourself and what brings you to coaching."*
- *"What would you like me to know about you?"*
- *"What is your life like outside of work?"*

Context and constraints — the pressures and realities the client lives with.

- *"What is the situation you are working within?"*
- *"What pressures or expectations come with your role?"*
- *"What is realistic for you right now?"*

Experiences that shape perspective — history that affects trust.

- *"What experiences have shaped how you see this?"*
- *"What has worked, or not worked, for you in past support relationships?"*
- *"What would make this different from other experiences you've had?"*

Values and beliefs — what the client holds important or true.

- *"What matters most to you in this?"*
- *"What do you believe about how this should go?"*
- *"How do your values show up in this decision?"*

Avoiding assumptions — checking rather than presuming.

- *"I may be assuming something. Can I check with you?"*
- *"What would you like me to understand that I might miss?"*
- *"What does that word mean to you?"*

Learning from the client — the client is the expert on their life.

- *“Help me understand how this works in your world.”*
- *“What would you teach someone new to your situation?”*
- *“What am I not seeing?”*

Assuming versus asking

Assumption	Question instead
Anyone in this role would want a promotion.	*“What would you like for your career?”*
She must be proud of her title.	*“How do you feel about this role?”*
He doesn’t speak up because he’s shy.	*“What makes speaking up easier or harder for you?”*
Family is a support, not a pressure.	*“What role does your family play here?”*
Stress means they should slow down.	*“What would help you with the stress?”*

> **Coach’s note.** Curiosity is not interrogation. Let the client decide how much context to share, and when.

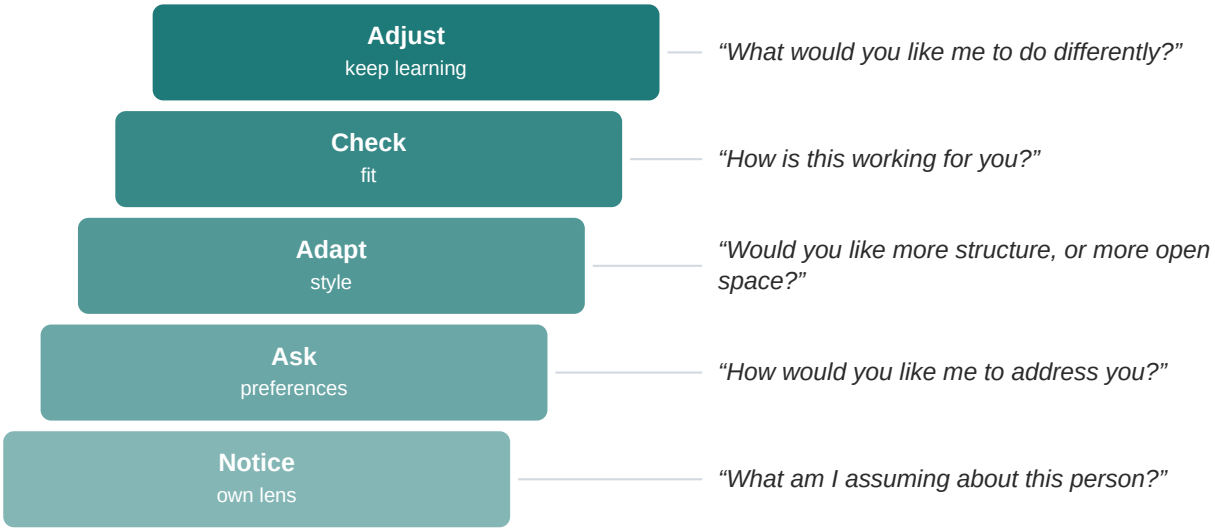
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FOUNDATIONS · WHAT TRUST RESTS ON

Respecting Identity, Language & Style

Respect shows in how the coach hears and speaks: using the client's name, pronouns and words, honoring their pace and preferences, and adapting to how they communicate rather than expecting them to adapt to the coach.

Respect in practice: a small loop to repeat



A simple loop for respecting identity and style. Repeat it as the relationship develops.

Name, pronouns and how to be addressed — getting the basics right.

- *"What name and pronouns would you like me to use?"*
- *"How do you pronounce your name?"*
- *"Is there anything about how I address you that you'd like to change?"*

The client's language — using their words and metaphors.

