

COMPREHENSIVE TRAUMA-INFORMED COACHING COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Ignite Global 360

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Preface:

Professional Coaching is a powerful framework that encompasses the development of an individual through reflection, deepening their awareness, and then strategizing a plan of action and accountability which enables them to move towards an intentional goal. The traditional coaching frameworks primarily focus on the client's present and the future. While the **'present and future-focused'** approach could work for some individuals in specific areas of development, the traditional coaching frameworks overlook the importance of interconnected aspects of the past to present and the future.

An individual's behavior at any given time is an outcome of two key predisposed elements, **nature and nurture**. Primarily, human behavior is shaped by the individual's genome inherited from the ancestors, environmental influences, experiences, and associations to which one is exposed. Traditional coaching frameworks considerably limit looking into the client's past, particularly the client's emotional past. Most traditional coaching frameworks do not include competencies that adequately support the exploration of the client's past. When approaching coaching as a holistic and integrated practice, it is crucial to encompass a client's mental, emotional, physical, and social experiences across the past, present, and future in comprehensively facilitating emotional and behavioral transformation contributing to the overall development of an individual.

Traditional coaching frameworks specify that past experiences and emotions are required to be addressed by a mental health care professional such as a therapist. This is an important professional boundary that should not be crossed if the coach lacks the training to look into the client's past as it requires an intricate, nuanced understanding of stages of human development, psychological constructs, the impact of life experiences, specifically negative encounters such as **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** and trauma.

Since the traditional coaching frameworks do not encapsulate these intricacies, most coaches overlook the root causes of the current challenges clients experience and what hinders their development into the future to a greater extent or completely. This may also result in both the coach and the client being disappointed in the coaching process when coaching does not generate the expected value or impact. And in some cases, if the traumatic experiences were unseen or disregarded in the coaching process, the constant push from the coach and the client's expectations for forward movement and then failure to achieve it could retraumatize the clients, the coaching process working against the intended purpose.

In mental health care, there are specific guidelines and indicators (such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM 5) or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)) in clinically diagnosing an individual with a mental disorder. In such cases, the individual must be treated by a licensed clinician. However, not all individuals who have experienced ACEs or Trauma in the past would meet the criteria of clinical diagnoses for mental disorders, as the impact of past trauma or their current challenges may not be as severe, as each individual responds to adversities differently.

Recent reviews of global mental health data from the World Mental Health Survey Consortium indicate that **70% of people worldwide** have experienced at least one potentially traumatic event in their lifetime based on the study by Corina Benjet et al., published in *Psychological Medicine* in 2016.

Research shows that individuals with **six or more ACEs** have a life expectancy that is, on average, 19 years shorter than those with no recorded ACEs, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

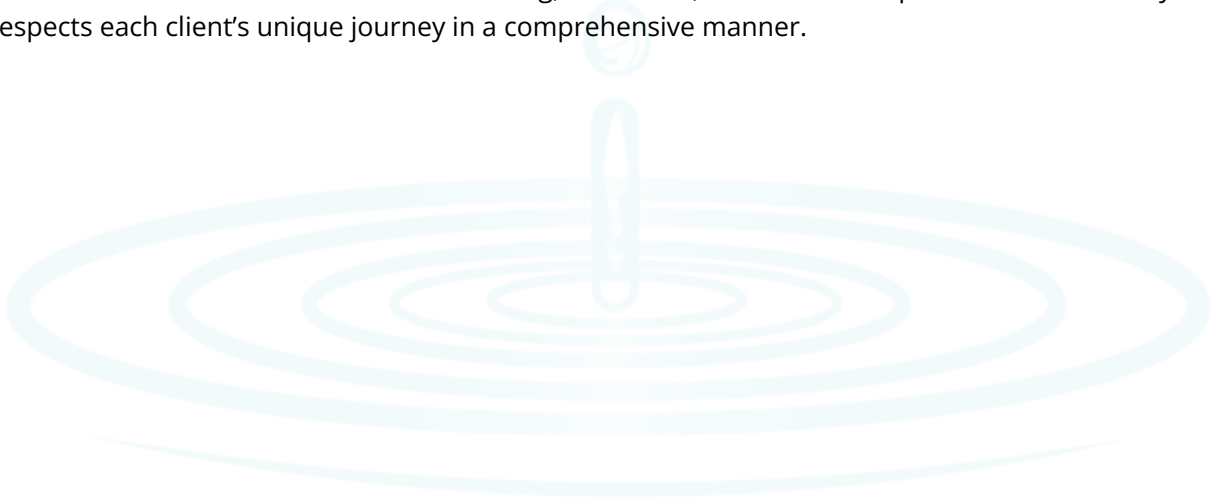
The important fact that calls for our attention is that not all individuals who have been exposed to past ACEs or trauma and currently experience challenges or find it difficult to achieve success in the future are suffering from mental disorders. Such individuals may not receive the necessary support from a licensed mental health professional as they do not meet the criteria to fulfill PTSD diagnosis. However, such individuals could be supported by well-trained and qualified Trauma Informed Coach Practitioners, helping them look into the dynamics of their past and resolve internal conflicts at a cognitive level, helping them release past obstacles and move forward into development and future success.

