Nurse Coaching: A Support Nurses Need Now

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What is nurse coaching?

Nurses are trained to assess, educate, advocate, and care. Yet even experienced nurses can lose confidence after workplace conflict, criticism, or a difficult transition. Nurse coaching offers a structured, relationship-centered process to help people clarify what matters, recognize strengths and barriers, set meaningful goals, and choose practical steps toward change. The American Holistic Nurses Credentialing Corporation (AHNCC) describes nurse coaching as skilled and purposeful, with clients recognized as experts in their own needs, values, and lives (AHNCC, n.d.).

That client-directed approach matters. A nurse coach does not take over or hand someone a generic checklist. The coach brings nursing and coaching expertise; the client brings lived experience, priorities, and authority to choose the goal. The work is done with, not for, the client.

After a difficult workplace experience, a nurse might work with a coach to separate facts from self-blame, prepare for a conversation with a manager, set a boundary, or consider a career transition. Another client may focus on leadership, well-being, a health goal, or reconnecting with purpose. The process remains collaborative and action-oriented.

What nurse coaching is not

Nurse coaching is not therapy. Therapy can assess and treat mental health conditions, trauma, or significant emotional distress. Coaching centers on present priorities, strengths, choices, and goals; it does not diagnose or treat mental illness. Coaching may complement therapy but cannot replace it. A responsible nurse coach helps connect clients with appropriate clinical or urgent support when needed.

Nurse coaching also differs from mentoring. Mentors often share experience, advice, and professional guidance. Coaches use questions and reflection to help clients clarify what matters, consider options, and choose a next step. Both approaches can be valuable and may overlap, but they serve different purposes.

Can Nurse Coaching Make a Difference?

Early U.S. findings support nurse coaching as a promising resource for nurse well-being and workforce stability. In a small emergency department project, 8 nurses and 2 advanced practice providers completed 6–8 weeks of wellness coaching. Emotional exhaustion and turnover intention declined, and 90% said coaching helped (Hines-Stellisch et al., 2024). A small study of early-career pediatric nurses found 20-week retention was 100% among coaching participants and 94% among nonparticipants, though engagement gains were not significant (Lang, 2025). Nursing students also rated nurse-coach interventions as beneficial; a 2026 pilot found a preliminary decrease in perceived stress, while students described gaining perspective and practicing self-care (Srivali Teal et al., 2024; Gipson et al., 2026).

Taken together, these findings support including nurse coaching in a broader strategy to promote nurse well-being and workforce stability. Continued evaluation can help organizations strengthen these programs and identify where coaching is most useful.

Why nursing needs it now

Nurses face relentless change, emotional strain, conflict, and increasing responsibility while expected to perform with confidence. When a capable nurse begins second-guessing decisions, the response can focus on individual resilience, even when criticism, exclusion, incivility, moral distress, or an unsafe environment contributed.

Telling that nurse to be more resilient is not enough. Education builds knowledge. Orientation teaches systems and tasks. Mentoring shares experience. Therapy addresses mental health concerns. Nurse coaching fills a different gap: it gives nurses a structured space to rebuild professional self-trust, strengthen their voice, clarify choices, and move forward with intention.

Nurse coaching should not be a perk reserved for nurses in crisis. Alongside safe working conditions, supportive leadership, peer connection, and access to mental health care, it can be part of a broader workforce strategy. Organizations should make coaching accessible and evaluate its outcomes.

Coaching cannot replace organizational responsibility, but it can help nurses clarify needed support and choose actions aligned with their goals. A supported nurse is better positioned to use their knowledge, speak up when something is wrong, and contribute fully to patients, teams, and the profession. ■

References online
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