

How Investing in Family Life Coaching Can Yield Healthy and Resilient Families

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Providing family life coaching can improve health and wellbeing while fostering resilience in youth and adults. This type of coaching, which may be less stigmatized than services that are categorized as “family therapy,” can be used to effectively implement family science-related evidence-based prevention programs (EBPPs)—that is, policies that research and testing have shown to prevent poor health outcomes—in a variety of settings like schools, family services organizations, and private practices. While there are counseling and therapy services available for families in crises, there are fewer services available to improve family life outside of crisis situations because of a lack of funding and limited availability of adequate training programs for would-be practitioners.

Research indicates that coaching is effective at improving behavioral and health outcomes in a variety of family contexts. However, employers, nonprofit organizations, and third-party payers rarely reimburse clients for coaching services, thus denying access to an effective intervention. Two factors constrain the state and federal funds that could otherwise be diverted to family coaching: spending rules that require recipients of specialty services to indicate a medical diagnosis (that is, a doctor needs to assign some type of pathology to a patient in order for them to access services) and the restriction of the provider class (that is, the type of practitioner) that can legally perform this type of service and be reimbursed through insurance. Changing healthcare policy to allow family life coaches to receive third-party payments through insurance and increasing the availability of rigorous training programs for practitioners would allow more parents, guardians, and children to benefit from this evidence-based, effective practice.

What is Family Life Coaching and Who is it For

Family life coaching is a collaborative partnership between a client and coach that enhances performance and well-being in personal and work domains. Family life coaching includes elements of EBPPs, including articulating a framework of behavior change, conveying issue-specific information, addressing environmental barriers, and providing tools for developing social supports. Practitioners at The Family Life Coaching Association have seen a wide range of cases where family well-being was being challenged in a variety of ways, and improved through targeted coaching sessions, as Rebecca’s story illustrates:

Rebecca, a single woman, was about to bring 4-year-old Natalia into her home as a potential adoptee and scheduled an appointment with parent coach Tina Feigal to help with the transition. Rebecca and the child had never met each other—a highly unusual circumstance in this type of arrangement—but the family members who held custody were “done” with her behavior and desperate to have her relocated. Having lived in seven previous homes, Natalia exhibited the resulting trauma almost as soon as she entered Rebecca’s home. While Rebecca was prepped in advance by Tina to handle traumatized child behavior, Natalia’s behavior of throwing objects, refusing to comply, and calling Rebecca horrible names seemed overwhelming.

After a few months of highly concentrated support from Tina, Rebecca was able to help Natalia learn for the first time that love and acceptance were possible in her life. Now adopted by Rebecca, Natalia is thriving in a loving home and knows that her mom is there to protect and comfort her. While there are still challenges, such as transitioning to a new school, Rebecca now has an effective plan to positively affect Natalia’s life.

In addition to improvements in the lives of individuals like Natalia, family life coaching offers a significant social return on investment, a concept that attempts to expand on traditional cost-benefit analyses by incorporating broader socioeconomic and environmental considerations to account for the total value of a program or intervention. On top of that, there is a growing consensus among national research centers and human services organizations that coaching is an effective intervention for improving self-regulatory

skills—the ability to manage one's emotions and behaviors—that truly improves quality of life.

Policy Recommendations

To reduce barriers in accessing and providing competent family life coaching services, policymakers can:

- **Expand eligibility to use specialty services** by updating medical necessity criteria to allow third-party reimbursement of coaching services without a current medical diagnosis.
- **Expand the provider class for specialty services** to allow third-party reimbursement of coaching services provided by credentialed para-professionals who may be skilled practitioners, but lack certain licenses that would award them different titles.
- **Incentivize employers to cover family life coaching through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** which could help reduce employee's costs for care.

Family life coaching is effective at improving self-efficacy, well-being, and goal-directed self-regulation that builds resilience through improved protective behaviors in caregiving, parenting skills, or emotional competency. It also is beneficial for diverse populations of different demographic or socioeconomic backgrounds. Better integrating this practice into traditional healthcare policies and programs would benefit families, practitioners, and society as a whole.

Research and data for this brief are drawn from the work of the [Family Life Coaching Association](https://scholars.org).