

# COACHING INTERVENTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



## Literature Brief

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## **BACKGROUND**

Coaching is a recommended approach for helping early childhood practitioners learn and master effective practices. Coaching involves providing ongoing support, feedback, and collaboration to teachers or caregivers. Coaching within early childhood special education often involves a collaborative process where coaches work closely with educators or caregivers, offering tailored support and feedback aimed at enhancing their professional competencies. The purpose of this overview is to provide a summary of systematic reviews of coaching interventions for young children under the age of five years old who have or are at risk for delays or disabilities.

## **METHODS**

This synthesis is an overview of reviews of coaching interventions for young children with disabilities. To complete this overview, we searched electronic databases and other sources for published articles that contained reviews of studies on coaching interventions for young children under the age of five years old who have or are at risk for disabilities or developmental delays. We then synthesized the findings across the reviews to formulate conclusions on the effects of the interventions for practitioners and children.

## **RESULTS**

We searched the literature in April 2024 for systematic reviews of coaching interventions for young children under the age of five years old who have, or are at risk for disabilities or developmental delays. We located six reviews with 122 publications involving over 250 coaches with more than 3,000 practitioners who taught over 15,000 children with delays or disabilities. A majority of the primary studies included in the reviews involved coaching that was delivered in person where the coach and coachee met face-to-face and the most common coaching arrangement was one coaching session per week. Common features of the coaching interventions that were identified in multiple studies across reviews included delivery of performance-based feedback, collaborative goal setting and use of action plans, observation, supporting practitioners to engage in self-reflection, and in vivo and video modeling of practices.

## **KEY FINDINGS ACROSS REVIEWS**

All six reviews concluded that there was empirical evidence showing that coaching practitioners who work with young children, including children with or at risk of developmental disabilities and delays, leads to increases in recommended adult behaviors and corollary positive findings for child learning and developmental outcomes. A summary of the findings across reviews is shown in Table 1 below. Noteworthy findings were identified across a variety of adult and child outcomes, suggesting the effectiveness of coaching interventions across a variety of skills. Collectively, this overview provides substantial empirical support for the use of coaching to improve practitioner's instructional practices in early childhood settings.

## Coaching Interventions for Practitioners Who Work with Young Children with Disabilities

Table 1. Characteristics and Findings from Systematic Reviews of Early Childhood Practitioner Coaching Interventions

Review	Number of primary studies and research design	Number of participants across included studies reporting sample size	Outcomes	Primary findings
Casey (2011)	Total = 19 studies SCD: 19 studies	Coaches: not reported Practitioners: 86 Children: not reported	Practitioner’s use of instructional practices	SCD: Consistency of effects examined in 19 studies; 64% of experimental manipulations (tiers) demonstrated a clear effect
Artman-Meeker (2015)	Total = 49 studies SCD: 17 studies GDS: 32 studies	Coaches: 252 Practitioners: 3,383 Children: 16,141	Practitioner’s use of instructional practices  Children’s developmental and learning outcomes	GDS: 13 of 32 studies met modified WWC standards – 7 studies with adult and child outcomes showing strong effects SCD: 12 of 17 studies met WWC SCR D standards – 4 met without reservations demonstrating strong effects and 8 met WWC standards with reservations demonstrating moderate effects
Elek (2019)	Total: 53 studies	Coaches: not reported Practitioners: 3,779 Children: not reported	Coaching components	Qualitative identification of critical features of coaching
McLeod (2021)	Total: 7 studies SCD: 6 studies GDS: 1 study	Coaches: 12 Practitioners: 16 Children: 14	Practitioner’s use of instructional practices	GD: 1 study did not meet modified WWC standards SCD: 4 of 6 studies met WWC standards – 1 study met WWC standards without reservations and 3 studies met WWC standards with reservations, with 3 of 4 studies meeting strong effects
Yang (2022)	Total: 33 studies GDS: 33 studies	Coaches: not reported Practitioners: 3,534 Children: 15,612	Practitioner’s use of instructional practices  Children’s developmental and learning outcomes	GDS: 29 of 33 studies reported practitioner outcomes (knowledge, adult/child relationships, classroom environment, language and literacy instruction, and practitioner sense of confidence). 19 of 33 studies reported child outcomes (language and literacy skills, social-emotional skills, and academic skills).
McLeod (2024)	Total: 27 SCD: 23 studies GDS: 4 studies	Coaches: 32 Practitioners: 179 Children: not reported	Practitioner’s use of instructional practices	GD: 3 of 4 studies met modified WWC standards – 1 study met all four modified WWC criteria and 2 studies met three modified WWC criteria SCD: 22 of 23 studies met WWC standards – 6 studies met without reservations and 16 studies met with reservations – across studies there were 12 strong demonstrations of effect and 6 moderate demonstrations of effect

Key: SCD = single case design study; GDS = group design study; WWC = What Works Clearinghouse

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