Furthermore, there are complex practical aspects to adverse experiences, such as the aftermath of trauma affecting person to person in varying intensities. While one could be significantly affected emotionally, mentally, or even physically, one may not experience post-exposure consequences with the same severity. Often the coping mechanisms in our biological, neurological, and psychological systems disassociate from traumatic experiences blocking them from our memory, which is known as one of the classical trauma responses. Trauma science is still in the developmental stages where awareness and trauma education are limited to the world population, leaving many individuals contemplating why certain areas in life appear particularly challenging to them.

Research suggests that **many individuals have experienced trauma**, often without recognizing how these past experiences silently shape their lives, unfortunately mostly negatively. Some of these individuals show up in traditional coaching sessions, without the awareness that some of the past adverse experiences are hiding in the unknown and hindering their progress. And when the coach is unaware of how trauma silently impacts their seemingly healthy clients, the coaching process may not be as effective or even counterproductive. Therefore, whether or not a coach intends to specialize as a Trauma-Informed Practitioner, a solid understanding of trauma and its impact is essential for effectively facilitating client growth and knowing when to refer clients to licensed mental health professionals.

Noticing the importance, we created this **Comprehensive Trauma-Informed Coaching Competency Framework** at Ignite Global 360 Coaching to address how to integrate trauma-sensitive practices

into the core competencies outlined by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). This framework expands upon ICF's core competencies, with a specific focus on safety, client autonomy, cultural responsiveness, and collaborative care, all essential for trauma-affected clients. By incorporating trauma-informed principles and knowledge of trauma-related disorders, this model provides coaches with the skills to facilitate healing, resilience, and client empowerment in a way that respects each client's unique journey in a comprehensive manner.



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COMPREHENSIVE TRAUMA-INFORMED COACHING COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

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Introduction:

The **Comprehensive Trauma-Informed Coaching Competency Framework** by Ignite Global 360 Coaching is designed to empower coaches with the insights, skills, and sensitivity needed to work effectively with clients affected by trauma without crossing clinical boundaries. The competency framework is built upon the International Coaching Federation's (ICF) core competencies with an additional competency focus on essential education on Trauma. This pioneering framework expands traditional coaching boundaries, integrating trauma-sensitive awareness and practices that foster safety, empathy, and client-centered resilience.

This framework provides trauma-informed competencies to guide coaches in understanding the role of past experiences, particularly adverse ones, in shaping present behaviors and challenges of clients. By focusing on safety, cultural responsiveness, and collaborative care, equips coaches to recognize and adapt to the impact of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), thus avoiding traumatization and enhancing the potential for post-traumatic growth and empowerment of the clients.

This model provides a framework to deepen the knowledge of trauma-related disorders, cultivate reflective practice, and develop a coaching approach that aligns with each client's unique experiences. This comprehensive framework ensures that trauma-informed principles are thoughtfully and professionally embedded in coaching practice, supporting clients in their journey toward holistic healing, resilience, and purposeful development.

Integrating the *Trauma-Informed Coaching Competency Framework* with ICF Core Competencies:

ICF Core Competency Framework provides a universal standard for delivering professional coaching. When delivering Trauma Informed Coaching, a coach must use the ICF Core Competency framework as the foundational reflective communication medium and incorporate the added level of competency from the Trauma Informed Coaching Framework in effective integration.

