

PRACTITIONER MANUAL

Strengths-Based Coaching

A Practitioner's Manual for a Six-Session Program

A guided protocol for helping clients live well, work well, and grow on purpose.

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Introduction

Why this program exists

Most people who walk into coaching are not broken. They are capable, resourceful adults who feel stuck, scattered, or quietly dissatisfied with a life they cannot quite name. This program was built for them. It assumes that growth is a normal human appetite, that strengths matter as much as struggles, and that small structural changes — practiced consistently — produce outsized shifts in well-being.

The protocol you are holding is a practical six-session arc. It does not replace therapy and is not designed for clients in acute psychological crisis. Its aim is more modest and, in our experience, more durable: to help a motivated client clarify what matters, recruit the strengths they already own, design behaviors that fit their real life, prepare for predictable setbacks, and build a practice of noticing what is going well.

The science behind a strengths approach

For most of the twentieth century, the helping professions concentrated on what goes wrong in human beings. That work has been invaluable, but it left a blind spot: very little was known about the conditions under which people actually flourish. Over the past several decades, researchers in well-being science have mapped that territory in detail. They have studied what makes communities resilient, what makes work feel meaningful, what makes relationships satisfying, and what habits reliably increase day-to-day happiness. The picture that emerges is consistent: well-being is not the absence of distress, and you do not arrive at it by fixing problems alone. You build it by deliberately practicing a small number of things — pursuing values-aligned goals, using your signature strengths, savoring positive experiences, nurturing relationships, and finding a sense of contribution beyond yourself.

This protocol translates that body of evidence into a sequence a coach can actually deliver in six sessions.

How the six sessions fit together

Each session has a clear job, and the order matters.

Session 1 establishes direction. Without a clear sense of what the client wants and why, every later exercise becomes generic.

Session 2 inventories the resources the client already brings to that direction. Strengths come

before strategy.

Session 3 turns intention into design. The client picks one behavior to change and engineers the conditions for change.

Session 4 anticipates obstacles. Most plans fail not because they were wrong but because they were not protected against predictable friction.

Session 5 broadens the work. Once a behavior is moving, the client begins training the emotional climate in which the behavior lives.

Session 6 consolidates. The client looks back at progress, identifies what to keep, and chooses the next direction independently of you.

Core ingredients of the work

Across all six sessions, four ingredients do most of the heavy lifting.

A real working alliance. Clients change in the presence of someone they experience as fully on their side. Warmth, curiosity, and unconditional regard are not soft skills; they are the active ingredient that makes every exercise in this manual land.

Client-led direction. The client is the expert on their own life. Your job is to ask better questions, not to issue better instructions. When in doubt, return the choice to them.

A strengths lens. Pay relentless attention to what the client already does well. Most adults can name their flaws fluently and their strengths with embarrassment. Reverse that ratio.

Small, repeated experiments. Insight rarely changes behavior. Behavior changes behavior. Every session ends with a concrete, small, between-session experiment the client has chosen and feels capable of completing.

How to use this manual

Each session chapter follows the same structure: a session purpose, a brief theoretical orientation for you the practitioner, a recommended flow, the exercises in full, sample language you can adapt, the homework to assign, and notes on what to watch for. Use the manual as scaffolding, not script. The best sessions happen when you know the structure well enough to depart from it gracefully when the client needs you to.

An important note

This program is an educational and developmental intervention. It is not a substitute for psychotherapy or psychiatric care. If, during intake or in any session, a client presents with severe depression, suicidal ideation, trauma symptoms, active substance dependence, or any condition outside your scope of practice, pause the protocol and refer to an appropriate licensed professional. Doing so is not a failure of the work; it is the work.

Client Information & Intake

Use the forms in this section at the start of the engagement. They give you a baseline, surface anything that needs referral, and quietly signal to the client that this work will be structured and respectful of their time.

