

Family and Parent Coaching Certification Processes: What Do Current Programs Do?

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ABSTRACT. Family and parent coaches work in clinical and non-clinical settings, receiving training from a variety of sources. Although family coaches are gaining in numbers, there is no standard credentialing or certification process for individuals or programs related to family coaching. The purpose of the current study was to understand training procedures and specific competencies required by programs offering training and certification in parent and/or family coaching. Qualitative information was collected regarding program standards and topics, skills gained, format and length of program, cost, theoretical perspectives, and support offered (during and after training). The primary finding was that seven training programs were quite varied with few similarities. Implications include the need for standardization of definitions as well as the creation of training standards and competencies. This study demonstrated that as the family coaching field expands, some modicum of standardization in training is necessary to ensure families receive quality coaching services.

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Family relationships and interactions are foundational for both individual growth and society progress. Recognition of this importance is reflected in the large and growing amount of information available through various media regarding how to improve family relationships and increase family well-being. Quality individualized help may make a difference as to whether a family thrives; however, it may be difficult for families to determine what is quality help in such a diverse field. Family life coaching is an emerging field of family science that is gaining in popularity among family practitioners (Allen & Huff, 2014). While coaching is growing as an applied family science, there is lack of consistency in training and credentialing in the field of coaching (Carr, 2005). To have consistent credentialing, there is a need for high quality coaching training programs, ideally offered by accredited universities that are part of a regulated system (Grant, 2008). To date, there is limited information about coach training programs specifically connected to the work of parents and family practitioners.

In response to the need for deeper information on how family coaches are trained and credentialed, a group of family practitioners working as parent coaches, or with a strong interest in family and parent coaching, came together to discuss the topic. Individuals were solicited through listserv communications of the National Parenting Education Network (NPEN) and the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Certified Family Life Educators (CFLE) groups in the spring and summer months of 2014. From these two organizations, 42 individuals, representing 25 states, Korea, and Canada indicated an interest in the topic and either volunteered to actively participate in the discussions (teleconferencing) or requested to be kept informed of any progress via email. A subgroup of eleven professionals began working more intensely on the issues surrounding family coaching. This active group of individuals, hereinafter referred to as the Family and Parent Coach Exploratory Committee (FAPCEC), initiated the current study. The overarching purpose of FAPCEC is to better understand the work of family and parent coaching, including identification of common practices, competencies, and training programs with the hope of ultimately creating a unified, standardized credential.

Literature Review

Family life coach, parent and family coach, family coach, and parent coach are all descriptors for individuals who work specifically in the family life realm. For the purposes of this paper, the term *family life coach* will be used to represent any of the above descriptors. Family life coaching “is a process-driven relationship between a family system (as represented by an individual or familial group) and a family practitioner designed to foster the achievement of family-identified goals” (Allen & Huff, 2014, p. 569). Family coaches utilize a strengths-based, solution-focused process to help individuals and families strengthen their relationships and reach goals set by them (Kovacs, 2012). In family life coaching, the client is viewed as an expert in his or her life, and the process of coaching is one of collaboration between coach and client (Allen, 2013; Allen & Huff, 2014). In addition, the role of the coach may change with the

family's needs. For example, in studying the effectiveness of utilizing coaching to assist families with children with ADHD, Sleeper-Triplett (2008) described how coaches moved from working with parents of very young children to working with parents and children of pre-teens and finally, working with just adolescents.

The area of family life coaching covers many diverse fields and purposes and as such, can be found in both clinical and non-clinical settings. Family life coaching may cover a variety of delivery methods or types of clients; however, there is a clear distinction in the literature on coaching and therapy. First, coaching, in general, has historically been conducted with clients that are generally healthy yet striving to be even better. Family life coaches are trained to refer to therapists those clients needing mental health services. Kovacs (2012) made a clear distinction between the philosophies of coaching versus traditional therapy. For those families having difficulties with children, traditional therapy would tend to be child centered, focusing on the child's skills (or lack thereof), and giving parents instructions (i.e. with the professional having the answers and the parents being sidelined). Alternatively, family life coaching is family centered, focusing on the parents' skills as well as the family's strengths and providing hands-on support and practice in real situations. With family life coaching, parents are the key to success while coaching professionals provide support. Hart, Blattner, & Leipsic (2001) identified differences of therapy and coaching noting that therapy tends to focus on creating wellness by fixing problems of the past while coaching tends to focus on building capacities to reach goals in the future. Coaching views the client as the content expert and the coach as the process expert; the process is results oriented and control is shared by both parties.

