

## Distinctions and Dealing with Emotions in Coaching

Coaching is a holistic approach to facilitate change and growth. For example, a person who needs to build an exercise habit may also have a deeper need to find purpose and meaning in life and enjoy greater fulfillment. Those embarking on major life changes may hit roadblocks of conflicting emotions along the way. In your job of coaching, you encounter physical, mental, social, spiritual, and emotional needs. Isolating certain aspects of a person's life is unwise and impossible. Addressing a client's emotions may seem challenging, as emotions have typically been the realm of therapists.

You and therapists both focus on clients' personal development. Although some areas overlap, major distinctions exist, and each is careful not to infringe on the other's specialties. You follow a results-oriented model and also use psychological skills for facilitating goal attainment, with an awareness of the mental and physical health of your clients.

Coaching methods draw from a growing body of evidence-based coaching psychology, positive psychology, and of course, MI. Psychotherapists are trained in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental disorders, though they often work with issues related to chronic and acute physical illness, trauma, and general self-care and wellness-related issues.

The field of psychotherapy considers emotions and thinking patterns on a wider and deeper scope, often going back in time in a client's life. Coaching is not typically viewed by the public as a mental health service, although coaches acknowledge and respect clients' emotions that surface when exploring an issue. You may likely find that clients come with issues they feel strongly about, and those conversations can be emotionally charged. It is within your scope to create a safe and respectful space for exploring emotions while also offering possibilities for moving forward.

When you say, "There are jobs that are more fun. It's just right now you feel disappointed that working at Disney wasn't as fun as you thought it would be," you validate the client's emotions while opening new possibilities. Therapeutic intervention with a counselor may delve into the emotional roots from the past that are surfacing in the present. Coaches work with emotionally healthy and functioning clients. The line is blurry, but the point is that you, as a coach, will not delve deeply into the past in order to repair things. You can certainly use the past as a pivot point, but your main focus is primarily on future development and growth.

This table is a quick reference for considering some distinctions between coaching and therapy.

### Coaching

Focuses mostly on clients' present reality with a far-horizon view of the desired future.

Is a collaborative relationship among equal partners where the coach helps clients self-discover answers.

Addresses emotions as natural and normalizes them. Less about using techniques and more about acknowledging emotions. Emotions are seen as messengers of new awareness.

Focuses on clients' positive strengths and capabilities to move toward change. A coach partners with clients to choose goals and find solutions.

Sees emotions as good, even though some are not pleasant in the moment. Expression and clarification with a coach (good listener) can lead to shifts, insight, or new positive emotions.

### Therapy

Mainly addresses people's past, which may include trauma, and seeks to heal disorder.

Is a therapist-patient relationship, where the therapist has the answers.

Addresses negative emotions as pathology and spends time to uncover emotions as a symptom of what's wrong.

Focuses on diagnosing and providing professional expertise and guidelines for the client's healing.

Recognizes the need for mental health treatment, or "fixing," and delving deeply into unresolved pain.

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