Client contact form

Full name

Preferred name / pronouns

Date of birth

Email

Phone

Mailing address

Occupation and current role

Emergency contact (name, relationship, phone)

Primary care physician (optional)

Currently working with a therapist or counselor? (Y/N — name & contact)

Intake questionnaire

1. In one or two sentences, why are you starting coaching now?

2. What would you like to be true about your life six months from now that is not true today?

3. Which area of life feels most alive right now? Which feels most stuck?

4. What have you tried before to address the area you'd like to change? What worked? What didn't?

5. On a scale of 0–10, how satisfied are you with your life overall right now?

6. On a scale of 0–10, how much energy do you have most days?

7. Are you currently experiencing any mental health concerns we should know about?

8. Are you taking any medications that affect mood, sleep, or focus? (Optional)

9. What does support look like at its best for you?

10. Is there anything else you would like your coach to know before we begin?

Session log

Use this log to record each session at a glance.

Date	Session #	Focus / theme	Homework assigned	Homework completed?	Practitioner notes

Values and Goal Setting

Purpose

Help the client name what truly matters to them, identify the area of life that most needs attention right now, and translate that into one or two well-formed goals for the engagement.

Theoretical orientation

People rarely fail at goals because they lack discipline. They fail because the goal was never theirs in the first place — it was inherited from a parent, a peer group, or a younger version of themselves they have outgrown. The first session exists to expose that mismatch before it costs the client another year of effort.

Two questions sit at the heart of this session. First: across the different domains of your life, where are you living in alignment with what you actually value, and where are you not? Second: of the places where you are out of alignment, which one, if it improved, would change the texture of everything else? That second question matters because well-being is ecological. A meaningful improvement in a single high-leverage domain tends to lift the others. A scattered improvement across many domains tends to dissipate.

By the end of this session the client should leave with a chosen domain, a clear picture of what "better" looks like in that domain, and a goal that is specific enough to act on but flexible enough to evolve.

Recommended flow

- Welcome and orient the client to the six-session arc (5 min).
- Exercise 1.1 — Life Compass (15 min).
- Exercise 1.2 — Values clarification (15 min).
- Exercise 1.3 — Choosing a focus area (10 min).
- Exercise 1.4 — Drafting a well-formed goal (10 min).
- Confirm the homework and close (5 min).

Exercises

Exercise 1.1 — Life Compass

Invite the client to list the domains that currently make up their life. Provide examples (work, finances, health, relationships, family, learning, recreation, community, spirituality, environment) but let them rename, combine, or add their own. Aim for between four and ten domains.

Then ask the client to rate, on a 0–10 scale, how satisfied they are in each domain right now. Do not interpret the numbers yet. Just collect them.

Finally, ask: "Looking at the picture, what stands out to you?"

Talking points

- Resist the urge to comment on the lowest score. The client may not want to start there. Let them choose.
- If a domain feels missing — for example, no mention of relationships at all — note it silently rather than calling it out.

Exercise 1.2 — Values clarification

Read aloud, slowly, a list of values (see Appendix A). Ask the client to mark every word that lands as deeply important. Then ask them to narrow the list to ten, and finally to five. The narrowing is where the work happens.

For each of the final five, ask: "What does this value look like when it's alive in your life? When you're a five out of ten on it, what is happening? When you're a nine out of ten, what's happening?"

Talking points

- Some clients will choose values they think they should hold. Watch for hesitation, glance-checking, or language that sounds borrowed. Gently ask, "Whose voice does that sound like?"
- Values are not goals. "Be a great father" is not a value; the values underneath it might be presence, integrity, or playfulness.

Exercise 1.3 — Choosing a focus area

With the Life Compass and the five core values in front of them, ask the client: "Which domain, if it improved over the next few months, would most change how the rest of your life feels?" Sit with the silence. The answer is rarely the lowest-scoring domain. It is usually the domain where the gap between the current experience and a deeply-held value is widest.

Talking points

- If the client cannot decide, ask them to pick the domain they would be most disappointed to leave untouched.
- One domain is enough. Resist the urge to take on two.

Exercise 1.4 — Drafting a well-formed goal

In the chosen domain, help the client draft a goal that meets four tests:

- Personal — it is something they want, not something they should want.
- Concrete — a stranger could tell whether it had been achieved.
- Approach-oriented — it describes what they are moving toward, not what they are running from.
- Within their influence — its fulfillment depends on actions they control.

Capture the goal in the client's own words. Read it back. Ask, "On a scale of zero to ten, how alive does this goal feel when you read it?" If the answer is below seven, keep editing.

Talking points

- "Lose 20 pounds" is concrete but often avoidance-shaped. "Become someone who moves their body daily and enjoys it" is approach-shaped.
- If the client offers a goal that depends on someone else's behavior ("get my partner to listen more"), redirect to what is in their own influence.