Decision Coaching, a medically-focused type of family life coaching used with families of children with diabetes was found to assist the families in managing their child's illness, particularly when coaching occurred early in the diagnosis process (Feenstra, Lawson, Harrison, Boland, & Stacey, 2015). Family life coaching received by parents can help improve family functioning, parenting skills and child behavior in families with children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Dunsmore, Booker, & Ollendick, 2013) and general developmental delays (Graham, Rodger, & Ziviani, 2014). Emotion coaching, another type of family life coaching, by mothers was found to help preschoolers learn to regulate their emotions better in stressful situations, serving as a mediator for families in disadvantaged situations (Ellis, Alisic, Reiss, Dishion, & Fisher, 2014). These are just a few of the examples of family life coaching.

Family life coaching can take on many forms to support families and individuals. Distance or Internet coaching has been used successfully with parents of children with hearing and speech impairment by providing assistance while the family remains in their natural environment (Broekmann, 2012; Hamren & Quigley, 2012). Website resources, in conjunction with weekly telephone coaching, have been used to assist families with children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (McGrath, et al., 2013). Families with children diagnosed with autism were successfully coached on how to handle problem behaviors via telehealth systems but at health centers that had parent assistants on site (Wacker, et al., 2013).

Coaching has become a wide-spread phenomenon, used in many fields and diverse practices. However, there is a deficit of research and professionalism of coaching, especially family life coaching (Allen & Huff, 2014). Depending on the field, the role of coaches may vary

greatly, influencing the training and credentialing needed. To ensure quality in the area of family life coaching, where the coach may be an expert as well as a guide, this trend necessitates further guidelines and research on the relationship between the coach and client, as has already occurred in other fields. For example, within the last few years, steps have been taken within the business arena to make coaching more uniform. In an interview transcribed for the Library of Professional Coaching, researcher Lew Stern recollected the move to standardize areas such as the definition of coaching, coaches' training requirements, standards of practice, and documentation of results due to coaching (Library, 2014). He emphasized the need of research to guide practice. Similarly, at the 2015 joint meeting of the International Society of Coaching Psychology and APA's Division of Consulting Psychology, Vicki Vandaveer and Anthony Grant both spoke of national efforts to standardize the field of coaching psychology, including creating standard definitions, credentials, and training requirements (Vandaveer & Grant, 2015). Family life coaching is moving in the same direction.

The field of family life coaching unites the fields of coaching psychology and family life education (Allen, 2013). Allen argued that unlike the coaching industry where the training focus is only on the coaching process, family life coaches need both the coaching process training and the family life content knowledge. Although some parent and family coaching has been in the literature for over a decade (see Rush, Sheldon, & Hanft, 2003), the field is now growing significantly as can be seen in the increase of articles on family life coaching and the creation of a new professional development organization, The Family Life Coaching Association (2015). This new growth creates not only opportunities for additional services for families, but also offers challenges since there are no current overarching training requirements, standards of practice, or unified credentials as of this writing.

Creating a standardized field of family life coaching

One significant element of growing the field of family life coaching is to create standards and core competencies needed for standardization of the field. In 2004, Carr identified 65 unique coaching credentials in the UK and North America. These 65 credentials varied greatly according to how they were awarded; some required training competencies, a specific number of hours of course work, or supervision of an approved supervisor. To a great extent there was inconsistency in training or competency requirements for all coach-training programs.

Many professionals in the field of coaching, specifically in the field of coaching psychology, view high quality coach training programs as essential. For example, Grant (2011) stated that an "educational and teaching framework will eventually need to be established" (p. 84) and core areas of study will need to be standardized. Cavanagh & Palmer (2011) asked practitioners in the field of coaching psychology about their impressions, concerns, and ideas about educating coaches. Their research suggested four critical areas coach training programs need to consider (a) purpose/agenda to inform what the curricula is trying to achieve and for whom, (b) context: considerations that shape coach training, (c) curriculum content: theories, models, approaches, perspectives, and topic areas, and (d) teaching process: how the curriculum should be taught. Sub questions and concerns in the field included qualifications of instructors, similarities and differences of content, and consistency in training.