- *"You called it 'a storm.' Shall I use that word, too?"*
- *"Which language do you think best in?"*
- *"Is there a word that captures this better?"*

Communication style — directness, pace, structure and silence.

- *"Do you prefer to think aloud or reflect first?"*
- *"Would you like me to be more direct, or more exploratory?"*
- *"How do you like to use silence in conversation?"*

Culture and worldview — respecting different norms.

- *"What is considered respectful in your culture or workplace?"*
- *"Is there anything about how I'm communicating that I should adjust?"*
- *"How does your background shape how you see this?"*

Accessibility and needs — removing practical barriers.

- *"What would make our sessions easier for you?"*
- *"Would a different format, pace or schedule help?"*
- *"What should I know about how you prefer to take in information?"*

Handling mistakes with respect — misnaming, misreading or misspeaking.

- *“I used the wrong word. Thank you for telling me.”*
- *“I apologize. May I check I’ve got that right?”*
- *“Please tell me whenever I get it wrong.”*

Respectful versus unintentionally dismissive

Instead of	Try
“That’s not a big deal.”	*“It sounds like it matters a lot to you.”*
“I know exactly how you feel.”	*“Help me understand what this is like for you.”*
“You should…”	*“What feels right to you?”*
“Where are you really from?”	*“Tell me about yourself, whatever you’d like to share.”*
“You speak so well!”	*“Tell me which language you think best in.”*

> **Coach’s note.** Cultural humility means staying curious about your own lens and inviting correction. Perfection is not the goal; a visible willingness to learn is.

4

THE RELATIONSHIP · FEELINGS, OPENNESS AND AGREEMENTS

Acknowledging & Supporting Feelings

A client who sees their feelings, concerns and beliefs welcomed rather than corrected learns that honesty is safe. Acknowledging is not agreeing: it tells the client, "I heard you, and it makes sense that this matters."

A client says: "Honestly, I'm terrified I'll fail."



A path for responding to a feeling. Slow down at the first steps; move on when the client signals.

Welcoming all feelings — no feeling is wrong in the room.

- *"Whatever you're feeling is welcome here."*
- *"Thank you for being so honest with me."*
- *"What else is there?"*

Acknowledging concerns — taking worries seriously without fixing them.

- *"What concerns you most?"*
- *"That sounds like a real concern. Tell me more."*
- *"What would help you feel more at ease about it?"*

Supporting beliefs and perceptions — valuing the client's view even when it differs from yours.

- *"Tell me how you see it."*
- *"What leads you to believe that?"*
- *"What would you like me to understand about your view?"*

Welcoming suggestions from the client — taking their ideas seriously.

- *"What do you suggest?"*
- *"How would you like to use our time?"*
- *"What would work better for you?"*

Handling strong emotion — staying steady and within scope.

- *"Would you like a moment before we go on?"*
- *"What would help you right now?"*
- *"Is it okay if we pause or change direction?"*

Not rushing to reassure or fix — resisting the urge to smooth things over.

- *“Let me just hear this first.”*
- *“What is it like to carry that?”*
- *“Would you like help with this, or just to say it out loud?”*

Acknowledge before you explore

Instead of	Try
“Don’t worry, it’ll be fine.”	*“It sounds like you’re really worried about this.”*
“You shouldn’t feel that way.”	*“It makes sense that this is painful.”*
“At least it’s not worse.”	*“That sounds really hard. What is it like?”*
“Let’s focus on the positive.”	*“Is there more you want to say about this first?”*
“Why are you upset?”	*“What is coming up for you?”*