HOMEWORK

Between now and our next session, notice — without trying to change anything — the moments when you feel most aligned with your top values, and the moments when you feel furthest from them. Bring three of each to Session 2.

Watchpoints

- Clients sometimes leave Session 1 feeling exposed. End warmly and remind them that the work has begun the moment they named what mattered.
- If the values exercise surfaces grief about how a client has been living, make space for it. Do not rush to a goal.

Strengths in Action

Purpose

Help the client identify and own the strengths they already bring to their chosen goal, and design at least one new way to use a signature strength in service of that goal.

Theoretical orientation

A strength is not just something you happen to be good at. It is a way of being that energizes you, comes naturally even under stress, and tends to be visible to others before it is visible to you. People who use their top strengths regularly report higher engagement at work, more satisfying relationships, and a greater sense of meaning. People who do not, often feel competent but flat.

The catch is that most adults cannot name their strengths cleanly. They describe their strengths as "just what anyone would do" and reserve the language of skill for things that are difficult. This session corrects that lens. The aim is not just to produce a list, but to help the client begin treating their strengths as deployable resources.

Recommended flow

- Review homework: alignment moments and misalignment moments (10 min).
- Exercise 2.1 — Strengths spotting (15 min).
- Exercise 2.2 — Reflected best self (15 min).
- Exercise 2.3 — A new use of a signature strength (15 min).
- Confirm the homework and close (5 min).

Exercises

Exercise 2.1 — Strengths spotting

Read the strengths inventory in Appendix B aloud, group by group. Ask the client to mark each

strength with one of three labels: Core (this is unmistakably me), Developing (I can access this sometimes), or Not me (this isn't where I shine).

When finished, look only at the Core list. Ask the client to narrow it to their top five — the ones that, if removed, would make them feel like a stranger to themselves.

Talking points

- If the client wants to add Developing items to the top five, redirect: "For now, only the ones that are unmistakably you."
- Watch for clients who score modestly across the board. Ask, "If a close friend were doing this exercise about you, which would they underline?"

Exercise 2.2 — Reflected best self

Ask the client to recall a specific moment, in any area of life, when they felt most alive and most themselves. Walk them through it slowly: where were they, who was there, what were they doing, what made it feel like that? Then ask: "Which of your top strengths were active in that moment?" Map the connection out loud.

This produces an experiential anchor for each strength — a felt-sense memory the client can return to when they need to access the strength again.

Talking points

- If the client struggles to find a moment, prompt with categories: a moment with a child, a piece of work you were proud of, a time you handled something hard.
- Note the strengths that show up in their best-self memory but weren't in the top five. Those are often unclaimed strengths.

Exercise 2.3 — A new use of a signature strength

Bring back the goal from Session 1. Ask the client: "Of your top strengths, which one is most underused in service of this goal right now?" Then design, together, one new way to deploy that strength in the coming week. Keep it small. The aim is a five-minute experiment, not a transformation.

Talking points

- Examples: a client whose top strength is curiosity, working on a fitness goal, might commit to researching one new form of movement this week. A client whose top strength is connection might agree to do their next workout with a friend.
- Resist designing the experiment for them. The ownership matters more than the elegance.

HOMEWORK

Run the strengths experiment we designed at least three times this week. Each time, write one sentence afterwards: what happened, and how it felt. Bring those sentences to Session 3.

Watchpoints

- Some clients respond to strengths work with discomfort or dismissal. That discomfort is often the point. Stay with it.
- If a client insists they have no strengths, that is itself useful information. Ask gently where that belief came from.

Designing Behavioral Change

Purpose

Translate the goal and strengths from previous sessions into a specific, sustainable behavior the client will practice between now and the end of the program.

Theoretical orientation

Behavior change is rarely a willpower problem. It is almost always a design problem. The most committed adult, dropped into a poorly designed environment, will fail. The least motivated adult, supported by a well-designed environment, will succeed more often than they expect.

Three design principles do most of the work in this session. First, behaviors are easier when they are tiny. A two-minute version of a behavior beats a thirty-minute version that gets skipped. Second, behaviors stick when they are anchored to existing routines rather than to time alone. "After I pour my morning coffee" is more reliable than "at seven a.m." Third, behaviors persist when the immediate experience of doing them is more rewarding than the immediate experience of skipping them. The client's job is not to muscle through unpleasantness; it is to engineer pleasantness into the behavior itself.