When a new field begins to professionalize and consider a uniform credential, Carr (2005) suggested the following strategies: (a) build on existing successful models, (b) separate certification from accreditation, (c) establish a common core curriculum, (d) create performance and practice standards, (e) restore integrity and mentor coaches in training, and (f) work to standardize information to the public. Since coaching families and parents is a relatively new field with no uniform credential, standards, or curriculum, much more information and research is needed for the field to advance.

The purpose of this study was to explore the practices of existing parent and family coaching training programs that offered some level of certification. Specifically, this study sought to better understand training procedures and specific competencies and skills required by current family or parent coach training programs. By reviewing current practices of existing training programs, it is hoped the field of family life coaching can move towards establishing core performance and practice standards needed to create a unified family life coaching credential.

Methods

Participants

Criteria for inclusion in this study included programs that specifically stated they train family science professionals to utilize coaching in their work. Potential participants were identified through general online searches, as well as through FAPCEC committee discussion, over the spring and early summer months of 2014. The websites of various programs were reviewed and 10 programs were identified as offering some level of certification for parent and/or family coaching professionals. Contact was made with representatives listed on the websites, individuals who were referred by a FAPCEC member, or with an appropriate individual referenced by a particular organization or entity. Of the 10 programs, seven agreed to participate in the study. Of the seven programs included in this study, two were university-based (in North Carolina and Minnesota), and four were stand-alone organizations located in California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Ohio. The seventh participant is no longer in business but was included as it offered insight on philosophy and lessons learned regarding teaching coaching to family practitioners.

Procedure

Institutional Review Board approval to conduct this study was received from a University's IRB Coordinator (IRB#3851). All researchers were trained on protocol for qualitative inquiry including review of questions and process. Researchers contacted the seven training programs via email, explaining the purpose of the Family and Parent Coach Exploratory Committee (FAPCEC) and their interest in gaining information from existing programs regarding any certification process of parent and/or family coaches. Three of the seven programs actually had representatives on the FAPCEC committee and completed the survey on their own rather than through the interview process. They answered the same questions in the same Qualtrics program that the researchers verbally asked the other program representatives. The remaining four programs gave verbal consent.

In order to glean deep, meaningful data, a mixed-methods format was used in that the 16-item survey included both qualitative and quantitative items. Questions were asked via an interview, allowing the researcher to probe for clarity and allowing the participant to ask any questions of the researcher. It was determined this procedure might give the participant a higher level of confidence in the process, thereby not only giving them information about what we were doing, but also giving them a personal connection to the process.

Instrument

The survey consisted of 16 items, eight descriptive and eight open-ended, with item number 8 having multiple sections. Semi-structured interviews with guiding questions were held with a representative from each training program. Seven open-ended items included:

1. Required educational backgrounds for students of their program
2. Standards for their training program and how they were measured
3. Student support after training program was complete
4. The history of their process in creating the training program
5. What they felt were specific skills a family/parent coach should have
6. Suggestions for moving forward in a national certification
7. "What else?" (This question allowed for any additional input.)

The eighth item focused on the details of their program and consisted of the (a) number of training/coursework hours required, (b) format of courses (i.e. classroom and/or experiential), (c) cost of program, (d) specific topics covered in the training, (e) coaching or theoretical models used, (f) written materials used, (g) program delivery method (i.e. online, blended, face-to-face), (h) length of program, and (i) requirements for completion.

Analysis

A content analysis was completed by the three primary researchers. The data were transcribed and analyzed using open coding, with tentative labels identified for similar items. Selective coding was then used to identify themes for each question area. A member check was provided to all FAPCEC members to check for consistency and accuracy.

Results

Survey participant responses provided insight into the complexity that exists in the area of family life coaching. California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, North Carolina, and Washington were represented in the study, two of which were university based, creating a heterogeneous data set in terms of location. The participating programs also represented variety in size of organizations offering coaching certification. Some were very small operations run primarily by one person and others were university based with much larger organizational support. The survey provided baseline data on what parent and/or family coaching programs are currently providing to their students. Data were analyzed first by the authors of this paper with additional analysis conducted with the full FAPCEC team. Analysis showcases both the responses of the individual participants, as well as themes identified throughout.

