

Coaching vs. Therapy: What Are the Differences and When Do You Refer?

Two of the most frequently asked questions of new coaches are, “What is the difference between coaching and therapy?” and, “When do I refer a client to a therapist?” There are many resources available to help answer these questions. Articles have been written on these topics in several coaching publications including *Choice Magazine* (www.choice-online.com), and the ICF has information about it on their web site, at www.coachfederation.org.

Tears and emotion can be scary for the beginning coach. Tears and emotion do not necessarily mean a person needs therapy, it merely means they have feelings. Feelings are a normal and healthy part of being human. As Co-Active Coaches we bring awareness and curiosity to the emotions of our clients so that they can make better choices and move into action. We are present with our clients in the current expression of their emotions and bring curiosity to that place, whether it's in our client's magnificence or in the challenging places of their inner and outer lives. As coaches, we don't deal with the psychological antecedent to the emotion — that is the realm of therapy. If tearfulness, moodiness and depression continue over time and do not end, then the coach should bring this to the attention of their client and together explore the need for outside therapy.

Discovering that there is something that should be addressed by therapy is a positive coaching outcome, and as coaches, we refer clients to therapy when needed. There are many possible scenarios in this situation — one is that the coach holds the client accountable to finding a therapist and completes the coaching. Another is that the coach, client and therapist design an alliance whereby the coaching continues and the client works with a therapist at the same time.

Following is some information about the differences between coaching and therapy and also some guidelines for when to refer to therapy. They were developed by Faith Fuller, Ph.D. Psychologist, CPCC and Marita Fridjhon, MSW, CPCC, PCC; faculty members of CTI and co-designers of CTI's Organization & Relationship Systems Coaching program. The information below is a small part of what is available industry wide. We recommend that in addition to reading this, you do your own research on these topics.