Recommended flow

- Review the strengths experiment from Session 2 (10 min).
- Exercise 3.1 — Naming the keystone behavior (10 min).
- Exercise 3.2 — Shrinking the behavior (10 min).
- Exercise 3.3 — Anchoring and rewarding (15 min).
- Exercise 3.4 — Tracking design (10 min).
- Confirm the homework and close (5 min).

Exercises

Exercise 3.1 — Naming the keystone behavior

Ask the client: "If, between now and our final session, you reliably did one thing — and only one thing — that would move you closer to your goal, what would that thing be?" Capture the answer as a verb-led behavior: "walk for ten minutes after lunch," not "be more active."

Talking points

- If the client offers two behaviors, push them to choose. Two behaviors usually means neither will happen.
- Test the behavior against the goal. If the client did this, three or four times a week, would the goal noticeably move? If not, rework.

Exercise 3.2 — Shrinking the behavior

Whatever version of the behavior the client proposes, ask: "What's the smallest version of this you could do on your worst day and still count as having done it?" That smallest version becomes the floor. The client may often do more — but only the floor counts as required.

Talking points

- Clients regularly resist shrinking. They feel it isn't enough. Reassure them: the floor protects the streak; the streak is what produces the change.

Exercise 3.3 — Anchoring and rewarding

Identify a stable existing routine and tether the new behavior to it: "After I [existing routine], I will [new behavior]." Then ask: "What can we add — before, during, or immediately after — that makes the experience itself enjoyable?" Music, a favorite drink, a phone call, an environment change, a tiny celebration.

Talking points

- Avoid rewards that contradict the goal (food rewards for a fitness behavior, screen rewards for a focus behavior).
- An immediate reward, even a small one, beats a delayed reward almost every time.

Exercise 3.4 — Tracking design

Choose, with the client, the simplest possible way to mark whether the behavior happened on a given day. A paper calendar with an X. A note on the fridge. A box ticked in a journal. Avoid elaborate apps. The tracking system is a tool, not a project.

Talking points

- If the client misses a day, the rule is: never miss twice. One miss is human; two misses is a pattern.

HOMEWORK

Practice the keystone behavior, at the floor or above, every day this week. Track each day. Notice on which days it felt easy, on which days it felt hard, and what was different. Bring the tracker to Session 4.

Watchpoints

- If a client returns next session reporting they did the behavior every day with no friction, congratulate them and gently raise the floor. If they did not do it at all, do not interpret that as failure. It is data about a design flaw, which is the subject of Session 4.

Obstacles and Coping

Purpose

Help the client identify the predictable obstacles to their new behavior, develop concrete coping strategies, and build a self-compassionate response to setbacks.

Theoretical orientation

Every behavior change runs into the same four categories of obstacle: internal states (low energy, low mood, anxiety), interpersonal friction (other people's needs, expectations, or sabotage), environmental design (travel, disruption, missing equipment), and identity stories ("I'm not the kind of person who does this"). Clients who plan for these obstacles in advance recover from them faster. Clients who do not, treat the first obstacle as proof that the whole plan was wrong.

The second half of this session is about what happens after a miss. The single biggest predictor of long-term behavior change is not how often the client succeeds; it is how quickly they return to the behavior after a slip. Self-criticism, counterintuitively, makes that return slower. Self-compassion makes it faster.

Recommended flow

- Review the tracker from Session 3 (10 min).
- Exercise 4.1 — Obstacle mapping (15 min).
- Exercise 4.2 — If-then planning (15 min).
- Exercise 4.3 — The compassionate restart (15 min).
- Confirm the homework and close (5 min).

Exercises

Exercise 4.1 — Obstacle mapping

Walk through the four obstacle categories with the client: internal, interpersonal, environmental, identity. For each category, ask: "In the past week, did anything in this category make the behavior harder? In the next month, what is most likely to?"

Capture each obstacle in the client's own words on a single page they will keep.

Talking points

- If a client says "nothing" in a category, prompt with the previous week. Specific memory beats general prediction.
- Note the category that produces the most discomfort. That category often holds the highest-leverage obstacle.