Titles

The most notable of themes was that all used the word “coach” in their title, and some variation of a family science term, with the majority using the term “parent coach.” There were other variations that included the words “family”, “family life”, and one that used the word “educator”.

Educational background

The major theme found here was that family life coaching programs required a background in family science. Four of seven participants stated incoming students must already have a training background as well as experience in some sort of coaching or family practice (i.e., counseling, certified family life educator [CFLE], or parent educator). The level of background was less consistent, ranging from a required master’s degree to a background in coaching.

Standards

The standards used to measure success in the programs centered on two themes; quality of coaching and use of standard processes. For example, one program had developed its own evaluative feedback process as well as a comprehensive standards and practices manual. Other programs used standards from various professional societies; one used the International Coaching Federation (ICF) standards while another used the CFLE standards. Two participants indicated standards were assumed to have been met merely by completion of the program.

Credentials and Certification**Length of program**

There were two categories identified in the length of the program: short courses ranging from a few hours to four months (those offering something more along the lines of professional development) and long courses lasting between seven months to three years (those offering university credits). The number of hours students spent under instruction varied widely, ranging from 8-10 clock hours of self-study to a full master’s degree of 30 graduate credits (approximately three years).

Teaching methodology

The major theme here was the use of classroom settings and the use of adult learning pedagogy. Four of the seven participant programs indicated they used a classroom setting (live or distance) plus experiential learning where students needed coaching practice for at least 10-15 clock hours. Experiential learning included peer learning and practice. For example, one program indicated “co-coaching” was part of their program and another program indicated “role playing” was part of their curriculum.

Cost

Results indicated the range in cost could be categorized into two basic levels: professional development and university credit. The cost of these programs ranged from \$980 for the least expensive professional development program to \$10,000+ for a graduate level university program (the cost of a master’s degree).

Topics

A number of topics were included in each program, primarily around the themes of coaching techniques and skills of family science. Coaching concepts included coaching theory, problem-solving, business planning, ICF standards, group work and mentoring. Family science content included parenting theory and practice (e.g. attachment, child development), communication, family life content areas, ethics, and family systems theory.

Coaching methods and theories

Coaching methods and theories fell into two categories: traditional psychology and coaching psychology. Psychological theories such as parenting and family systems (Adlerian, Ellis, Ginott,) and process theories (Gordon, transactional analysis) were identified. Coaching theories and practices identified included Appreciative Inquiry, SOAR (situation, obstacles, action, results), GROW (goal, current reality, options, will), positive psychology, strengths based, and empowerment.

Written materials

All programs utilized some written materials as training guides, ranging from those created by the individual program to readily available books and published articles. Peer reviewed articles and specific coaching book chapters as well as manuals and workbooks were mentioned. It was noted there was no overlap in written materials utilized by these seven programs.

Delivery method

Although there were a variety of delivery methods, all had a distance component with four of the seven offering only distance learning, both synchronous and asynchronous. The technologies by which students were trained included phone and internet and included practice and supervision via distance technologies. Three of the programs indicated there was some component of face-to-face, for supervisory or observation purposes.

Support for students

This item asked what type of support was provided for students or any employees of their program. A common theme was that programs did provide regular group or individual meetings as well as mentoring for students. Continuing education was offered by two programs and on-the-job training was offered by one program. Another theme was the need to support students in their employment search by teaching business skills. Some programs offered marketing courses and assignments for creating forms and flyers (for starting their own business) while other participants mentioned their program wanted to offer student support but were not yet doing so.

Coaching Skills

This item asked what specific skills were seen as key when working with parents and families in a coaching role. The overarching theme was the use of client-centered strategies such as empathy, reflection, and client –centered practices. Another theme was the importance in content expertise in family science topics such as parenting and family dynamics. A third theme, although less prevalent, was the use of coaching skills such as questioning and problem solving. For example, one program indicated “parents can find [their] own answers; a parent

coach teaches them how to do that; [the coach] must have that understanding that you aren't the ones with the answers but have to help parents figure it out."

Further Directions for the Field

One of the last items asked for the participant's advice on moving forward with a national certification process. A need for professional standards was the overarching theme however no theme could be identified regarding what those standards would include. One participant felt it was important to "make room for those people who aren't starting from scratch and want to add more skills/credentials." Another participant felt the process should "not require degrees, but do look at standards for what all parent/family coaches should learn/have/do."