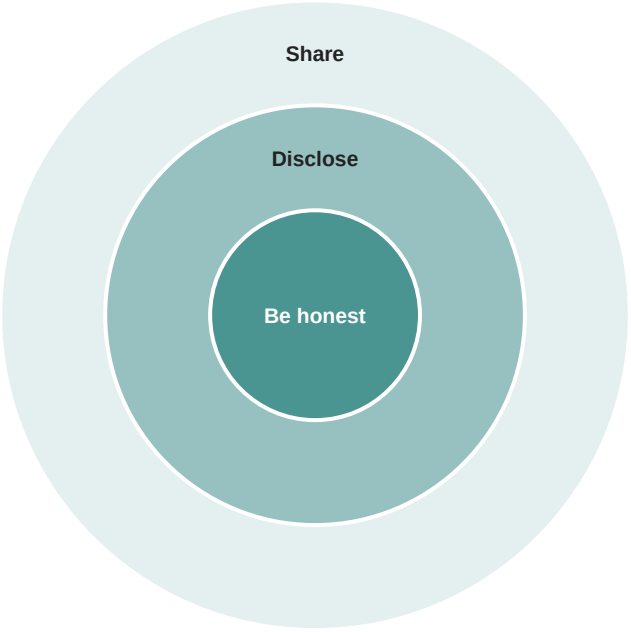
> **Coach’s note.** If feelings go beyond the scope of coaching, say so kindly and discuss whether another form of support, such as therapy, would serve the client.

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THE RELATIONSHIP · FEELINGS, OPENNESS AND AGREEMENTS

Openness, Transparency & Vulnerability

Trust is reciprocal. When the coach is open about what they are doing, honest about what they notice, and willing to say "I don't know" or "I got that wrong," the client learns that honesty is safe on both sides.



Be honest
Tell the truth about what you notice, think and do, including when it is uncomfortable. Never mislead.

Disclose
Share your process, limits, conflicts of interest and why you ask what you ask.

Share
Offer personal information or reactions sparingly, only when it serves the client.

Layers of transparency, from honesty (always) to personal sharing (rarely, with purpose).

Transparency about the process — explaining what is happening and why.

- *"Here is how I work, and why I ask what I ask."*
- *"Would it be okay if I explain why I asked that?"*
- *"What would you like to know about how this works?"*

Honesty and candor — saying the true thing with care.

- *"May I share something I notice?"*
- *"I want to be honest with you about…"*
- *"How does that land for you?"*

Admitting limits — saying "I don't know" or "that's outside coaching."

- *"I don't have an answer to that, and I'm curious about yours."*
- *"That may be beyond what coaching can do. How can we get you the right support?"*
- *"What would help you feel supported on that?"*

Appropriate self-disclosure — sharing the coach's reactions or experience for the client's benefit.

- *"Would it help if I shared a reaction?"*
- *"Is it useful to hear my own experience, or would you rather not?"*
- *"What would you like to do with that?"*

Owning mistakes — naming a misstep without defensiveness.

- *"I think I misunderstood you. Thank you for correcting me."*
- *"I got that wrong. Let me try again."*
- *"What would you like me to do differently?"*

Inviting feedback — asking how the coaching is working.

- *“What is working for you in our conversations?”*
- *“What would you like more or less of?”*
- *“How safe does this space feel to you right now?”*

Transparency: yes and no

Helpful transparency	When it is not helpful
Explaining the coaching process and my role	Sharing so much of my story that it becomes about me
Telling the client what I notice, as an observation	Offering an interpretation as fact
Admitting limits and referring on	Pretending to expertise I do not have
Owning a mistake and repairing it	Over-apologizing so the client must reassure me
Asking permission before sharing a view	Sharing opinions disguised as questions

> **Coach’s note.** Before self-disclosing, ask: Is this for the client or for me? Keep it brief and hand the conversation straight back.

6

THE RELATIONSHIP · FEELINGS, OPENNESS AND AGREEMENTS

Confidentiality, Boundaries & Agreements

Safety is built on clarity. Clients speak freely when they know exactly what is private, what is not, and how the relationship works. These agreements are set early and revisited as things change.

Setting the foundations for safety



Agreements that support safety. The exact limits depend on law, the coaching agreement and your code of ethics.

Confidentiality — what stays private and what is shared.

- *"Here's how I protect what you tell me."*
- *"What questions do you have about privacy?"*
- *"Is there anything you would like me to treat with extra care?"*

Limits of confidentiality — the exceptions the client should know in advance.

- *"There are some exceptions, such as legal or safety obligations. Here they are…"*
- *"How do you feel about those limits?"*
- *"What would you like me to do if I'm ever unsure?"*

Sponsors and third parties — when an organization pays for coaching.

- *"What will be shared with your organization, and by whom?"*
- *"How would you like us to agree on reporting?"*
- *"What would you like your sponsor to know?"*

Boundaries and roles — what coaching is and is not.

