ADHD Coaches' Experiences with and Perceptions of Between-Session Communication with Clients: Focus Group Findings

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Abstract

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is associated with difficulty initiating and following-through with tasks. When coaching clients with ADHD (a type of coaching called "ADHD coaching"), providing for additional communication between coaching sessions may be an effective approach to support progress on goals a client has established. However, little is known about the process of between-session contact in ADHD coaching. This study employed a focus group to explore the experiences and perceptions of eight experienced, self-identified ADHD coaches regarding their between-session communication with clients. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, and four key themes pertaining to between-session communication emerged. Further research is needed to provide a more full understanding of this important component of ADHD coaching.

Introduction

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), is a diagnosis characterized by core symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity (APA, 2013). ADHD is a disorder increasingly understood to impact the executive functions of the brain which include activating, organizing, prioritizing, focusing and shifting attention, regulating and sustaining effort, problem-solving, self-awareness and self-regulation, inhibition, and motivation (Barkley, 2011; Brown, 2013).

While the most common treatment for ADHD is stimulant medication, behavioral interventions also appear key, particularly for achieving benefits in functional areas such as organizational skills and academic or employment success (Chan et al., 2006; Rajeh et al., 2017). Because of this, a multimodal, or integrated, approach may be ideal to address ADHD impairments and promote optimal outcomes (Hinshaw et al., 2015).

A specialized type of coaching for individuals with ADHD, called "ADHD coaching", is one useful behavioral component of multimodal intervention for ADHD (Barkley, 2015; Kooij, et al., 2010; Prevatt & Levrini, 2015). A review of research on outcomes of ADHD coaching found consistent evidence of improvement in clients' ADHD symptoms and executive functioning and, in some cases, well-being (Ahmann et al., 2017; Ahmann et al., 2018). In several of these studies, and additional literature (e.g. Sleeper-Triplett, 2010), coach-client communication between coaching sessions has been described as part of the ADHD coaching process. The present study explores this very specific aspect of ADHD coaching.

Background

ADHD coaching, a specialized form of life coaching, employed since the early 1990s, helps individuals with ADHD "identify and employ strategies and skills to help both minimize the effects of ADHD symptoms on their daily lives and more easily achieve their personal goals" (Ahmann et al., 2018, p. 18). Described in numerous articles and books (e.g., Ahmann et al., 2020; Field et al., 2013; Graham, 2018; Maitland et al., 2010; Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Prevatt & Yelland, 2015; Richman et al., 2014; Sleeper-Triplett, 2010), a central aim of the ADHD coaching process is to support behavior change by employing approaches that promote a client's ability to "set realistic goals and stay on task to reach those goals" (Murphy, 2015, p. 753). Among the advantages of coaching as a behavioral intervention are its emphasis on structure and accountability (Wolever et al., 2013).

ADHD coaches most commonly meet with their clients weekly (Ahmann and Saviet, 2019). Since ADHD is often associated with issues such as poor task initiation and procrastination, a lack of follow-through on action steps between coaching sessions is a potential challenge that can impact a client's overall progress. One study of ADHD coaching for college students explored the value of specific between-session assignments, finding benefit when quality completion of useful action steps occurred (Prevatt et al., 2011).

Communication with clients between sessions has been encouraged to both promote client accountability and support follow-through with weekly action steps for clients with ADHD (Sleeper-Triplett, 2010). Ahmann et al. (2018) reviewed 19 studies exploring ADHD coaching outcomes, six of which mentioned the use of between-session communication. Sometimes this contact occurred at predetermined times between sessions (e.g., Swartz et al., 2005) and sometimes it was used "as needed" (Field et al., 2013, p. 72). In other research, ADHD coaches have reported most commonly engaging in between-session communication with clients at a

variable frequency and utilizing a number of platforms for this contact (text, email, telephone, or other messaging app) (Ahmann & Saviet, 2019, unpublished data).

