

A photograph of two women sitting and talking. The woman on the left has long, wavy brown hair and is resting her chin on her hand, looking towards the other woman. The woman on the right has short brown hair and is wearing glasses, looking back at the first woman. They appear to be in a professional or therapeutic setting.

COACHING VS THERAPY

What is the difference between coaching and psychotherapy?

Coaching can be distinguished from psychotherapy in several ways. To understand them, it's important to start with definitions of each...

The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines **coaching** as “**partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.**”

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines **psychotherapy** as “**the informed and intentional application of clinical methods and interpersonal stances derived from established psychological principles for the purpose of assisting people to modify their behaviors, cognitions, emotions, and/or other personal characteristics in directions that the participants deem desirable.**”

When comparing the outcomes achieved through coaching and psychotherapy, we find core differences in four key factors: focus, purpose, population, and who is leading the change.

The Therapist



A therapist primarily addresses clinically diagnosable problems associated with mental health and trauma for individuals dealing with some form of dysfunction or disorder. They work with their patients to identify challenges through a diagnostic structure, typically based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

By focusing on psychopathology, emotions, and the past, a therapist attempts to alleviate symptoms through counseling and, at times, prescription medications. The desired outcome is a shift in behavior or result – as defined by the therapist – frequently addressing physical or emotional pain, dysfunction, and conflict within the individual or a relationship they hold. To achieve this goal, the therapist focuses on past issues to improve their client's capacity in the present.

The Coach

A coach – and specifically a Whole Person Coach – does not rely on a pre-defined definition of normalcy. As the client, you inform the process and lead the way holistically. The coach uses powerful questioning to help you recognize and leverage your strengths and resources then self-create your desired outcomes.



Client-stated goals often address aspects of personal or professional development and improvement. Unlike the therapist, upon whom patients often remain dependent for extended periods of time, a coach builds your capacity to be your own changemaker – exponentially, in every aspect of your life. A coach focuses on visioning and success in the present to move you into the future.

Coaching relationships are shown to produce desired outcomes among well-functioning clients and do not involve the diagnosis or treatment of mental disorders as defined by the American Psychiatric Association. Nor is coaching a substitute for counseling, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, mental health care, or substance abuse treatment.

Which one is right for me?



You may **benefit from the support of a professionally certified coach** if...

- You feel lost or confused about your purpose or next steps in life.
- You are afraid to try something new (even though it's something you're genuinely interested in).
- You feel constant stress, self-doubt and succumb to the "you shoulds" imposed by family and friends.
- Your happiness and forward momentum are constantly derailed by limiting beliefs, old patterns, and self-sabotage.
- You have a goal or vision but lack the focus, organization, and clarity necessary to form an action plan.
- You want to make changes to your personal or professional life such as improvements to health and wellness, personal relationships, spirituality, career, time management, or work/life balance.
- You procrastinate or have difficulty completing tasks from start to finish.
- You are facing or currently going through a major life transition.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), you may want to **consider speaking with a licensed therapist or counselor** if...

- You feel an overwhelming, prolonged sense of helplessness and sadness.

Your problems fail to resolve or improve despite your efforts and help from family and friends.

- You find it difficult to concentrate on work assignments or conduct everyday activities.
- You worry excessively, expect the worst, or remain constantly on edge.
- Your actions, such as drinking too much alcohol, using drugs, or being aggressive, harm yourself or others.

SOURCES

1. [HTTPS://COACHFEDERATION.ORG/APP/UPLOADS/2018/06/WHITEPAPER-CLIENT-REFERRAL-JUNE-2018.PDF](https://coachfederation.org/app/uploads/2018/06/whitepaper-client-referral-june-2018.pdf)
2. [HTTPS://WWW.APA.ORG/TOPICS/UNDERSTANDING-PSYCHOTHERAPY](https://www.apa.org/topics/understanding-psychotherapy)