Terminology was also an identified theme with emphasis on the differing roles between a parent and a family coach. One participant stated she wanted "standards high and ethics but would not support statewide licensing." Other responses indicated any credentialing process should be open to varying parenting approaches, be international in approach, certifying a program (not an individual), and follow the CFLE model. Finally, a last theme identified was the importance of partnering with other professional organizations in growing the field such as the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) and the International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP).

Discussion

Overall, the survey revealed an active, engaging network of individuals, organizations, and programs providing family life coaching training. Although the primary finding was that the training process and content for the seven training programs were quite varied, the common themes that were revealed show a real and present need for more discussion and research on the topic of training family and parent coaches. This section provides specific descriptions of continued needs namely the need for standardization of definitions and specific parameters, competencies, and ongoing student support.

Definitions and specific parameters

What was most clear from this study is that all training programs required content knowledge in the field of family science. Unlike other coaching fields, a content expertise in family students was apparent. However, how that looked and what it is called was less clear. Results of this study suggest that uniform definitions are needed for the terms used to describe coaching in the family realm. As each program's training content and practice varied, so too did the terms they used for what they called themselves. And some participants had strong opinions about those terms. Some participants representing these parent coach training programs made it clear they do not coach children or whole families, but rather focused solely on parenting issues. As one participant stated, "parent and family coaching are two different things . . . [t]he national certification process would need to seriously consider the differences between the two as well as the additional time and money it would take for the student to be proficient in both." Another stated "I never meet the children - working with children is NOT part of the program." Those participants using the *family coach* term (versus *parent coach*)

indicated they come from a family systems perspective and coach on family life related issues including but not limited to parenting (e.g., parental relationships, interpersonal communication). However, some family coaches worked only with parents while others worked with youth or families.

The need for specific parameters for this field was also a common theme. Do family life coaches need to be certified or licensed? Do individuals need to be certified or do the programs need to be accredited to provide the training? One participant stated “don't certify individual parent coaches but rather approve certification programs with a national seal of approval.” Another participant stated, “ICF seemed to be the only model for us, but it doesn't fit for what we are trying to do.”

Standards and Competencies

While there was some consistency in standards (i.e., need for parenting information and background, types of theories grounding coaching work), this survey demonstrated a highly varied approach to training of parent and family coaches. Training programs tended to be in one of two camps; university training programs lasting more than six months and professional development programs lasting less than six months. Training standards need to be in place to help inform and elevate the field of parent and family coaching. If a unified certification or credentialing program is to be successful, it will need to incorporate standards and competencies in order to make certification meaningful. Ultimately, the delineation of being a *certified* parent or family coach would be something parents and families would seek out as indicating a professional, well-trained individual. Or, as NCFR stated, “the purpose of certification is to provide assurance to employers and consumers that the designee is qualified” (NCFR, 2013).

Specific credentials related to parents and families such as the Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE), Board Certified Coach (BCC), National Board for Certified Counselors' National Certified Counselor (NCC), and American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) all have specific competencies that ensure specific knowledge in content areas as well as educational requirements. The CFLE program requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree with 3200 hours or relevant work experience or a master's degree plus a minimum of 1600 hours of relevant work experience (NCFR, 2015). The Center for Credentialing & Education's BCC requirements vary by education level and work history, but require a minimum of a bachelor's degree as well as 120 hours minimum of professional coach training and 30 hours minimum of post-degree coaching experience hours (CCE, 2015a). The NCC designation requires a minimum of a master's degree, 100 hours of counseling supervision, and 3000 hours of counseling work experience (NBCC, 2015). Lastly, the AAMFT offers a Clinical Fellow as a credential. This designation requires a minimum of a master's degree and current licensing or certification in a mental health field or as a marriage and family therapist (AAMFT, 2014).

Such competencies and requirements are needed for family and parent coaches in order to ensure competence. Merging existing competencies from the family science field such as the CFLE with competencies from the coaching field such as the BCC may be a way to do this effectively and efficiently. The CFLE certification process requires knowledge in 10 different content areas regarding family life (NCFR, 2014). Incorporating these 10 areas into standards

from the BCC would create a firm foundation for parent and/or family coaching standards and competencies. Likewise, the BCC requires knowledge in 6 areas, including (a) Screening and Orientation in Coaching, (b) Fundamental Coaching Skills, (c) Assessments in Coaching, (d) Coaching Approaches for Individuals, (e) Coaching Approaches for Business and Organizations, and (f) Ethical and Professional Practice in Coaching (CCE, 2015b). Both the CFLE and BCC require exams to assess knowledge in each of the core areas has been obtained. This directly responds to what one of the participants indicated when she said “to me, both the coaching field and the family life fields are equally important in a family coach education.” The incorporation of both the coaching and family fields would also encompass many of the responses received in this survey.

