

# From Teaching to Coaching. Enhancing Communication with Parents in the Neonatal Unit Using Coaching Skills

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## Introduction

With the implementation of infant and family centred developmental care, healthcare professionals are called upon to support parents in becoming confident caregivers of their children in the neonatal units and upon discharge. Traditional teaching methods, even when gentle and respectful, often focus on instruction and hierarchy. Transitioning to a coaching approach, which has its foundation in active listening and person-centred theory can more effectively build parents' confidence and autonomy, leading to a stronger partnership between healthcare professionals and parents. Parents, with the healthcare professional's facilitation, will be able to find their own way of parenting and caring for their children rather than fitting in with professional expectations. This approach aligns with up-to-date research showing that communication with parents can have an impact on their wellbeing.

## Aims

Develop a foundational educational programme to train healthcare professionals in fundamental coaching skills to:

- Communicate effectively with parents ensuring parents feel heard and treated with empathy.
- Promote a team-oriented dynamic between parents and healthcare professionals, fostering a strong partnership.
- Provide practical tools for navigating challenging situations, boosting healthcare professionals' confidence.

## Method

The coaching education programme is built around three key coaching skills: active listening, open questioning, and how to share skills and knowledge with a coaching mindset.

A pilot programme was delivered in a three-hour session as part of a NIDCAP/FINE Masterclass delivered online on the 5th of July 2024. It was highly interactive to give participants the opportunity to practise the skills in a safe space. We explored the idea of shifting from teaching to coaching through discussion around two specific scenarios and identified three key coaching skills to practice. For each skill we discussed the concept, engaged in practical application, and concluded with a group discussion. Feedback collection from participants in

the pilot is in progress. We sent a survey following the event to identify relevance and areas of improvement. This feedback will be used to shape the programme for a wider audience of healthcare professionals as part of a foundational Infant Family Centred Developmental Care (IFCDC) education curriculum appropriate for NIDCAP. The programme is collaboratively designed by healthcare professionals and parents and delivered by a certified coach with lived experience in NICU, actively volunteering in a level 3 hospital and working with healthcare professionals. A second parent with NICU experience will also contribute, ensuring diverse perspectives.

## Results

Fifteen participants (parents, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and researchers) all with experience of foundational education for IFCDC attended the pilot. This online Masterclass was highly interactive, and all participants were engaged and contributed greatly throughout the session. Preliminary feedback from the participants at the end of the session showed a high interest in the topic and a palpable need for training in coaching skills to enhance communication between healthcare professionals and parents. Participants supported moving to the next phase of the "From Teaching to Coaching" project.

Input from attendees at the pilot will help design questions to evaluate outcomes once the final format is in its trial phase.

## Conclusion

This approach highlights the potential benefits of promoting coaching skills for parents and healthcare professionals in the neonatal unit by improving communication and fostering a stronger partnership. This is crucial for parents' and healthcare professionals' wellbeing and should enhance parents' confidence in caring for and bonding with their children, ultimately resulting in better outcomes for pre-term children and families.

## Relevance to NIDCAP

Coaching skills could be part of the NIDCAP training skillset.