



## Coaching Parents: Are We Ready?

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In early intervention, family-centered care has been considered best practice for decades. In more recent years, family-centered care has broadened to reflect changes in the role of the provider, whose focus is no longer on working with the child, but on building the caregivers' capacity to promote their children's development within everyday activities and routines (Friedman, Woods, and Salisbury, 2012). This requires the use of explicit teaching and coaching strategies (Salisbury & Cushing, 2013). Given the growing emphasis on caregiver-implemented intervention, one might assume that it is becoming more and more widely used. However, studies show that the percentage of home-based early intervention services that are provider-driven (versus caregiver-focused) is anywhere from 44% to 70% (Woods, Wilcox, Friedman, & Murch, 2011), meaning that family-centered care, although considered best practice, was occurring as little as 30% of the time in some instances.

Why is this percentage so low? It appears that change is happening slowly and that some providers are still learning these skills. Hanen SLPs don't have to worry — they have the necessary tools to use a coaching model both in and outside of a Hanen Program.

This article introduces the definitions of specific coaching strategies from experts in the field, then draws parallels between these coaching strategies and the teaching methodology developed and utilized by Hanen. Examples for using the Hanen methodologies during 1:1 coaching sessions will be given. Finally, for those interested, additional resources available to Hanen members will be listed.

## How to Coach According to the Experts

Experts tend to agree on the core components that make coaching effective. A review of the work of three sets of experts demonstrates that, while their vocabulary varies, their core concepts are similar (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Freidman et al, 2012; Rush & Sheldon, 2011). The list below most closely represents the work of Friedman et al. (2012), who developed a practical core vocabulary to define all the critical components of effective caregiver-implemented intervention. In other words, all of the activities below need to be included in work with individual families if we are to be building parents' capacity to foster their child's language development.

- **Conversation and Information Sharing** — The provider and caregiver take the time to talk with each other in order to build a supportive working relationship. The objective is for the two parties to discover what each one feels to be important, believes to be of value etc., so that common ground can be established.
- **Observation** — The provider watches the child and caregiver interact during family routines, without providing feedback. The objective is to discover what's happening right now during important family routines. The professional observes in order to answer the following questions: What's working? Where might help be needed? What actions might fit into what's already occurring, without causing disruption?
- **Direct Teaching** — This may be a brief verbal explanation of the strategy(ies) followed by a demonstration. Handouts and video may also be used if this fits the parent's learning preferences.
- **Demonstrating** — The provider demonstrates use of the strategy while providing verbal explanation to the parent. This coaching strategy is often used in conjunction with Direct Teaching to more concretely define/describe the intervention strategy.
- **Caregiver Practice with Feedback** — The caregiver practices applying a strategy while the provider observes and offers suggestions and feedback, if needed. Feedback reinforces the interactive behavior of the caregiver and can include comments on how the child responded. This practice is designed to increase the caregiver's sense of competence and confidence. For the parent who is reluctant to practice in front of the provider, a starting point could be what Friedman, et al. (2012) call Joint Interaction (the provider and caregiver take turns interacting with the child and feedback is not provided). However, the caregiver is still practicing and gaining skills.

- **Problem Solving/Reflection** — The provider engages the caregiver in conversation that gives the caregiver the opportunity to self-evaluate in relation to the practice he/she has done or is doing.
- **Joint Planning** — When done effectively, this coaching strategy evolves from the discoveries made during Caregiver Practice with Feedback and Problem Solving/Reflection. The caregiver and the provider develop a plan of action to be implemented between intervention sessions. The provider plans with the parent not for the parent.

## Expert Coaching Strategies and Hanen Methodologies: What Are the Parallels?

While the 4Ps provide the structure for the design of Hanen group sessions, these can be used in 1-1 contexts as well. What follows is an analysis of how each P fits with the coaching strategies described above.

### Prepare

The objective is to hook the parent, get her thinking about the topic/strategy to come and provide a rationale for why the strategy is important for the child. We do this by engaging the caregiver in conversation about the topic, getting them to answer questions or reflect on some aspect of the strategy (e.g. “How do you feel when someone...?”) or by using analogies. The goal is for the parent to answer the questions, “Why do I want or need to learn this strategy?” and “Why it is important?”