Competency #	Integration of Competencies	
	ICF Core Competencies	Trauma-Informed Competencies
	A. Foundation	
01	Demonstrates Ethical Practice	Demonstrates Ethical Practice as a Trauma Informed Reflective Practitioner
02	Embodies a Coaching Mindset	Embodied Trauma-Informed Coaching Mindset
	B. Co-Creating the Relationship	

03	Establishes and Maintains Agreements	Establishes and Maintains Trauma-Informed Agreements
04	Cultivates Trust and Safety	Cultivates Trauma-Sensitive Trust and Safety
05	Maintains Presence	Maintains Trauma-Sensitive Presence
C. Communicating Effectively		
06	Listens Actively	Observes Trauma Responses and Listens Actively
07	Evokes Awareness	Trauma-Informed Inquiry and Evokes Awareness
D. Cultivating Learning and Growth		
08	Facilitates Client Growth	Integrates Insights for Post Traumatic Growth and Facilitates Client Healing
E. Essential Psychoeducation		
09		Foundational Knowledge of Trauma and Trauma-Related Disorders

Guidelines for Using the Trauma-Informed Competency Framework:

This framework alone is not adequate to address client growth. Any reflective practitioner who wishes to integrate this trauma-informed framework into their practice requires the integration of foundational reflective methodologies such as a coaching framework, a relevant psychotherapy modality, or a combination of reflective practices, and combining them seamlessly with this competency framework.

The primary essence of this framework invites the client-centered and solution-focused approach, which compliments the professional coaching framework and client-centered & solution-focused therapy modalities. This framework will provide a qualified mental health professional the ability to combine both client-centered as well as therapist-driven therapeutic modalities and execute client growth effectively in providing trauma-informed care.

Important Recommendations:

The competencies outlined within this framework facilitate the higher-level standard required by a Trauma Informed Reflective Practitioner. It is crucial that a practitioner gains necessary education through best practices, skills, knowledge, experience, feedback, and assessment in depth in elaborating this standard framework in practical application before integrating the competency into delivery.

For coach practitioners who intend to integrate this framework into their coaching practice, it is recommended that you acquire sufficient client-driven coach-specific education and experience (at least at ICF Associate Certified Coach (ACC) credential level or equivalent) and then complete the necessary education and assessments based on the competencies outlined below before incorporating this Trauma Informed Coaching Framework for coherent integration and effectiveness of Trauma Informed Coaching.

For mental health care providers who wish to incorporate this framework, you are required to demonstrate the ability to robustly deliver therapeutic modalities backed by the relevant accredited qualifications and possess the necessary licenses to practice within the country or the region you operate.

Ethics and Standards for Trauma-Informed Coaching:

This competency framework is created with Ethical Standards at the forefront. Trauma informed care is an intricately sensitive approach, that requires complete adherence to ethical standards with empathy.

For professional coaches who intend to specialize as a Trauma Informed Practitioner, in addition to adhering to the ICF's Ethical Guidelines, you are required to adhere to relevant aspects of the Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct by the American Psychological Association (APA), as these provide deeper insights into trauma-sensitive ethical considerations. This includes key areas such as maintaining appropriate boundaries, safeguarding client confidentiality, ensuring informed consent, and following ethical referral practices.

Integrating these guidelines intends to further support trauma-informed coaches in upholding the highest standards of care and professionalism, especially when working with vulnerable or trauma-affected clients.

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Comprehensive Trauma Informed Coaching Competencies

This Comprehensive *Trauma-Informed Coaching Competency Framework* is curated to guide coaches and mental health professionals in applying trauma-sensitive principles to their practice, emphasizing empathy, safety, and client empowerment. Coaches are encouraged to regularly engage in reflective practice, supervision, and continued education in trauma-informed care to maintain an up-to-date understanding of best practices, research, and industry trends. This comprehensive framework includes nine core trauma-informed competencies, each of which contributes to a comprehensive trauma-informed coaching practice.

1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice as a Trauma Informed Reflective Practitioner

Definition: Understands and consistently applies ethics and standards of coaching and trauma-informed care, upholding integrity, respect, and professionalism through trauma-sensitive client-centered principles.