Although the use of between-session communication in ADHD coaching has been documented, no research to date has directly explored this aspect of the coaching process. In the current study, a focus group of ADHD coaches was used to explore this topic, with the following guiding research question: What are the experiences and perceptions of ADHD coaches regarding between-session communication with their clients?

Methods

Study Design

Focus groups are a useful and efficient qualitative research approach for gaining insight into a topic that has not been explored previously in the literature; the interaction that occurs in the group can be helpful in stimulating participant thinking about a topic. The Institutional Review Board at Maryland University of Integrative Health approved this focus group study designed to collect data from ADHD coaches about between-session communication. A brief survey obtained demographic data and included several quantitative questions related to the study topic.

Participant Recruitment

This study used a convenience sample of self-identified ADHD coaches who participated in a conference session at the 2019 ADHD Professionals Institute in Philadelphia about research on ADHD coaching communication modalities (Saviet & Ahmann, 2019). Word of mouth at the conference was used to invite participation. Study inclusion criteria were: (1) self-identifying as

an ADHD Coach and (2) 18 years of age or over. Participants signed an informed consent, no personally identifying information was collected, and all were reminded to respect participant privacy by not repeating what was said in the group to others.

Data Collection

Eight coaches participated in a 45-minute focus group, run by a researcher (MS) with experience conducting qualitative interviews. The focus group protocol for exploring the topic of between-session communication with clients used the following guiding questions:

- What benefits are there with between session communication with clients?

- What drawbacks are there with between session communication with clients?

- How do you choose a method for between session communication with clients?

- What else is important when considering between session communication with clients?

Recordings were professionally transcribed and then reviewed for accuracy by one of the authors (MS).

Data Analysis

The focus group transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis, an inductive approach for identifying themes and patterns within data without trying to fit the data into any pre-existing framework or theoretical construct (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We chose a phenomenological lens focusing on learning directly from participants what their perceptions and experiences meant about between-session communication. Two researchers independently reviewed the transcripts, identifying initial key terms, ideas, and underlying threads to develop a working codebook. After

several rounds of coding the data, followed by discussions, the key concepts were reorganized, refined and consolidated into four discrete, meaningful thematic categories.

Results

Coach Demographics and Quantitative Responses

Eight coaches participated in this focus group. Coaching is not a licensed profession, but credentialing is available. Five coaches each held two credentials from various of the following credentialing bodies: Institute for the Advancement of ADHD Coaching, Center for Credentialing and Education, International Coaching Federation, and National Board for Health & Wellness Coaching. One coach held a credential only from a coach training program; two did not indicate a credential. Terminal degrees held by participating coaches included: BA (n=4), MA (n=2), MSEd (n=1), and MSW (n=1); one participant held two BAs, and one was currently engaged in doctoral studies. Two participants reported being licensed social workers in addition to coaches.

All participants reported working with individuals having ADHD, for the following number of years: 3-4 years (n=1); 7-8 years (n=1); 9-10 years (n=2); and over 10 years (n=4). Participants reported currently coaching a range of 0 to 18 clients per week (M=9.3). All indicated having a practice of being in contact with clients between sessions, with the following frequencies: several times a week (n=1); once a week (n=3); variably (n=2); rarely (n=2). Email was the most frequently reported method of between-session contact (n=8), followed in decreasing order of frequency by text messaging (n=6), phone (n=4), and other (n=1), which was indicated to be videoconferencing. Some participants used more than one modality.

Qualitative Data

Four key themes were identified from the focus group data: (1) the relevance of between-session communication for clients with ADHD and/or executive functioning challenges; (2) designing the agreement for between-session communication; (3) the purpose of between-session communication; and (4) challenges coaches face related to between-session communication. Only the first theme seemed specifically relevant to clients with ADHD; the other three themes could apply to any client group. Additionally, of note is that themes 2-4 could apply equally well to coaching sessions as to between-session contact; that is, coaches seemed to apply the same values, skills and competencies to between-session contact with clients as they might in any coaching session.