**The parallels:**

#### Prepare → Conversation and Information Sharing

At the beginning of every Hanen group session, we always ask parents how the week went and do a review of the previous week’s content. So, if the first topic after the introduction is a 4P cycle, the Prepare is preceded by some discussion about the previous week, how well the parent felt they applied the strategies and how the child responded. This is important to creating and maintaining an ongoing relationship with the parent.

This type of sharing usually leads to the provider introducing new strategies and engaging the parent with questions as in the Prepare, such as “Why might this [name of specific strategy] be helpful?”

### Present

The objective is to provide a concrete description/definition of the strategy being taught so the parent has a good idea of what is involved in applying it. The Present addresses the

following: “What does the strategy consist of?”, “What steps are involved?” and “How might these steps be embedded into each family’s routines to produce the best results?” Essential aspects of the Present are to provide demonstrations (multi-modalities are best), and to use interaction rather than lecture.

**The parallels:**

**Present → Direct Teaching, Demonstrating, Conversation and Information Sharing**

In Direct Teaching, the provider gives what may be a short verbal explanation followed by a demonstration. Handouts and video may also be used. Demonstrating involves the provider demonstrating with the child. These same activities are what’s described in any Making Hanen Happen as part of the Present. Another aspect of the Present is to use interaction rather than lecture, so the conversation and information sharing continues.

## Practice

The basic criteria for the Practice is, of course, giving the strategy a go, but practice alone isn’t sufficient. The parent also needs to have the chance to talk over how things went during a “debrief” or a “let’s talk it over.” As independently as possible, the parent answers questions such as “What worked?” and “What might you do differently?”

**The parallels:**

**Practice → Caregiver Practice with Feedback, Problem Solving/Reflection**

With Caregiver Practice with Feedback, the parent is practicing and receiving provider feedback as needed. Hanen’s “Practice” and Caregiver Practice with Feedback are synonymous. Problem Solving/Reflection also occurs in the Practice “debrief” or “let’s talk it over.”

## Personalize

The answers to the “debrief” or the “let’s talk it over” questions lead right into the Personalize. The parents are drawing conclusions, often with our guidance, during the Practice. In the Personalize, they are taking the time to put their conclusions into a written plan for applying the strategy with their child at home. When writing the plan, the parent may still need our suggestions and guidance.

**The parallels:**

**Personalize → Problem Solving/Reflection, Joint Planning**

As much as possible, the provider is encouraging self-reflection and problem solving, assisting as needed. As such, we're planning with the parent rather than for the parent.

### Video Feedback Process

This is where the practice continues and learning is consolidated. With the video (or whatever might be the latest technologically correct terminology), the parent can see what is truly happening in the moment. Without the video, the parent is asked to rely on memory, which is less accurate.

The teaching continues. We still give direction and coaching from the sidelines if necessary, but we can be even more direct if needed (my turn, your turn during a time out and/or further demonstration). After providing direction, we video some more. With additional footage, we hope the parent will have the chance to see a clear contrast in how they interacted and how the child responded before and after the direction. Throughout the video session, we ask rather than tell, letting the parent draw conclusions as independently as possible. Just as is the case with the 4-P teaching/learning cycle, the session ends with the development of a written plan.

**The parallels:**

**Video Feedback Process → Conversation and Information Sharing, Observation, Direct Teaching, Demonstration, Caregiver Practice with Feedback, Problem Solving/Reflection, Joint Planning**

### Example of a Hanen 1:1 Coaching Session

Let's say that during our initial observations, family interviews, and baseline assessments, we determine that we are working with Julio, a Communicator with an Own Agenda style of interaction. The parent appears to be a Director, predominately. As the therapist working with this family, we decide that a functional initial short-term goal for the parent and child might be "I will imitate my child to help my child learn to imitate my sounds and actions." That is the goal we have in our minds, but our minds are only one of the minds that is in this therapy session. We also have the parent, so we want to discuss this with her/him so they have their say about which goal they want and whether or not they see the value of this one.

A side note: The goal above is just one possibility suggested today as a starting point to make this example more concrete. Different therapists will certainly have different ideas that could be just as effective. As therapists, we often have an opinion on a good starting point only to discover that our idea isn't a match for the parent. At that point, we'd have to go back to the drawing board with the parent to explore further options.

We are now in our initial treatment coaching session with the family described above. Here are some possibilities of activities we can include.

