



# **PRACTICAL GUIDE**

## **TO DISCOVER THE PROFESSIONAL NLP COACH'S TERRITORY**

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**OR HOW TO DEFINE THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN  
NLP COACHING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY**

*September 2017*

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Marianne Gagnon, SICPNL Chair

Anne-Laure Nouvion, Ph.D., SICPNL Vice-chair

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## **SPECIAL COLLABORATION**

Working Group (see annex)

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to establish a frame of reference for the professional practise of NLP coaching. It highlights the boundary between NLP coaching and psychotherapy and suggests parameters that delineate the NLP coach's practise in Quebec's current legislative context.

The illegal practise division of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec (OPQ) was consulted to ensure that the content of this document does not contravene the Act to amend the Professional Code and other legislative provisions in the field of mental health and human (Bill 21). It is, however, understood that the content of this document reflects only the views of SICPNL.

### **“Coaching or psychotherapy” decision-making tool**

To delimit the coach's “territory,” the SICPNL created the “coaching or psychotherapy” tree diagram presented at the end of this document. It is intended for Professional Certified NLP coaches, but it may be of interest to other support professionals, particularly those whose interventions do not constitute psychotherapy within the meaning of the second paragraph of section 187.1 of the Professional Code.

It may also be useful for people wondering which support approach to pursue: “Should I consult a coach or a psychotherapist?”

This tool stems from a generative collaboration among Professional Certified NLP coaches (presented in the annex).

The purpose of this tool is double:

1. Protecting and directing people to the appropriate professional;
2. Offering NLP-coaching professionals a decision-making tool regarding the point at which a psychotherapeutic approach should be recommended.

## THE PROFESSIONAL CERTIFIED NLP COACH'S AREAS OF INTERVENTION

The coaching professional is often described as change facilitator, a lever for upgrading talents, potential or internal resources. The latter definition is also accepted by a variety of professional orders and is formalized in the *Regulation respecting the psychotherapist's permit*, chapter C-26, r. 222.1. It states that “coaching is to update one’s potential by developing talents, resources or skills in a person neither in distress nor in pain, but who expresses particular needs in terms of personal or professional achievements.”

NLP coaching differs from other coaching approaches by its characteristic reference to and use of NLP. For a full article on NLP coaching and the NLP approach as such, please refer to the article entitled “*Le coaching PNL, une profession en plein essor,*” which is available on the SICPNL website found at <http://sicpnl.org/pnlvaleurajoute.asp> (French only).

Thus, depending on the context in which the coach intervenes (personal/life coaching, family coaching or executive/corporate coaching) and upon the client’s reason for seeking consultation, the Professional Certified NLP coach may have to (partial list):

- accompany and support his client through occasional difficulties of daily life;
- decode his client’s behavioural strategies, enabling him to reach a specific goal;
- reinforce his client’s achievements by enabling him to update his strengths, winning strategies and helpful behaviours;
- intervene on personal and familial level by supporting the functioning of the couple, helping those concerned develop better communication skills and blossoming of their parent-child relationship.

It appears that the NLP coach's professional practise is more far-reaching than the coaching activity described in Bill 21's explanatory guide (French version), which targets other interventions that are not psychotherapy, as defined in the Professional Code's *Regulation respecting the psychotherapist's permit* (chapter C-26, ss. 187.1, 187.3.1 and 187.3.2), particularly the following interventions:



1. **accompaniment and support** of a person through regular or sporadic meetings, so that the person may express his or her difficulties. In such a context, the professional or intervener may give advice or make recommendations;
2. **support intervention** to support a person so that the person may maintain and consolidate acquired skills and adaptation strategies by targeting strengths and resources through regular or sporadic meetings or activities. The intervention includes reassuring, advising and providing information related to the person's condition or the experienced situation;
3. **conjugal and family intervention** designed to promote and support the optimal functioning of the couple or family by means of interviews that often involve all the family members. Such intervention is intended to change the factors in the functioning of the family or couple that impede the couple's or family members' blossoming or to offer assistance and advice in the face of everyday life's difficulties;
4. **crisis intervention** consisting in an immediate, short and directing intervention adjusted to the type of crisis, the characteristics of the person and of the person's surrounding. It is intended to stabilize the condition of the person or the person's environment in connection with the crisis situation. That type of intervention may involve exploring the situation and assessing possible consequences, for instance, the danger potential, suicidal risk or risk of decompensation, defusing, support, the teaching of adaptation strategies to deal with the experienced situation and orientation towards services or care more adapted to the needs."



#### SUMMARY – SICPNL's definition of NLP coaching

NLP coaching, because of its use and reference of the NLP, includes:

1. coaching as defined in Bill 21's explanatory guide (French version);
2. as well as other interventions that are not psychotherapy and are defined in Bill 21's explanatory guide (French version).

## NLP COACHING OR PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Both NLP coaching and psychotherapy aim to achieve the client's well-being. There is, however, a distinction between these two approaches. As to not impede on a psychotherapist's territory, it is of utmost importance for the NLP coach to know when he should refer his client to a psychologist or psychotherapist.