- *"Here is what I do as a coach, and what I don't."*
- *"Where might coaching not be enough?"*
- *"What do you expect from me, and what can I count on from you?"*

Consent and permission — asking before probing, recording or sharing.

- *"May I record our session for my learning?"*
- *"Is it okay if I ask about this?"*
- *"Would you like to stop or change direction?"*

Revisiting agreements — adjusting as the work evolves.

- *"Is anything about how we're working worth changing?"*
- *"Is our agreement still serving you?"*
- *"What do we need to add or remove?"*

Agreement checklist for a trusting start

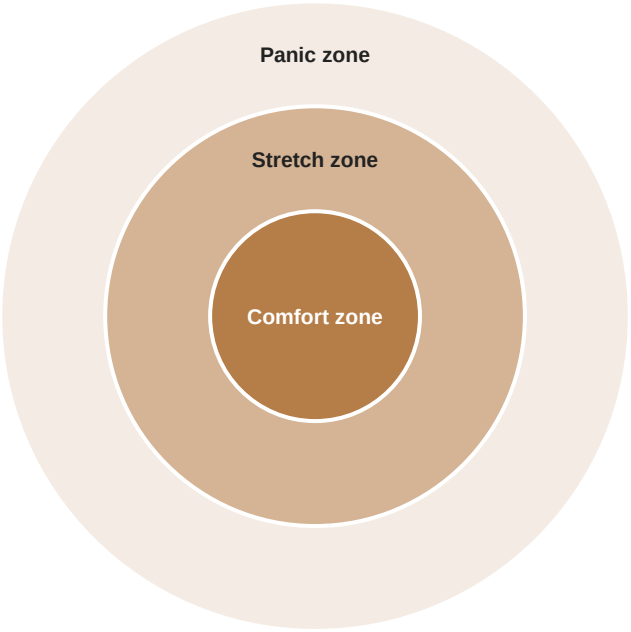
Topic	What to make clear	Client confirms (tick)
Confidentiality	What is private, and the limits	■
Roles	What coaching is, and what it is not	■
Logistics	Time, fees, cancellations, tools	■
Records	What notes or recordings are kept, and who sees them	■
Sponsors	What is shared with an organization	■
Ending	How either of us can pause or end the relationship	■

> **Coach's note.** Legal and ethical requirements vary by country and context. Follow the ICF Code of Ethics, your coaching agreement and local law.

A SAFE SPACE TO GROW · STRETCH, CHALLENGE AND REPAIR

7 Safety for Risk, Stretch & Challenge

Growth lives just outside the comfort zone. A safe relationship lets the client stretch without fear of humiliation, and gives the coach permission to challenge. The skill is staying in the stretch zone: enough challenge to grow, enough safety to stay.



Panic zone
Too much challenge. The client shuts down or defends. Slow down, ground, and return to what is steady.

Stretch zone
Challenging and supported. The client thinks, risks and learns. This is the target for most coaching.

Comfort zone
Familiar and easy. Safe, but little new learning happens.

Comfort, stretch and panic zones. Trust and safety widen the stretch zone.

Inviting risk — encouraging the client to try, say or imagine something new.

- *"What would you try if you knew it was safe to fail?"*
- *"What is the smallest brave step you could take?"*
- *"What would you say if you knew it would be received well?"*

Challenging with permission — offering a harder question or observation.

- *"May I offer a challenge?"*
- *"Would you like me to be more direct?"*
- *"I have a question that may be uncomfortable. Is it okay to ask?"*

Naming fear and doubt — making them discussable.

- *"What are you most afraid of here?"*
- *"What is the worst that could happen, and what is the likelier outcome?"*
- *"What would help you feel safer in taking this step?"*

Checking the level of stretch — reading the client's capacity in the moment.

- *"On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you right now?"*
- *"Are we in a helpful stretch, or is this too much?"*
- *"How is the pace for you?"*

Pausing and grounding — stepping back when the stretch is too much.

- *"Let's pause for a moment. What do you need?"*
- *"Shall we go back to something steadier?"*
- *"What would help you feel grounded right now?"*

Celebrating courage — noticing and honoring risks taken.