Competency Outline:

- 1.1 Personal Integrity and Honesty: Maintains transparency, integrity, and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors, and other stakeholders, building trust within trauma-sensitive contexts.
- 1.2 Sensitivity to Client Identity and Experience: Demonstrates cultural and situational awareness, honoring each client's identity, environment, trauma history, values, and beliefs.
- 1.3 Appropriate and Respectful Language: Uses trauma-sensitive, inclusive, and respectful language that aligns with the client's comfort and preferences, creating a safe and non-judgmental space.
- 1.4 Commitment to Internationally Recognized Ethical Guidelines: Adheres to both the Ethical Guidelines of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and relevant guidelines of Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct by the American Psychological Association (APA), particularly those addressing confidentiality, client autonomy, conflicts of interests, and appropriate boundaries. Coach ensures that trauma-informed care aligns with the highest ethical standards in both coaching and psychological practices.
- 1.5 Confidentiality and Legal Compliance: Protects client confidentiality according to stakeholder agreements and pertinent laws, with heightened sensitivity to trauma disclosures. This includes understanding mandatory reporting requirements for child or elder abuse, which may vary by region.
- 1.6 Awareness and Protocols for Suicidal Ideation: Recognizes signs of suicidal ideation or self-harm and understands the ethical obligation to respond appropriately. Coach is able to:
 - Use non-judgmental language if a client discloses suicidal thoughts.
 - Know when to refer the client immediately to a licensed mental health professional.

- Take immediate, ethically sound actions, such as contacting emergency resources, if the client is at imminent risk.
 - Understand the local laws regarding the duty to report or intervene in cases of expressed suicidal intent.
- 1.7 Clear Professional Boundaries and Role Awareness:** Maintains distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy, and other support professions, ensuring that trauma-informed care remains within coaching boundaries. Establishes and models clear emotional and professional boundaries within coaching relationships and addresses boundaries with empathy and compassion.
- 1.8 Awareness of Transference and Countertransference:** Coach is aware, understands, and recognizes transference and countertransference. Recognizes and reflects on relational dynamics, seeking supervision as needed to maintain a clear and supportive stance.
- 1.9 Informed Consent and Disclosure:** Ensures that clients fully understand the coaching process, limitations of trauma-informed coaching, and the role of the coach. Coach secures explicit, informed consent, especially when working in sensitive trauma contexts, as per APA and ICF guidelines.
- 1.10 Referral to Other Support Professionals:** Recognizes signs of emotional crises and identifies when clients may benefit from additional, alternative or clinical support and refers them to licensed mental health or credentialed trauma-specializing professionals when needed, ensuring a collaborative approach to client care. Coach establishes and maintains a network of mental health professionals for effective referrals.
- 1.11 Ethical Responsibility for Personal Bias Management:** Actively identifies and manages personal biases that may influence the coaching relationship, particularly when working with trauma-affected clients from diverse and intersecting backgrounds (e.g., race, culture, socioeconomic status). Demonstrates awareness and accountability to prevent unintended harm, ensuring a fair and client-centered approach.

2. Embodied Trauma-Informed Coaching Mindset

Overview: Maintains a grounded, trauma-sensitive mindset that embodies empathy, ongoing learning, reflective practice, and the highest standard of professionalism. This competency highlights the importance of coaches to continuously develop self-awareness and cultural reflexivity to ensure an ethical, responsive, and supportive approach for trauma-affected clients with professional credibility.

Competency Outline:

- 2.1 Awareness and Embodiment:** Demonstrates an empathetic professional demeanor and compassionate presence that respects client circumstances and acknowledges vulnerabilities while enabling resilience within the client and their ecosystems.

- 2.2 Cultural Reflexivity:** Learn, understand, reflect on, and adapt practices to align with each client's unique cultural and social context, addressing potential biases. Take necessary measurements such as implicit tests when necessary.
- 2.3 Commitment to Education:** Engages in continuous learning specific to trauma-informed care, staying updated on new practices and research while continuing relevant professional development.
- 2.4 Personal Trauma Awareness:** Actively practices awareness of the practitioner's personal trauma history, seeking necessary professional support where necessary, and managing responses or effects of trauma adequately to prevent projection or over-identification.
- 2.5 Reflective Practice and Supervision:** Regularly engages in reflective practices and supervision to deepen self-awareness, seek feedback, and ensure alignment with trauma-informed ethical standards.
- 2.6 Directive Approach:** Coach is able to engage a directive approach in providing necessary care and awareness without influencing the client's direction.
- 2.7 Awareness of Cultural and Systemic Trauma:** Understands the impact of collective, cultural, and systemic trauma (e.g., racial, community-based trauma) on clients, and integrates this awareness into the coaching process to support empathy and inclusivity.