Relevance of Between-Session Communication for Clients with ADHD and/or Executive Functioning Challenges

One predominant theme to emerge from the focus group data was the relevance of between-session communication for clients with ADHD and executive functioning challenges.

As one example of this theme, coaches reported that clients who make the most use of between-session communication do so "because it is supportive of their learning style". For these clients, checking in between sessions "keeps the learning on the front burner". Coaches reported that clients using between-session communication are "more likely to stay on task [and] to take that step they may not have [taken] if an entire week had gone by".

Coaches also reported that more frequent check-ins appear to support task awareness for some clients; facilitate learning about their own focus and/or task avoidance; and provide an opportunity for processing and to "clear the brain", allowing clients to either move forward or

shift goals. One coach described between-session communication as an opportunity for "...reinforcing what [the client is] thinking, supporting them. While it may seem minimal/petty to the coach, to the client, that may be a real big deal." Another stated simply: "Clients with ADHD, they need that extra support."

Coaches also indicated that between-session communication can provide external support for the development of executive functioning skills, particularly early on in the coaching relationship, with the goal of clients developing greater EF capacity and, thus, autonomy over time.

Several coaches indicated that they provided more structure and expectation around between-session communication for younger clients whose EF skills are less developed. One stated, "...when I worked with college students ... I had much more of a scripted, or more of a systematic, method." Another stated:

"When I'm working with kids, the accountability is important because that's part of … lessons learned when your executive functioning skills are still underdeveloped. Just saying 'being accountable' means that you have to think about: 'Okay, if I say I'm going to do this, what's it going to take for me to actually do it?'"

Designing the Agreement for Between-Session Communication

A second broad theme to emerge from the focus group had to do with designing the coaching agreement related to between-session contact, including both the initial and weekly agreements.

Coaches discussed the importance of taking care in how they described the purpose of between-session contact when designing the coaching agreement with a new client. Several described purposely avoiding use of the term 'accountability', concerned that it "implies that [clients] need to be held accountable." In this regard, one coach mentioned the following: "We are dealing with people [with ADHD] … that are already sort of overwhelmed and [accountability] just … adds one more thing to the pile that I think is less inherently rewarding."

Instead of using the term 'accountability', several coaches described creating an "open" agreement providing between-session "access" to the coach. One coach indicated: "We're co-creating the agreement around how to stay connected." Another shared, "I'm available to [clients] whenever they need me to be available to them. And that is written in the agreement." One coach shared her practice of providing new clients with several examples of how others access support between sessions.

In addition to the design of the initial coaching agreement, coaches described aspects of weekly coaching agreements related to between-session contact. Coaches were clear that the use of between-session contact for clients, with the exception of very young clients, was generally left up to the client's preference, as "an option that is available to clients", without wanting clients to "feel like it's an obligation". In fact, coaches indicated that many clients appreciate its availability but don't make use of it: "Some people have told me that they really love that they could [have between-session contact], even if they don't."

To emphasize the client-centered nature of designing the agreement about between-session communication, coaches described the importance of using careful language when engaging in between-session contact with clients, in order to be sure to leave the client in charge. As one coach explained:

If I were to do a check-in, and [the client says] they're going to text me at 7 o'clock when they start something, then I always ask, 'Okay, and if you don't text me, then what do you want me to do?' [and] 'What do you want me to say?' … because I'm very sensitive to the fact that [checking-in] feels like my being a coaching cop or something.

In terms of the weekly agreement, coaches described setting up varied types of between-session communications and using varying modalities. Some specific strategies clients used as forms of between-session contact were sending the coach a screenshot of a to-do-list and providing the coach a progress report. One coach also described clients making use of bookending: "They love to call me or text me right before they do something. They'll describe it, and then they go take the action and let me know how it went." (See Box for other types of between-session contact.)