- *"That took courage. What did it take?"*
- *"What did you notice about yourself just now?"*
- *"What does it show about what's possible?"*

Challenge that keeps trust

Challenge that damages trust	Challenge that builds trust
Confronting without asking	*"Would it be okay if I shared something I notice?"*
Pushing for emotion or disclosure	*"Would you like to say more, or move on?"*
Stating the answer	*"What do you make of that?"*
Keeping going when the client withdraws	*"Let's check in. How is this going for you?"*
Challenging the person	*"Let's look at the pattern, not at you."*

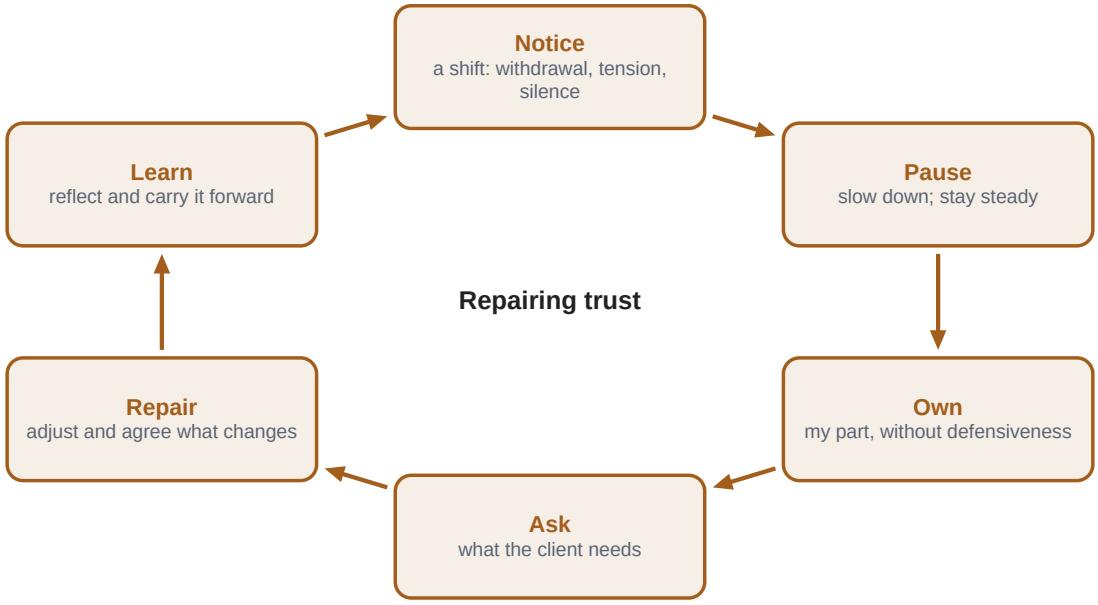
> **Coach's note.** Ask permission before challenging, watch how the client responds, and be ready to step back. Challenge delivered with care strengthens trust.

8

A SAFE SPACE TO GROW · STRETCH, CHALLENGE AND REPAIR

Repair: Mistakes & Difficult Moments

Every coach misreads, misspeaks or misses something. What matters most is what happens next. A sincere, quick repair often deepens trust more than a flawless session.



A repair cycle for moments when trust is strained.

Noticing a rupture — spotting early signs.

- *"I noticed something changed just now. What happened?"*
- *"Did what I said land the way I meant it?"*
- *"I sense some distance. May I check in?"*

Owning your part — taking responsibility without over-apologizing.

- *"I think I interrupted you. I'm sorry. Please go on."*
- *"I made an assumption. Thank you for telling me."*
- *"That was my mistake. What would you like from me?"*

Listening to the impact — letting the client say how it affected them.

- *"How did that land for you?"*
- *"Tell me what that was like."*
- *"What do you need me to understand?"*

Repairing and adjusting — changing what happens next.

- *"What would you like me to do differently?"*
- *"How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?"*
- *"What would help you feel safe to continue?"*

When the client is angry or distressed — staying calm and respectful.

- *"I hear that you're upset. I want to understand."*
- *"Would you like to take a break?"*
- *"What do you need right now?"*

When coaching is not the right fit — ending or referring with care.