3. Establishes and Maintains Trauma-Informed Agreements

Overview: Establishes clear, trauma-sensitive agreements that consider the unique needs, expectations, and boundaries of the client focusing on the holistic development of the client as a person, facilitating behavior change incorporating the client's wider worldview. Include the family members, caregivers, and other individuals of the ecosystem of the client appropriately when necessary. Creates a collaborative environment that encourages open communication around session structure, goals, accountability, and confidentiality.

Competency Outline:

- 3.1 Clarity and Transparency:** Clearly communicates the coaching agreement (for both overarching global agreement as well as the session agreements), process, and ethical boundaries, particularly as they relate to trauma-informed care.
- 3.2 Collaborative Agreement Setting:** Invites clients to co-create agreements, including awareness and open communication on comfort and safety within the coaching process.
- 3.3 Consent and Flexibility:** Establishes flexible agreements, accommodating the pace of the client and adjusting the focus as needed. Coach efficiently adjusts to the pace of the client.

3.4 Collaborative Re-Establishment of Agreements: Revisits and adjusts coaching agreements when a client needs to evolve or new trauma-related insights arise, ensuring the coaching structure adapts to support the client's changing needs.

3.5 Post-Traumatic Growth: Coach acts as a catalyst in incorporating post-traumatic growth

4. Cultivates Trauma-Sensitive Trust and Safety

Overview: Builds a safe and supportive environment that fosters trust, empowering clients to explore and heal in a non-judgmental, trauma-sensitive space. Coach demonstrates efficiency in building coaching relationships incorporating necessary elements of therapeutic alliance.

Competency Outline:

4.1 Trust and Collaboration: Builds a respectful partnership, empowering clients to lead their own healing journey engaging meaningful reflection to surface innate awareness and healing potential.

4.2 Safety Awareness and Attunement: Adapts session structures to meet client needs, incorporating trauma-sensitive practices that promote safety.

4.3 Intentional Use of Silence and Space: Uses pauses and silence thoughtfully, allowing clients to process at their own pace with trauma sensitivity with an understanding of the neurological and psychological functions of a trauma-affected client.

4.4 Consent and Choice Empowerment: Regularly checks in with clients to confirm comfort and alignment with session direction, supporting autonomy.

4.5 Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation: Offers information on trauma responses, triggers, and aftermath of trauma to help clients understand and normalize their experiences.

4.6 Intersectional Trauma Sensitivity: Recognizes the influence of intersecting identities on trauma experiences, adjusting approaches as needed.

4.7 Recognition of Power Imbalances: Identifies and mitigates power dynamics within the coaching relationship to foster a sense of equality and empowerment, especially when working with clients who have experienced disempowerment due to trauma.

5. Maintains Trauma-Sensitive Presence

Overview: Demonstrates a calm, grounded and client centered presence, maintaining focus on the client while remaining aware of trauma-related cues and emotional dynamics, coaching process, and coach's internal process. Assures that the coaching environment is conducive to trauma informed care and safety of the client.

Competency Outline:

5.1 Mindful Presence: Brings a calm and non-reactive presence to sessions, focusing fully on the client's needs and responses.

- 5.2 Emotional Regulation:** Manages personal emotions to avoid projecting onto the client, maintaining a supportive and stable environment.
- 5.3 Attunement to Emotional Shifts:** Notices and adjusts to changes in the client's emotional state, offering support as needed.
- 5.4 Somatic Awareness and Grounding:** Stay vigilant to somatic changes and energy shifts in the client. Uses grounding techniques when clients experience strong emotional reactions, maintaining a secure space.
- 5.5 Adaptive Session Pace:** Maintains a pace that aligns with the client's needs, allowing flexibility in processing complex emotions and deriving learning from emotions with permission engaging the intuition of the coach.
- 5.6 Attuned with Energy Perception:** Coach is able to engage energy perception such as intuition to act as a catalyst or to recognize spontaneous healing within the client and solidify healing and post-traumatic growth of the client.
- 5.7 Environmental Sensitivity for Safety:** Ensures the physical or virtual coaching environment is structured to reduce potential triggers and enhance client comfort, including control over lighting, seating, and other sensory aspects.

6. Observes Trauma Responses and Listens Actively

Overview: Coach possesses a vast knowledge of the interplay of triggers and trauma responses. Develops an acute awareness of identifying trauma responses, using active listening and non-verbal cues to understand the client's full experience and enhance emotional safety and post-traumatic growth.