Exercise 4.2 — If-then planning

For the three obstacles the client rates as most likely or most disruptive, build an if-then statement together: "If [obstacle], then I will [specific action]." The action should be small, rehearsable, and within the client's control.

Talking points

- Avoid if-then plans that depend on willpower ("then I will be more disciplined"). Replace with concrete actions ("then I will do the two-minute version," "then I will text my accountability partner").
- Have the client read each plan out loud. Vocalizing increases the chance they will recall it under stress.

Exercise 4.3 — The compassionate restart

Ask the client: "When you miss a day or fall off the plan, what do you usually say to yourself?" Most clients will offer a harsh, familiar inner monologue. Then ask: "What would you say to a friend you cared about who had missed in exactly the same way?" Capture that second voice. Help the client write a brief, specific restart script — three or four sentences they will read to themselves the next time they miss.

Talking points

- Self-compassion is not letting yourself off the hook. It is treating yourself the way a wise coach would: honestly, kindly, and with the assumption that you will keep going.

HOMEWORK

Continue the keystone behavior. Carry the obstacle map and the if-then plans with you. If you miss, read the restart script before you do anything else. Notice whether the response feels different.

Watchpoints

- Clients with strong perfectionist tendencies will resist the compassionate restart. Stay with it. The restart script is often the single most useful artifact of the entire program.
- If obstacles cluster in the interpersonal category, consider whether the next session needs to spend additional time on relationships rather than moving directly to positive emotions.

Cultivating Positive Emotions

Purpose

Help the client deliberately broaden the range and frequency of positive emotions they experience, using practices that are simple, evidence-based, and sustainable beyond the program.

Theoretical orientation

Positive emotions are not decorative. They serve two distinct functions. In the moment, they widen attention, encourage exploration, and make creative connection more likely. Over time, they accumulate into psychological resources — resilience, optimism, social bonds, sense of purpose — that the person can draw on under stress. This is sometimes called the "broaden and build" effect, and it has been demonstrated across age groups and cultures.

Positive emotions also operate on a different timescale than negative ones. Negative emotions are usually loud, fast, and easy to remember. Positive emotions are usually quieter, briefer, and easy to overlook unless deliberately attended to. The practices in this session are about training that attention.

Recommended flow

- Review the past week and the use of the restart script (10 min).
- Exercise 5.1 — The three good things practice (10 min).
- Exercise 5.2 — A savoring inventory (15 min).
- Exercise 5.3 — A gratitude letter (15 min).
- Exercise 5.4 — Acts of meaningful generosity (10 min).
- Confirm the homework and close (5 min).

Exercises

Exercise 5.1 — The three good things practice

Introduce the practice: at the end of each day, the client writes down three things that went well, however small, and one sentence about why each happened. The "why" matters more than the "what."

Demonstrate it together using the past 24 hours.

Talking points

- Encourage specificity. "My coffee tasted good" is fine; "my coffee tasted good because I took five minutes to actually drink it instead of working through it" is better.
- The practice typically produces noticeable mood shifts within two weeks of consistent use.

Exercise 5.2 — A savoring inventory

Ask the client to list the small daily experiences that already bring them pleasure but tend to pass by unnoticed: a particular song, the first stretch of the morning, the smell of a meal cooking, a child's laugh, a familiar walk. Aim for at least ten.

Then choose one to deliberately savor each day for the coming week — to slow down inside it, to stay with the experience an extra ten or fifteen seconds, and to consciously notice.

Talking points

- Savoring is not about adding new pleasant experiences. It is about extracting more from the ones the client already has.

Exercise 5.3 — A gratitude letter

Ask the client to think of a person who has had a meaningful positive impact on their life and whom they have never properly thanked. Have them draft a short letter — a paragraph or two — describing exactly what the person did and how it shaped them.

Whether the letter is delivered is up to the client. The act of writing it produces the effect.

Talking points

- If the letter is delivered in person and read aloud, the effect on well-being tends to be larger and more durable. Mention this without pressuring.

Exercise 5.4 — Acts of meaningful generosity

Brainstorm three small acts the client could do this week that would benefit someone else and require modest effort: a sincere message to someone they admire, a small unsolicited help to a colleague, time given to a cause they care about. Choose one to commit to.

Talking points

- Acts of generosity reliably increase the giver's well-being more than acts of self-care of equivalent size. Mention this; it often surprises clients.