- *“I wonder whether another kind of support would serve you better. What do you think?”*
- *“Would you like me to suggest some options?”*
- *“How would you like to end well?”*

Repair that works and repair that doesn’t

Doesn’t work	Works
“I’m sorry you feel that way.”	*“I’m sorry. I got that wrong.”*
“That’s not what I meant.”	*“I hear how it landed. Let me try again.”*
Long explanations and justification	*Short acknowledgment, then curiosity*
Repeated apologies	*One sincere apology and a change in behavior*
Ignoring it and carrying on	*“I’d like to go back to something. Is that okay?”*

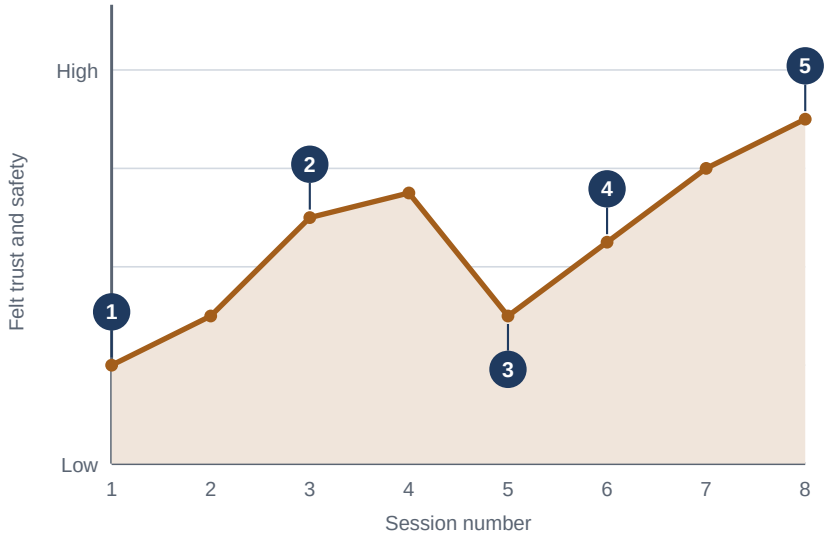
> **Coach’s note.** Repair is not about being perfect. If you cannot repair a rupture, seek supervision and consider whether another coach would serve the client better.

9

OVER TIME · BUILDING AND SUSTAINING TRUST

Building Trust Across Sessions

Trust is built through a long series of small moments. Over time, coaches keep it growing by following through, remembering what matters and checking the relationship itself.



What happened

1. Agreements set; client is polite but guarded.
2. Client shares a worry for the first time.
3. A misunderstanding: the client feels judged.
4. The coach owns it and checks in; trust is repaired.
5. Deeper, riskier work becomes possible.

A sample trust curve over eight sessions. Trust rarely rises in a straight line; a repaired rupture can leave it stronger.

First session — setting the tone.

- *"What would make this a good experience for you?"*
- *"How would you like us to work together?"*
- *"What do you need to feel comfortable?"*

Remembering what matters — recalling people, goals and details.

- *"Last time you mentioned… How is that going?"*
- *"How did the conversation with… go?"*
- *"What has changed since we last spoke?"*

Following through — doing what you said you would do.

- *"I said I'd send… Here it is."*
- *"Did I follow through on what we agreed?"*
- *"What can you count on from me between sessions?"*

Checking the relationship — regular, light feedback.

- *"How is our work together going?"*
- *"What would you like more or less of?"*
- *"How would you rate the safety of this space, from 1 to 10?"*

Celebrating openness — appreciating risk and honesty.

- *"Thank you for trusting me with that."*
- *"That took courage to say."*
- *"What made it possible to share that today?"*

Deepening the work — moving to riskier topics as trust allows.

- *"Is there a topic you've been holding back on?"*
- *"What would you like to bring that you haven't yet?"*
- *"What would help you feel safe enough to go there?"*

Trust tracker (sample data)

Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
Respecting identity	medium	medium	high	high	high	high
Acknowledging feelings	low	medium	medium	high	high	high
Openness and honesty	low	low	medium	medium	high	high
Keeping agreements	high	high	high	high	high	high
Asking for feedback		low	low	medium	medium	high

Sample tracker (illustrative data) of how strongly each trust-building behavior showed up in six sessions. Use your own labels, for your reflection.