Competency Outline:

- 6.1 Elevated Observation Skills:** Recognizes shifts in body language, tone, and breathing and etc. that may indicate trauma responses.
- 6.2 Respect for Client Interpretation:** Encourages clients to interpret their responses without imposing meaning.
- 6.3 Ethical Documentation:** Transparently and sensitively documents observations with informed consent, inviting client participation.
- 6.4 Grounding and Regulation Techniques:** Utilizes grounding exercises to help clients manage intense emotions, creating safety.
- 6.5 Acknowledgment of the Body's Role in Trauma:** Recognizes how trauma can manifest through somatic experiences, encouraging clients to notice physical responses as part of their emotional and mental awareness in sessions.

- 6.6 Body-Based Awareness:** Predetermine and apply somatic practices, such as breath focus, humming, chanting, rhythmic movement, etc. appropriately to help the client manage physical responses, then derive meaning and post-traumatic growth.

7. Trauma-Informed Inquiry and Evokes Awareness

Overview: Engages in non-directive, trauma-sensitive inquiry that supports client-led exploration and awareness, respecting the client's pace and personal insights while adjusting the language and pace for the preference of the client.

Competency Outline:

- 7.1 Reflective Inquiry:** Uses open-ended, non-directive inquiry that facilitates client-led exploration.
- 7.2 Encouragement of Abstract Expression:** Supports and enables comfort for the client in expressing complex emotions through metaphors or abstract language inviting creativity. And coach continues to use metaphorical language as appropriate to deepen awareness and derive meaning.
- 7.3 Trauma-Sensitive Language:** Communicates in an empowering, non-hierarchical manner at all times and places the client in the center of the coaching process enabling the client to own the dialogue.'
- 7.4 Client Feedback Integration:** Actively seeks client feedback on the approach, ensuring alignment with their comfort and needs.

8. Integrates Insights for Post Traumatic Growth and Facilitates Client Healing

Overview: Helps clients integrate insights into their lives, focusing on resilience, healing, post-traumatic growth, and a higher level of meaningful development as an individual.

Competency Outline:

- 8.1 Insight Integration with Goals:** Guides clients in applying insights to broader goals related to healing and growth.
- 8.2 Recognition of Resilience:** Encourages clients to acknowledge their strengths and progress, emphasizing resilience. Normalizes relapses as part of the healing journey and invites clients to identify strategies to minimize relapses in advance.
- 8.3 Values-Driven Growth:** Supports clients in exploring values and goals that are connected to personal meaning and healing.
- 8.4 Celebrates Progress in a Culturally Resonant Way:** Honors achievements in a way that respects the client's cultural values and identity.

- 8.5 Accountability with Compassion:** Co-creates realistic, supportive, and multidimensional accountability steps aligned with client readiness focusing on reintegration into their environment.
- 8.6 Facilitate Post-Traumatic Growth:** Facilitates a dialogue and provides additional measures to foster post-traumatic growth. Helps clients identify practices and mindsets to support long-term resilience and recovery, beyond the immediate coaching goals, allowing for sustainable growth post-coaching.

9. Foundational Knowledge of Trauma and Trauma-Related Disorders

Overview: Coach is equipped with foundational trauma knowledge, trauma-related theories, referral skills, and effective communication with clinicians to ensure informed client support and collaboration with mental health professionals.

Competency Outline:

- 9.1 Understanding Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders:** Knowledgeable about trauma-related disorders like PTSD, recognizing their potential impact within coaching.
- 9.2 Knowledge of Screening Tools:** Understands (strictly not diagnose) DSM-5 and other relevant screening tools to accurately gauge when a referral is appropriate.
- 9.3 Trauma Neurobiology:** Understands trauma's impact on the nervous system to better validate and support client experiences in safety.
- 9.4 Awareness of Trauma-Focused Therapies and Referral Pathways:** Knowledgeable about common trauma therapies, supporting informed referrals.
- 9.5 Seamless Referral and Clinician Collaboration:** Communicates effectively with clinicians to support holistic client care.
- 9.6 Awareness of Trauma-Related Legal and Ethical Standards:** Keeps informed of regional and national legal standards related to trauma and mandatory reporting, ensuring clients are supported within legal frameworks while maintaining trauma-informed care.

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