Box: Types of Between-Session Contact

- Check-Ins (via technology)
    - Phone
    - Hybrid
    - Text
    - Email
    - Online platform
    - Website as a check-in (via form)
- Reminders
    - Appointment (automated) reminders
    - Text from coach - reminder on day of appt.
    - Quick summary of session (sent by coach via email after appointment)
- Other Contact
    - Client cancellations

○ Follow-up with "missing client"

Purpose of Between-Session Communication

A third predominant theme to emerge from the focus group discussion was related to the purpose of between-session communication. Within this theme, several sub-themes surfaced: the interpersonal dynamic between coach and client, the specific uses of between-session contact, and how this contact functioned for the client. While this theme bears some relationship to the "relevance" theme described above, "relevance" identified reasons between-session communication was of specific benefit to clients with ADHD, and "purpose" points to how and for what this communication is used.

Aspects of the interpersonal dynamic related to between-session contact included the coach's availability as an "extra support"; assuring a lack of judgement; and the creation of a "safe space". All of these interpersonal factors were described as contributions to strengthening the coaching relationship. As one coach mentioned, "There are just times that we are the only safe space for our clients… so they know that we're there for them, that makes a huge difference." Another shared,

> The comment that I get [from clients] is, 'You don't even have to respond [to a between-session text]. Just knowing that you're reading my text makes me feel like I have a partner as I'm going through what I'm doing, which is extremely powerful.'

The specific purposes of between-session contact for clients largely surfaced in relation to accountability to help clients stay on task, since, as one coach put it, for many clients with

ADHD the "week is too long". Between-session contact also seemed helpful when client goals change mid-week: "If you need to tweak something, or something's definitely not going to work, you don't have to waste the week. You can shift a little bit." One coach indicated that to stay on task, some clients, particularly college students, benefit from breaking regular weekly coaching sessions into two separate appointments, one being shorter, like a brief interim session.

The functions of between-session contact for clients fell largely into two categories: help getting a client into action and supporting learning and growth. Coaches emphasized that between-session contact can be "energizing for clients who haven't started", helping with activation. One coach talked about the function of a "brain dump" for clients between sessions in helping them to get out of a state of "overwhelm", "allow[ing] them to move forward with the goals that they've set".

Between-session contact seemed to support learning and growth both early on in the coaching process and, later, at challenging points for the client. Several coaches emphasized the importance of using contact with clients between-sessions for acknowledging progress and celebrating accomplishments. Coaches also described between session contact as an opportunity to model "the self talk that gives [clients] their own check-ins, because we're repeating what they want to hear about themselves, or for themselves, and it's really valuable as time goes on".

Challenges Coaches Face Related to Between-Session Communication

A final predominant theme to emerge from the focus-group data related to challenges that coaches faced in relation to between-session communication with clients. Sub-themes included: interpersonal dynamics, including boundaries, and ethics/scope of practice.

An interpersonal consideration with which all participants agreed was the importance of being careful with one's language during between-session contact, so as not to sound judgemental about client progress. Careful use of tone and modeling respectful behavior were also identified as relevant strategies. Additionally, one coach described giving clients control over the between-session communication to avoid any sense that the coach had a stake in the outcomes. For example, if a client had planned to text a coach between sessions, rather than follow-up directly the coach might ask, "And, okay, what do you want me to do if you don't text me?"

Several coaches discussed the importance of assuring that between-session contact supported autonomy rather than fostered dependence. One participant illustrated this point as follows: "I think that coaches sometimes get that warm and fuzzy feeling when that [dependence] happens. And that's really a bad thing for the person they're coaching. It's not supporting them." Several coaches mentioned the relevance of the frequency of between-session contact in regards to client autonomy. A final interpersonal challenge was clarity of boundaries related to distinguishing between-session communication from full coaching sessions, particularly when clients found coaching to be a "safe space". Coaches said the following: "Boundaries are really important with that." and "Obviously, it's up to me to set my boundaries." A coach expressed discomfort about occasionally overlooking a planned contact saying, "Later, when I pick up their folder, it's like… I've failed not only them, but myself."