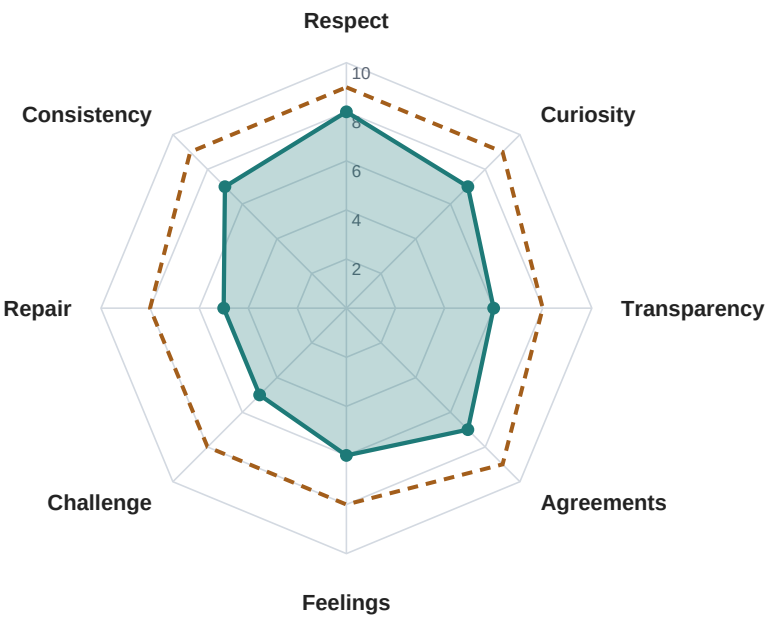
> **Coach's note.** Ask for feedback on the relationship regularly. A short check such as "What's working, and what would you change?" keeps problems small.

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OVER TIME · BUILDING AND SUSTAINING TRUST

Trust in Special Contexts & Growth

The way trust is built changes with the setting: virtual sessions, organizational sponsors, team coaching, and cross-cultural work each add new considerations. Coaches also keep growing in how they create safety.



How to use the wheel

Rate yourself from 0 (center) to 10 (outer ring) in each area, today and where you want to be.

Choose one or two areas to practice for a month and ask for client or mentor feedback.

Scores here are samples for illustration only.

Today (sample)

Goal (sample)

A trust and safety self-assessment (sample scores). A conversation starter, not a test.

Virtual and phone coaching — building closeness without being in the room.

- *"How comfortable are you with this format?"*
- *"What would help you feel private and at ease?"*
- *"What should we do if the connection drops?"*

Sponsored and organizational coaching — serving the client and the sponsor.

- *"What is private between us, and what is shared with the organization?"*
- *"How will we handle questions from your manager?"*
- *"Whose goals are we working toward, and how do they fit?"*

Team and group coaching — safety among several people.

- *"What agreements will help everyone feel safe to speak?"*
- *"How will we handle disagreement?"*
- *"What needs to stay in this room?"*

Power and hierarchy — recognizing differences in status.

- *"How does power show up in this relationship?"*
- *"What makes it hard to speak honestly with people above you?"*
- *"How can I help you feel more equal here?"*

Cross-cultural coaching — different norms for trust and disclosure.

- *"How do people build trust where you come from?"*
- *"What would help you feel respected here?"*
- *"What should I know about how you prefer to communicate?"*

Coach self-care and supervision — protecting your capacity to be trustworthy.

- *"How rested and present am I for this client?"*
- *"What do I need to talk through with a supervisor?"*
- *"Which of my habits might reduce someone's sense of safety?"*