Establishing competencies, however, requires some standardization in training programs, including the number of hours of training (or length of program), the topics covered and their theoretical frameworks, the materials used, whether experiential is required, and a set of key skills seen as required base knowledge. As the results indicated, these responses were varied with the most notable being the number of hours required (two weeks to one year or more). Certainly some differences were due to delivery methods. As one participant indicated, some of these programmatic requirements were different according to the level that the individual student was hoping to achieve. Overall, minimums would need to be established in order to encompass learning, practice, supervision, observation, reading, and writing. Survey responses indicate that a varied approach in content delivery would be optimal especially given the varied educational backgrounds, experiences, and availability of students.

There was consistency on the topic covered. As Allen (2013) noted, Family Life Coaches blend both Family Life Education content and coaching psychology practices. This was the case with the FLC training programs with equal emphasis placed on the coaching process and the content of family science. A Humanistic approach to serving families using Rogerian (see Rogers, 1959) techniques was also evident. However, no single topic was included in all seven training programs. Additionally, several participants noted the importance of including ethics and related standards, a critical piece to any credentialing or certifying program. This would indeed be an important topic to ensure programs and/or individuals were well-versed especially as it may relate to when a coach would need to refer a parent or family to another professional. Both the CFLE and BCC certification processes include an ethics and standards category (CCE, 2015b; NCFR, 2013).

Each program did have some sort of theoretical basis from which to draw their topics for learning, although the item was worded in such a way as to elicit some level of response. Whether it was “present-moment parenting theory (self-created)” or family systems theory, each program did state some underpinnings of theory. In general, though, most programs included some sort of coaching theory, family theory, child development, and/or positive psychology. In her text on coaching families, Allen (2016) indicated family life coaches often wear two hats: that of the coach with guidance by the client and that of an educator who shares information when needed to make informed decisions. To what extent these roles can mesh within the framework of a certification process remains to be seen.

If a certification process for coaches is pursued, specific standards will be helpful to ensure particular topics are addressed. Although programs could be free to use whatever resources they felt addressed the topics, some specific resources could be included, recommended, or highlighted. Similarly, although no two programs delivered the content in exactly the same way, all had a set process. Since there are a finite number of ways to deliver content, any sort of certification could allow for differences in delivery. It is worth noting that no program was 100% asynchronous online and no program was 100% face-to-face. There were synchronous components, application and practice components, skill level components, testing and observation requirements, all of which could be utilized to ensure a robust program was offered for those seeking parent or family coaching certification.

Ongoing support

This survey demonstrated a perceived need for providing ongoing support for family life coaches as participants indicated they offered mentoring (6 out of 7), on-the-job training (1 out of 7), or other services (4 out of 7). Student need for continuing support beyond their program was a clear theme. Additionally, networking, a website, and some sort of repository for coaching professionals that parents and families can come to find coaches were all mentioned as being important for this field. One need that was mentioned several times was offering some level of employment support to help those students who wanted to start their own coaching business or for those working within other organizations or agencies. As one participant stated about their current student support “not much after completion [of program]. Need to work on that.”

Limitations

Although this study produced initial data with which to move the potential of certification forward, there were some limitations namely bias- and instrument-related. The sample size was small, albeit representative of most parts of the country and inclusive of all training programs specifically identified as training family practitioners. Additionally, one program was actually no longer in business although the researchers deemed the information to be helpful in offering an additional viewpoint.