Coaches agreed that between-session contact provides "more information with which to be able to be appropriate", an appeal to ethical scope of practice. Another coach discussed moving a between-session check-in from text to phone if "I am sensing something… because we're responsive to what we are hearing and need to be". The notion of ethics also came up in

regard to being aware of potential "red flags" and the need for possible referral to mental health treatment, particularly for this population which can have comorbid diagnoses. Coaches acknowledged that knowing when a client's need is outside the scope of practice for a coach, and making a referral, is the "ethical thing to do".

Discussion

ADHD is associated with impairment in the "executive functions" of the brain, including activation, organization, prioritization, focusing and shifting attention, regulating and sustaining effort, problem-solving, self-awareness and self-regulation, inhibition, and motivation (Barkley, 2011; Brown, 2013).

Coaches in this small exploratory study described the use of between-session communication with clients having ADHD to foster task awareness, continued learning, and progress on, or modification of, goals, as well as to support the development of executive functioning skills over time. Participants in this study suggested that between-session communication can assist clients in taking action on their goals, a key challenge for individuals with ADHD and executive functioning concerns (Barkley, 1997; Brown, 2006, 2013). In fact, Favorite (1995) suggests that one hallmark of ADHD coaching is its focus on setting goals, including developing strategies to pursue the goals and then taking action on these strategies. ADHD coaching has been found to be a successful approach in the development of executive function skills (Ahmann et al., 2018). Other coaching research has also demonstrated increased client motivation, goal setting skills, problem solving skills, and clients getting "back on track after running into barriers" (DeJesus et al., 2018, p. 316).

Findings from a study examining coach and client learning related to the International Coaching Federation (ICF) Core Competencies (Griffiths & Campbell, 2008) may help explain the emphasis coaches in this study placed on designing the agreement for between-session communication. These authors interviewed five coaches who were professional or master certified coaches (PCC/MCC) with ICF, and nine of their respective current and past clients, and found that "establishing the coaching agreement" emerged as an important part of the coaching process, although not so much for its own sake, instead primarily as a factor within the arena of managing progress and accountability. The core coaching competency of "establishing the agreement", typically applied in coaching sessions for any type of client, was specifically applied by coaches in this study to between-session communication for clients with ADHD.

In the current study, between-session communication was described as supporting learning and growth as well as an opportunity to model the "self-talk" around accountability that clients could use themselves over time, of particular benefit for clients with executive function impairments. Griffiths & Campbell (2008), similarly, reported that by holding clients accountable for taking action, as well as for their insights and learning, coaches "ultimately held their clients accountable to themselves and with that clients developed an intrinsic ability to hold themselves accountable" (p. 28). Whether part of a regular coaching session or between-session communication, the process involved in a coach and client checking on progress toward goals seems to be a useful as well as valued aspect of coaching, impacting both short-term progress and long-term attainment of goals.

In fact, supporting client accountability, part of the typical coaching process in any context, and particularly useful for clients with ADHD who often have difficulty with follow-through, was a predominant emphasis in between-session communication identified in the

current study. Providing accountability is a process that has been identified as a useful

component of coaching in a number of studies. For example, in a study of primary care patients

(n=99) with pre-diabetes participating in a 12-week wellness coaching program, accountability

was identified as one aspect of what was most helpful about the coaching process; participants

also felt that coaching was very helpful with getting "back on track after running into barriers"

(DeJesus et al., 2018, p. 316). Liddy et al. (2015) interviewed 11 adults at risk of or diagnosed

with type 2 diabetes who participated in a health coaching program. Among the several themes

identified was the value of coaching for building accountability: being "monitored" contributed

to motivation, helped participants recognize the need to take ownership of their health and

related behavioral change (p. e162). Other studies of health coaching have also identified

accountability as an important aspect of the process (e.g., Caldwell et al, 2013; Thom et al.,

2014; Wolever et al., 2010).

Despite the fact that accountability was one function of between-session communication

reported in the current study, coaches chose language carefully to avoid that specific term when

talking with clients. Coaches, instead, used language highlighting the co-creation with clients of

a client-centered, open agreement about contact between sessions, both in the initial coaching

agreement and on a weekly basis, offering clients "whatever is going to be supportive of you".