### Criteria for a Prepare = hook activity + rationale (the link to Present)

**Option 1** — The provider asks the parent to read about the strategy of imitate in an It Takes Two to Talk® or More Than Words® guidebook prior to coming this session, if the parent enjoys reading. We can start the session by asking the parent about the reading using questions such as “How did you think Julio will respond if you imitate him?” or “Do you think this strategy could help him learn some more sounds or actions?” The answers the parents give to these questions provide the link to the Present.

**Option 2** — We could use some sort of analogy. Example: “You’re a very good cook. How do you feel when one of your friends really likes one of your recipes and wants to copy it for his/her use? (parent responds) Exactly, you feel good about the compliment and that motivates you to keep using this recipe.” Link: “The same thing will be true of your child. If you copy him, he’ll feel good about himself and will want to do what you imitated more and more. One of the key ways we learn is by doing things over and over. If your child has a chance to imitate sounds, words and gestures, it’s going to help him use them himself.”

**Option 3** — Provide a demonstration of the strategy with the parents’ child or show a Hanen video of a parent using the strategy with a child who has a similar stage and style of communication. Ask the parent to look for how the child is communicating with the parent and then after the video, ask “How will this strategy help your child learn/progress?” The answers the parents give to these questions provide the link to the Present.

### Criteria for Present = definition/description, demo (multi-modal), interactive

- After reading about the strategy in a guidebook, ask the parent to put the strategy into their own words.
- Provide a demonstration of the strategy while interacting with the child and ask the parent to describe what they saw you doing. Fill in the gaps as needed. The difference between a demonstration in the Present from one in the Prepare is what you are asking the parent to notice. In the Prepare, you want the parent to notice the impact of the strategy on the child in order to help with the buy in. In the Present, you’re asking the parent to notice the steps to take to use the strategy effectively.
- Show a video from a companion DVD of a parent using the strategy with a child at the same communication stage. Again, ask the parent to describe what they saw this parent doing and the impact on the child. Fill in the gaps as needed.



- After the demo and description above, ask the parent to give it a go (my turn, your turn). This activity transitions the parent into the Practice.

### Criteria for Practice = briefly set task, parent tries, direction as needed, debrief

- “All right, let me step back for a bit and you give it a go. He seems to be enjoying playing the cars. How about you get your own car? As soon as you see him do an action with the car or make any sound, imitate it.”
- Parent gives it a go, with direction as needed
- Ask the parent, “How do you think that went?”, “Did you notice how he responded?” or “Is there anything you might do differently?”

### Criteria for Personalize = time to plan, parent writes plan

- “You’ve been talking about how you’ll use imitate at home. Let’s put some things down in writing to help you remember.”
- Use a home plan of choice from Making Hanen Happen (MHH) or other resources. Have the parent fill out the plan, giving suggestions and asking “What if” questions as needed, etc.

**Next session:** A memorable phrase that comes from Rush & Sheldon (2011) is “start with a plan, end with a plan.” Last session ended with a plan. This session can start by asking the parent to bring out the plan from last session so that the two of you can talk over how things went. Recall that the Making Hanen Happen home plans have a report back section. Those can be used as a guide to determine the questions that can be asked and/or the topics that can be discussed in reference to the home plan. The parent has likely got some practice under her/his belt. Now would be a good time to bring out the camera and let the parent see the fruits of their efforts, using your Hanen Making Hanen Happen as a guide for carrying out this video feedback coaching.

### Additional Resources for Hanen Members:

[Making Hanen Happen in 1:1 Sessions](#): This e-seminar has been viewed by many Hanen members over the years. It gives additional ideas for using the Hanen resources in daily clinical work during assessment, intervention, and discharge. A recording is now available for free viewing for Hanen members.

[Parent Workbook](#): A Companion to the *It Takes Two to Talk* Guidebook, this parent workbook is available for purchase through the Hanen website. In true Hanen form, it is full of parent-friendly informational content, with illustrations. Among other things, it

also has additional checklists and home plans to assist with individualized assessment and planning. It helps therapists structure 1:1 sessions in a manner similar to the parent group program. There is a recording of Cindy Conklin, along with a panel of Hanen SLPs, that presents a plethora of ideas for putting this parent workbook to use. This recording is available online free for Hanen members on the [Online Member Meetings](#) page.

[Taking Coaching to the Next Level: Helping Parents Make Behavior Changes that Stick!](#) : A new Hanen e-seminar that was offered for the first time August 2015 and is now available On Demand.

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