HOMEWORK

Pick at least two of the four practices and run them every day for the coming week. Continue the keystone behavior. Bring observations to Session 6 — what worked, what didn't, what

surprised you.

Watchpoints

- Clients who are skeptical of "positivity work" often respond best to the savoring exercise, which feels quieter and less performative than gratitude. Start there with them.
- If a client reports the practices feel forced, normalize that. Forced is fine. Repetition does the work.

Review and the Road Ahead

Purpose

Help the client consolidate what they have learned, recognize the changes they have made, and design a sustainable practice and next-direction without you.

Theoretical orientation

The final session has three jobs that the client will not do on their own: an honest review of progress, a deliberate harvest of insights worth keeping, and a clean handoff back to the client's own authorship. The danger of a final session is that it becomes either a victory lap or a list of things still wrong. The work is to hold both — what has changed, and what remains — without flinching from either.

Recommended flow

- Open with appreciation and a brief check-in (5 min).
- Exercise 6.1 — Then and now (15 min).
- Exercise 6.2 — Harvesting what works (10 min).
- Exercise 6.3 — Designing the maintenance practice (15 min).
- Exercise 6.4 — Naming the next direction (10 min).
- Closing ritual (5 min).

Exercises

Exercise 6.1 — Then and now

Bring back the Life Compass from Session 1 and the goal the client wrote in Exercise 1.4. Ask them to re-rate each domain from 0–10 today, alongside the original ratings. Where has something moved? Where has it not?

Then ask: "In your own words, what is different about how you're living now compared to six

sessions ago?"

Talking points

- Honor the changes that are not on the original goal. Often the most meaningful shifts happen in domains the client wasn't consciously working on.

Exercise 6.2 — Harvesting what works

Walk back through the program and identify the practices, exercises, frameworks, or insights the client wants to keep. Be concrete: "the restart script," "the if-then plan around evenings," "the savoring practice on the morning walk." Aim for between three and six items.

Talking points

- Less is more. A short list the client will actually use beats a long list that gathers dust.

Exercise 6.3 — Designing the maintenance practice

Help the client design the lightest possible ongoing practice that will keep the gains in place: a weekly review, a monthly self-check-in, a quarterly re-rating of the Life Compass. Choose the day and time. Put it on the calendar before the session ends.

Talking points

- If the maintenance practice takes more than 15 minutes a week, it will not survive. Shrink until it will.

Exercise 6.4 — Naming the next direction

Ask: "With everything you have learned about yourself in these six sessions, what is the next direction you want to grow in?" Capture it as a single sentence. The aim is not a new goal with the same precision as Session 1; it is a direction the client now owns.

Talking points

- Resist the urge to coach the new direction in this session. Give it back to the client to carry on their own.

HOMEWORK

Run the maintenance practice on its scheduled day this week. Read the harvest list once. Notice what the experience of the next direction is like without a coach in the room.

Watchpoints

- Endings matter. End on time, with warmth, and with confidence in the client. They are leaving as the author of their own next chapter.
- If a client wants to continue working with you, schedule that as a new engagement, not a continuation of this one.

Practitioner Guidance

The coaching stance

The most useful posture across all six sessions is curious, warm, and unhurried. Resist the pull to demonstrate expertise. Ask one good question and stay quiet. Most of the meaningful work in coaching happens in the silence after the question, not in the next thing you say.

Common practitioner pitfalls

Three patterns reliably reduce the effectiveness of this protocol.

Rushing the early sessions. Sessions 1 and 2 feel slow. Practitioners under pressure to "get to the change work" sometimes compress them and pay for it later, when the behavior plan in Session 3 has no values to anchor to.

Over-customizing the language. The exercises are written deliberately. Clients read your confidence in the structure as confidence in them. If you treat the protocol as a rough draft, they will too.

Becoming the source of motivation. If your client is doing the work because you are excited about it, the work will not survive your absence. Notice when motivation is being externally supplied and quietly hand it back.

Ethics and scope of practice

Coaching is not therapy. The line is not always crisp, but a few principles help. Coaching addresses present and future functioning in non-clinical populations. Therapy addresses diagnosable mental health conditions and the past as it intrudes on the present. If a client's presentation drifts toward the second category — persistent low mood, trauma symptoms, intrusive thoughts, suicidal ideation, active addiction — pause the coaching frame and refer.