This approach reflects a philosophy of coaching that aligns with common definitions and beliefs

about coaching, no matter the coaching context. For example, Schwellnus et al. (2015), in a

scoping review, reported that definitions of coaching provided in 65% of 17 articles reviewed,

included "client-centred" [sic] as key to the nature of coaching (p. 1311), and 82% identified the

"collaborative nature of coaching" (p. 1313) as key. Similarly, Jarosz (2016) conducted an

integrative review of the literature on life coaching; among key themes identified in relation to

the coaching process were both an individualized client-centered approach and co-designing the coaching relationship (p. 37).

Coaches in the current study described taking care to approach between-session communication in ways that supported the development of client autonomy. Some literature suggests that adults with ADHD have lower self-esteem and self-efficacy (e.g., Newark et al., 2016). These are both factors that may be related to self-determination, defined by Field et al. (1998) as "...a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior" (p. 115). At least one study has shown ADHD coaching to be a process that strongly promotes autonomy, self-direction and self-efficacy (Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

The creation of a safe, non-judgemental space was also a key dynamic of between-session communication emphasized by coaches in this study. Research affirms the importance of this dynamic in coaching for any population. In the DeJesus et al. (2018) examination of wellness coaching, a primary theme identified by study participants was positive interaction with the coach, including encouragement, support, and a "nonjudgmental and accepting attitude" (p. 316). Jarosz (2016) identified creating a "safe and open environment" as one of the "key components of a successful coaching relationship" (p. 37). Similarly, Clayton (2011) found that key elements to establishing the coaching relationship were creating a safe space, building trust, connection, and rapport. In the current study, coaches felt that the 'safe space' they created optimized the support they could provide to clients with ADHD.

In addition to describing the purposes and nature of between-session communication with clients, participants in the present study described practices, or coaching skills, related to this communication that highlighted each of the International Coaching Federation (2020) Core

Coaching Competencies, as outlined in the Table. Some, such as Bachkirova & Smith (2015), argue that "reliance on competency frameworks over simplifies coaching practice" and suggest that effective coaches are "far more than a set of skills and techniques" (p. 128). While this argument has merit, and at least one study has illustrated that, in practice, coaches are not always constrained to the competencies as strictly limiting guidelines (Sime & Jacob, 2018), it is none-the-less true that coaching within the construct of identified competencies, such as the way between-session communication was described by coaches in the current study, assures a measure of integrity and attention to scope of practice in an unlicensed field. It is interesting to note that coaches used the same skill-sets and competencies in between-session contact with clients as are used during coaching sessions.

Table. *Between Session Communication and ICF[a] Coach Competencies*

Coaching Skills	Example from Data	ICF[a] Competency	ICF[a] Sub-competency [or Competency Definition]
Maintaining Ethical Practice	*To know when it's outside the scope of practice for a coach and when you need [to refer out]*	Demonstrates Ethical Practice	Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions
Using a Client Centered Approach	*There's whatever is going to be supportive to you [client], and we'll figure that out as we go.*	Embodies a Coaching Mindset	Acknowledges that clients are responsible for their own choices
Designing the Agreement	*I always ask, "What do you want me to say?"*	Establishes and Maintains Agreements	[Definition] Partners with the client … to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship [and] process….
Providing Safety	*There are just times that we are the only safe place for our clients. And so that they know that we're there for them, that makes a huge difference.*	Cultivates Trust and Safety	[Definition] Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely.
Maintaining a Non-Judgemental Stance	*So we have to be very careful never to judge.*	Maintains Presence	Remains focused, observant, empathetic and responsive to the client
Using Active Listening	*It also provides me another type of active listening. That's a different type of listening than would happen in a conversation during a coaching session…*	Listens Actively	Considers the client's context, identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs to enhance understanding of what the client is communicating
Continuing the Learning	*It helps to keep that client's learning and what we are working on together on the front burner.*	Evokes Awareness	Invites the client to share more about their experience in the moment
Providing for Accountability	*I give them the option. I just say, 'How would you like to be accountable?'*	Facilitates Client Growth	Partners with the client to design goals, actions and accountability measures that integrate and expand new learning

