

## What is Coaching?

### Encountering problems and defining the role as a coach

This document should be reviewed prior to starting as a wellness coach. It is intended to help set reasonable parameters around the role as a coach. Coaching is not intended as therapy or treatment. Its purpose is to assist clients in setting and achieving goals. A coach is a skilled professional; however, a coach is not acting as a clinician. This is true even if the coach has a background in clinical care. Coaching intends to improve and develop performance-related skills and knowledge. The coach concentrates on specific goal(s) where the outcome is clear. It is the coach's role to enable individuals to find answers within themselves; therefore, the coach is dependent upon each individual's motivation to succeed.

The role of the coach is usually time-limited and task-related, where the goal is identified along with a specific time frame created to achieve the goal. This is not to say that the same person cannot work with the same coach for different problems and/or issues.

As a coach, personal development is facilitated by helping people develop and achieve their goals. A good coach uses listening skills to help people realize and fulfill their goals.

Across the system, it is likely that clients will come with a variety of both physical and psychological problems. It is not possible to predict what types of problems will confront the coaches. This document is intended as a basic guide in assuring that clients receive the proper care, and that the scope of the work does not exceed the mandate and scope of practice.

**Psychosocial problems:** It is important to realize that the role of a wellness coach is not that of therapist. It is likely that many clients will not clearly distinguish this role, and seek treatment and counseling for wide-ranging problems. These may include marital and other family problems, anxiety, depression, or other psychological conditions. Regardless of the condition, these individuals should be referred for care outside of the WIN VA Program. Other individuals may present with financial problems, homelessness, victims of domestic violence, or perhaps perpetrators of domestic violence.

The VA has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Employee assistance is available at each facility. These services are free to employees, and staff members within the EAP have been trained to deal with acute and chronic psychosocial problems. These individuals should be strongly encouraged to seek assistance, and WIN VA staff should assist them in making appointments to assure they receive appropriate and timely care.

**Cardio-vascular disease:** Wellness coaches provide guidance in meeting exercise and fitness goals. If a client notes symptoms of cardiac disease (e.g., chest pain, nausea, shortness of breath on exertion), they should be referred for evaluation prior to starting an exercise program. Participants should be asked to see their physician, who should assume responsibility for setting basic exercise parameters. These parameters may be based on a variety of factors including the client's past and current medical history as well as medical testing.

**Common heart attack warning signs:**

- Discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain;
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach;
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort;
- Breaking out in a cold sweat;
- Nausea; and
- Lightheadedness.

Women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

**Stroke warning signs:**

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body;
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding;
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes;
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; and
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

**Arthritis:** In general, exercise will help to limit pain from arthritis. There are some conditions where it is likely that exercise may harm joints and cause undue stress. In particular, exercise should be restricted during acute inflammatory arthritis. Individuals with acute arthritic changes should be asked to see their physician prior to starting (or re-starting) exercise.

**Substance abuse:** Clients who openly discuss or appear to be using alcohol or other substances should be referred to the Employee Health Clinic. Coaching sessions should not take place if an individual appears to be intoxicated. Once acute intoxication is over, these individuals should be encouraged to go to the EAP.

**Violent clients:** All coaches should familiarize themselves with ways to manage violent or potentially violent clients. If it appears that a client may become violent or is acting in a threatening way, the coach should do as follows: (1) stay out of closed rooms while with the client; (2) if already in a room, coaches should quietly excuse themselves and seek assistance; and (3) under no circumstance should violent clients be engaged in any type of stressful exchange. Coaches should be sincere, remain calm and professional, and leave the room as quickly as possible, quietly closing the door behind themselves. It is the coach's option to decline to see such individuals in the future.

Alcohol and substance abuse can play a critical role in violent behavior. The effect of alcohol and other chemicals can lessen inhibitions and serve as a catalyst for violent behavior. Supervisors need to familiarize themselves with the symptoms of substance abuse and intervene at the earliest possible stage. The signs of impairment are usually evident even to the untrained eye. Alcohol and drug abuse are not an excuse for misconduct.

If a client is threatening, the appropriate authorities should be contacted after leaving the room. If a coach believes that a client may be threatening to others, it is the coach's responsibility to assure that the appropriate authorities are alerted.

**Other illness:** If a coach is concerned about an acute or chronic condition, the client should be referred to the Employee Health Clinic or their personal health care provider. If uncertain, it is reasonable for coaches to express concern to the client and state that they would be more comfortable in their role as coach knowing that he or she (the client) is receiving the proper care. Because of the number of possible conditions, it is not possible to provide a complete listing. Warning signs might be the mention of extreme or unremitting pain, swelling in the joints or limbs, ongoing shortness of breath, shortness of breath with minimal exertion, or mention of another unusual condition. It is important to remember, the coach does not need to be right, it is more important to be prudent and allow those with other expertise to make the final clinical judgment.