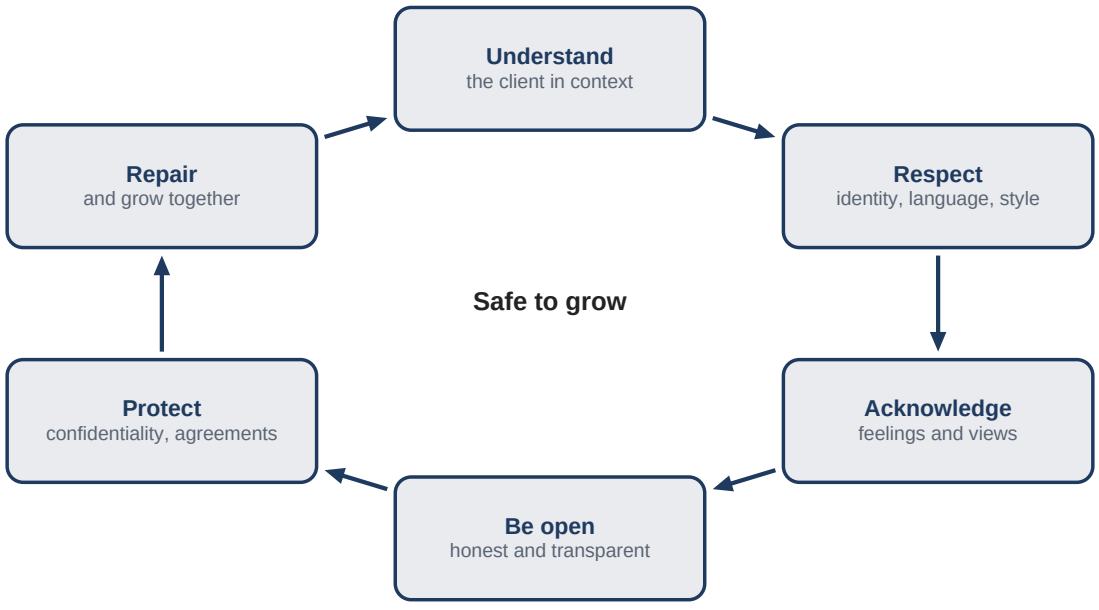
Trust across settings

Setting	What changes	What helps
Video	Less body language; tech distractions	Eye contact on camera, a clear privacy agreement
Phone	Only voice and silence	Check in verbally, welcome pauses
Chat or email	No tone; slower pace	Warm language; agree on response times
Sponsor involved	Three-way relationship	Clear reporting and confidentiality agreements
Team	Many voices and power levels	Group agreements and shared norms
Cross-cultural	Different trust and disclosure norms	Ask, listen and adapt

> **Coach's note.** Aim for progress, not perfection. Trust and safety are cultivated, not completed.

Putting It Together

Cultivating trust and safety is a cycle rather than a checklist. The coach seeks to understand, respects, acknowledges, is open, protects, invites growth and repairs, and starts again.



The trust and safety cycle.

Do and avoid

Do	Avoid
Ask how the space feels to the client	Assuming it feels safe
Use the client's name, pronouns and words	Substituting your own labels
Acknowledge feelings before exploring	Reassuring or fixing too soon
Ask permission before challenging	Confronting by surprise
Own mistakes quickly and simply	Defending or over-apologizing
Keep and revisit agreements	Letting agreements go unspoken

Phrases by purpose

Purpose	Sample phrases	When to use
Welcome	*Whatever you bring is welcome here.*	At the start, or when the client hesitates
Acknowledge	*That makes sense. Thank you for telling me.*	When the client shares something hard
Check safety	*How safe does this feel right now?*	Regularly, and at moments of stretch
Ask permission	*May I share something I noticed?*	Before challenging or sharing a view
Own a mistake	*I got that wrong. Let me try again.*	As soon as you notice
Clarify limits	*Here is what stays private, and the exceptions.*	At the start and when things change

Practical notes

- **Trust the process, and the client.** Assume the client is capable and resourceful.
- **Check, don't assume.** Safety is the client's experience.
- **Move first to repair.** The coach holds responsibility for the relationship.
- **Be consistent.** Reliability is the quiet engine of trust.
- **Protect confidentiality fully.** One breach can undo months of work.
- **Keep learning.** Ask for feedback and use supervision.

Session Checklist

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

- [ ] I made sure agreements and confidentiality were clear.
- [ ] I welcomed the client as a whole person, in their context.
- [ ] I used the client’s name, pronouns and language.
- [ ] I acknowledged feelings and views before exploring or fixing.
- [ ] I was open about what I was doing and why.
- [ ] I asked permission before challenging or sharing a view.
- [ ] I checked how safe and comfortable the space felt to the client.
- [ ] I noticed any strain and repaired it quickly.
- [ ] I kept my commitments from the last session.
- [ ] I chose one thing to do next time to strengthen trust.