[a]International Coaching Federation (2020)

While coaches in the current study primarily focused on how between-session communication impacted clients, they also shared feeling personally accountable for their own role in between-session communication. In particular, one coach mentioned feeling as though failing to follow-through with a promise to check in with a client was a personal failure. Coach accountability has been alluded to by Griffiths & Campbell (2008) who found that clients were often held accountable in coaching engagements, but coaches also "positioned themselves to be held accountable… to their client's progress… during sessions" (p. 28). In fact, one ICF Core Competency emphasizes the coaches role in this regard: "Partners with the client to summarize learning and insight within or between sessions" (ICF, 2020, para. 9)

In the current study, coaches also identified the issue of ethics in relation to being aware of potential "red flags" and the need for referral to mental health treatment. This is important during coaching sessions as well as with between-session contact. In an examination of the boundaries between coaching and therapeutic practices, Sime & Jacob (2018) found that, among ICF Master Certified Coaches, "13 distinct boundaries ... distinguish[ed] between coaching and non-coaching and between content [coaches] will and will not work with" (Sime & Jacob, 2018, p. 52). These included boundaries such as a client's emotional stability, diagnosable mental illness, sustained excessive emotion, and "old patterns of behavior that cannot be moved past", among others (Sime & Jacob, 2018, p. 53). Coaches in the Sime and Jacob (2018) study, as well as the present study, seemed to use care to trust their own intuition and experience in determining when coaching might potentially cross a boundary. Whether this is a sufficient guide may deserve further exploration.

Strengths and Limitations

"Given the multi-disciplinary nature of coaching, and the intimate nature of the coaching relationship, coaching processes are a particularly challenging subject of study" (Correia et al., 2016, p. 8). Nevertheless, in-depth exploration of a topic is a hallmark and strength of qualitative research, including the use of focus groups (Gibbs, 2007). The interaction that occurs in a well-managed focus groupis one of its strengths as a research method (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). The moderator of this focus group made an effort to encourage all participants to share their thoughts openly. A key strength of this small study is that it provides an in-depth look at an important aspect of ADHD coaching not previously explored.

The use of a qualitative approach, and the use of a convenience sample, suggest caution in any effort to generalize findings (Jager et al., 2017). The small sample size in this study also suggests that the study findings could be considered preliminary; a larger study could expand on this initial exploration. An additional limitation in qualitative research, and particularly with thematic analysis, is the potential for subjectivity in interpretation of the data. The fact that the researchers in this study brought differing professional backgrounds (social work and coaching) may have moderated subjectivity to some degree.

Conclusions

This small focus group study explored ADHD coaches' experiences with and perceptions of between-session communication with clients. As this exploratory study, and other material, suggests, between-session communication is common in ADHD coaching; can consist of texts, emails, brief telephone calls, or other types of communication; and appears to occur with varying frequency in any given coach-client dyad.

Four key themes emerged from the data: (1) the relevance of between-session communication for clients with ADHD and/or executive functioning challenges; (2) designing the agreement for between-session communication; (3) the purpose of between-session communication; and (4) challenges coaches face related to between-session communication. Despite the paucity of literature on the specific topic of between-session communication, other related literature substantiates both the cogency and relevance of these themes and illustrates that the values, skills and competencies identified in this study in relation to between-session communication with clients having ADHD are well-established in the coaching field.

Because between-session communication is common in ADHD coaching and is also an aspect of the ICF Core Competency "Facilitates Client Growth" (ICF, 2020), this topic deserves further exploration. Future research on between-session communication in ADHD coaching should include larger sample sizes and could also use quantitative methodology to examine outcomes related to between-session communication. To generate a more full understanding of this aspect of the coaching process, future research should also examine client experiences and perceptions of the use of between-session communication.

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