Bias was a potential limitation of this study. Because FAPCEC committee members were interviewers, it is possible there was acquiescence bias. Alreck and Settle (2004) stated if a participant feels “a certain response will be more welcome to the sponsor, researcher, or interviewer, then many will almost automatically provide it” (p. 103). It is possible a participant overstated what training their program provided for parent or family coaches. An additional potential bias is that of prestige bias (participant tries to respond in a way that enhances his or her image) as well as self-selection bias. Although there were ten programs identified to interview, only seven agreed. Potentially these seven over-represent a particular viewpoint or process (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

There were also some instrument limitations thereby affecting some interpretation. The item related to titles was a compound question in that both those who were being trained as well as those who work with families were combined into the one item regarding titles. Also,

interpretation of one of the items varied. The specific question was “are there specific coaching methods or theories your program aligns with and if so, what are they?” Because the question was worded “specific *coaching* methods” some only responded with coaching methodology/theory while others also included family related methods and theories.. Another item asked “if you do not offer your own certification process, do you require your coaches to have a certification from somewhere else and if so, from where?” This did not delineate whether the coaches in question were the trainers or the students being trained to be a coach. Only two responses were received on this item, potentially due to the way the question was worded. Lastly, another compound item may have confounded results. When asked about the support that was provided, the survey asked “what type of support do you offer your employees/students?” Support for employees may have been different from what the support was for students. However, most responses indicated support for students.

Implications and Conclusions

Results of this study indicate there are a number of implications in moving forward, namely to (a) define the field and determine terminology, (b) create training standards, (c) create competencies, and (d) create a network and/or professional organization for the field. An additional implication is that more research is warranted in order to clearly indicate whether the field of family life coaching is ready for a credentialing or certification process.

Define the field and determine terminology

The importance of having a definition of coaching is not new; Grant (2011) argued that before an agenda for teaching can be established, a clear definition of coaching and its aims are needed. As previously mentioned, one issue raised was whether the term “family life coach” means providing services to both children and families or just parents. Implications of this study indicate that, regardless of what term or terms are used, there will be disagreement in establishing a title and definitions of terminology within the parent and family coaching field. There is likely not a one-size-fits-all approach. Possibly providing only a description for *what* these coaches do is all that is needed at this time. Prior research from not only family science but also coaching psychology will be critical in helping establish terminology.

Create training standards

Training standards are essential for the growth of the family life coaching field. There have been areas of study needed for a coaching training program identified in the literature. Grant (2011) identified ten core areas of instruction including foundations for an evidence-based approach to practice, ethical principles, models of practice, mental health, core coaching skills, and a variety of coaching psychology theories. He also emphasized the importance of specialized areas of coaching, in which family life coaching could fit. By using prior literature, as well as this study, training standards could be established as a guideline for credentialing programs to follow. Additionally, meshing International Coaching Federation (ICF), Board Certified Coach (BCC), and Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) standards with what these seven programs currently provide may offer robust training standards for parent and/or family coaches. Any credentialing process of particular programs would also need to encourage the use of pre and post assessments relating standards to outcomes, require ongoing quizzes or

assessments of knowledge gained, and provide some sort of venue for observation of skills learned.

Create competencies

Achieving competency in a particular field is a way to ensure clients receive quality services. While competencies are discussed in the coaching psychology and family science literature (see Cavanaugh & Palmer, 2011; NCFR, 2014; AAMFT, 2004; Family and Consumer Sciences, 2007 for examples), there is a vast deficit of competencies identified in the literature specific to family life coaching. Competencies such as cultural sensitivity, interpersonal skills, assessments, ethics, evaluation and others must be identified if family and parent training organizations are going to be able to meet the unique needs of the coaches they train.

Create a network and/or professional organization

For those interested in ensuring program quality, a network of credentialing programs could be established. A professional organization specific to family life coaching could also be initiated in order to further the interaction between programs, potentially helping increase the quality of training standards and programmatic guidelines. As one participant stated, “We need to support one another as we figure this out.”

Other Implications

Although one of the goals of this study was to identify some common themes for program content, standards, and competencies, such varied results and opinions indicate a certification or credential may not be workable at this time. This is not surprising, given the relative infancy of such a field. However, some have been working in the field for 20 years, lending credibility to the field. Further research, as well as collaboration with other organizations and agencies is warranted.

Family life coaching is growing in numbers and interest from family practitioners (Allen and Huff, 2014). To date, there is no empirical evidence suggesting any uniform training for coaches working with parents on family life issues. Bridging the fields of coaching psychology and family science can be an asset; training programs and accreditation standards exist for both fields. This study highlights the need for additional research and action to move the field of family life coaching towards unified standards. Additional studies examining the effectiveness of family life coaching are also needed to better understand what professionals need.

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