Maintain confidentiality. Be transparent about what you record and where it lives. Obtain written consent for any recording. If you supervise or consult on cases, anonymize. If you use any AI tools in your practice, tell the client and tell them what data, if any, is sent to those tools.

When to refer

Refer to a licensed mental health professional when you observe any of the following: signs of

major depression that have lasted more than two weeks; any mention of suicide or self-harm, current or historical; trauma responses that interfere with daily function; substance use the client cannot voluntarily moderate; eating patterns that suggest a clinical disorder; or any concern that exceeds your training. Refer warmly. Frame the referral as expanding the client's support, not replacing you.

Caring for yourself

Coaching is relational labor. It is also rewarding labor that compounds if you do not tend to it. Build into your practice the same things you ask of clients: a strengths-based identity, a sustainable behavior plan, an obstacle map, positive emotion practices, and a regular review. Have your own coach or supervisor. Take real time off. The work will be there when you return.

Appendix

Appendix A — Values vocabulary

Use this list during Exercise 1.2. Read aloud, group by group. Add or substitute words that fit your client's vocabulary.

Connection cluster: belonging, friendship, intimacy, family, community, loyalty, love, presence, hospitality, kinship.

Contribution cluster: service, generosity, mentorship, stewardship, justice, fairness, social impact, advocacy, citizenship, legacy.

Mastery cluster: excellence, craftsmanship, learning, growth, competence, discipline, focus, mastery, rigor, skill.

Autonomy cluster: independence, self-direction, sovereignty, freedom, authenticity, integrity, courage, honesty, voice, agency.

Vitality cluster: health, energy, play, adventure, beauty, sensuality, rest, joy, spontaneity, embodiment.

Meaning cluster: purpose, faith, spirituality, wisdom, transcendence, wonder, reverence, contemplation, calling, alignment.

Stability cluster: security, peace, balance, simplicity, order, reliability, prudence, patience, stewardship, home.

Appendix B — Strengths inventory

Use this list during Exercise 2.1. Read aloud, group by group.

Thinking strengths: curiosity, love of learning, judgment, creativity, perspective, strategic thinking, analytical depth, intellectual humility.

Heart strengths: kindness, empathy, love, generosity, emotional honesty, warmth, capacity for connection, capacity for forgiveness.

Will strengths: courage, perseverance, integrity, honesty, conscientiousness, resilience, self-discipline, follow-through.

Community strengths: leadership, fairness, teamwork, citizenship, mentorship, hospitality, capacity to repair, capacity to mediate.

Self-management strengths: prudence, humility, self-regulation, self-awareness, capacity to rest, capacity to receive feedback.

Spirit strengths: gratitude, hope, humor, awe, spirituality, capacity to savor, capacity to find meaning, capacity for stillness.

Appendix C — Emotion vocabulary

Many clients have a narrow emotional vocabulary, especially on the positive side. Offer the list below as a reference for Exercises 5.1 and 5.2.

Positive activating: joy, excitement, enthusiasm, pride, awe, inspiration, amusement, delight, eagerness, vitality.

Positive calming: peace, contentment, gratitude, affection, tenderness, ease, trust, relief, satisfaction, serenity.

Positive social: love, belonging, compassion, admiration, warmth, appreciation, kinship, gratitude-toward, pride-in-other, tenderness.

Appendix D — Suggested further reading

For practitioners who want to deepen the theoretical foundation of this protocol, look into the published literature on well-being science, habit formation, self-compassion, and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. Avoid relying on any single source. Triangulate.

Appendix E — Session-at-a-glance summary

Session 1 — Values and Goal Setting. Outcome: a chosen domain, top values, and a well-formed goal.

Session 2 — Strengths in Action. Outcome: top five strengths and a new use of one signature strength.

Session 3 — Designing Behavioral Change. Outcome: a keystone behavior, a floor version, an anchor, a reward, and a tracker.

Session 4 — Obstacles and Coping. Outcome: an obstacle map, three if-then plans, and a compassionate restart script.

Session 5 — Cultivating Positive Emotions. Outcome: at least two daily well-being practices in active use.

Session 6 — Review and the Road Ahead. Outcome: a re-rated Life Compass, a harvest list, a maintenance practice, and a named next direction.