Three key elements have been identified to define this boundary between NLP coaching and psychotherapy:

1. The client
2. The mandate
3. The cause

### KEY ELEMENT NO. 1: THE CLIENT

The NLP coach's practise has a greater scope than the coaching activity defined in the *Regulation respecting the psychotherapist's permit*, chapter C-26, r. 222.1. The Professional Certified NLP coach may be able to support and guide a client who is suffering or in psychological distress. **However, SICPNL recommends that NPL coaches work with autonomous and functional clients**, as defined by the following indicators:

#### 1. INTENSITY AND CHRONICITY of the suffering/psychological distress.

The boundary between a coaching approach and a psychotherapeutic one is assessed according to the intensity and frequency of the suffering or psychological distress expressed by the individual. The following questions must be evaluated:

- To what extent is this suffering regular and repeated?
- How long do the episodes last?
- How well is the individual functioning?

A coaching client has a “normal” level of functioning as well as a “normal” level of intensity and chronicity with respect to suffering or psychological distress\*. A client describing suffering or distress with an intensity and frequency involving **dysfunctional chronicity** will be directed to engage in a psychotherapeutic process.

*\* The “Psychopathological Guidelines for Coaches” training better equips coaches who would like to develop their acuity regarding the notion of “normality.”*

## 2. SMART OBJECTIVE

A client engaged in NLP coaching must be able to formulate a defined objective that is “SMART”: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound.

## 3. TAKING THE INITIATIVE

The coach must see that his client is taking the initiative, a first step toward reaching his goal. If no sign of change is seen at the end of three meetings, the client will be referred to another health professional (psychologist, psychotherapist, attending physician, etc.).

## KEY ELEMENT NO. 2: THE MANDATE

NPL-coaching mandate can focus on any problem stemming from daily life. However, a client who presents a problem related to a diagnosis of mental disorder or referencing a traumatic event\* will be asked to specify the reason for his consultation:

- If the reason for the consultation involves work targeting the **treatment of a mental disorder or the source\*** of the distress or the psychological suffering, the client will be referred to another health professional (psychologist, psychotherapist, attending physician, etc.).

- The coach is able to support and guide a client who presents such problems on the condition that:
  1. the mandate does not involve work that targets a mental disorder;
  2. the above-mentioned autonomy criteria is respected;
  3. the mandate involves work based on a defined objective in “SMART” terms: **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**ttainable, **r**ealistic and **t**ime-bound.

### KEY ELEMENT NO. 3: THE CAUSE

During a coaching process, the client may, unintentionally, become aware of a traumatic event\*, the cause of blockages or fears that prevent the attainment of his objective. Even if the client is autonomous and functional (criteria no. 1) and the coaching mandate respects the guidelines specified above (criteria no. 2), it is the coach’s responsibility to adjust his intervention. His responsibilities are as follows:

1. Receiving the client’s emotion, feelings, experience;
2. Supporting his client in the mobilization of his personal resources (e.g., self-confidence, calm, sense of security, etc.);
3. Reassessing the mandate.

Under no circumstances may the coach work on **the source of traumas**.

Thus on the basis of his readjustment, the coach will be able to refer his client to another health professional (psychologist, psychotherapist, attending physician, etc.).

*\* The “Psychopathological Guidelines for Coaches” training (see next paragraph) will enable coaches to define the following terms (partial list): psychological treatment, suffering and psychological distress, mental disorders and DSM-5, traumatic event, etc.*

## “PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR COACHES” TRAINING

To effectively equip the full spectrum of a coach’s professional activity and duly complete his NLP training, SICPNL suggests that “Psychopathological Guidelines for Coaches” training become mandatory. SICPNL is considering the possibility of making this training a requirement for coaches who are association members, either during the coach’s education at schools whose curriculum is SICPNL-accredited or as part of a continuing education program. Today, the “Psychopathological Guidelines for Coaches” training is accredited by SICPNL as continuing education. At this time, this training is offered by Sébastien Beaulieu, PCC, organizational psychologist and executive NLP coach.

### **General objective of training program**

*(excerpt of training program description by Sébastien Beaulieu, PCC, organizational psychologist and executive NLP coach)*

Since psychotherapy is a reserved act regulated by the Professional Code, most coaches are aware of the importance of complying with the law. But is it always easy to define the boundary between coaching and psychotherapy? In Quebec, coaches are generally not trained to identify the clinical boundaries that, paradoxically, they are legally bound to respect.

As additional training, “Psychopathological Guidelines for Coaches” aims to allow coaches to develop the ability to refer to a psychotherapist, psychologist, physician or other recognized health professional and thus better circumscribe the limits of their function.

The training’s principal educational objectives are:

- To detect with greater discernment which potential clients to accept or refuse;
- To identify the signals indicating that a client must be referred more quickly.

## DECISION-MAKING TOOL: COACHING OR PSYCHOTHERAPY?

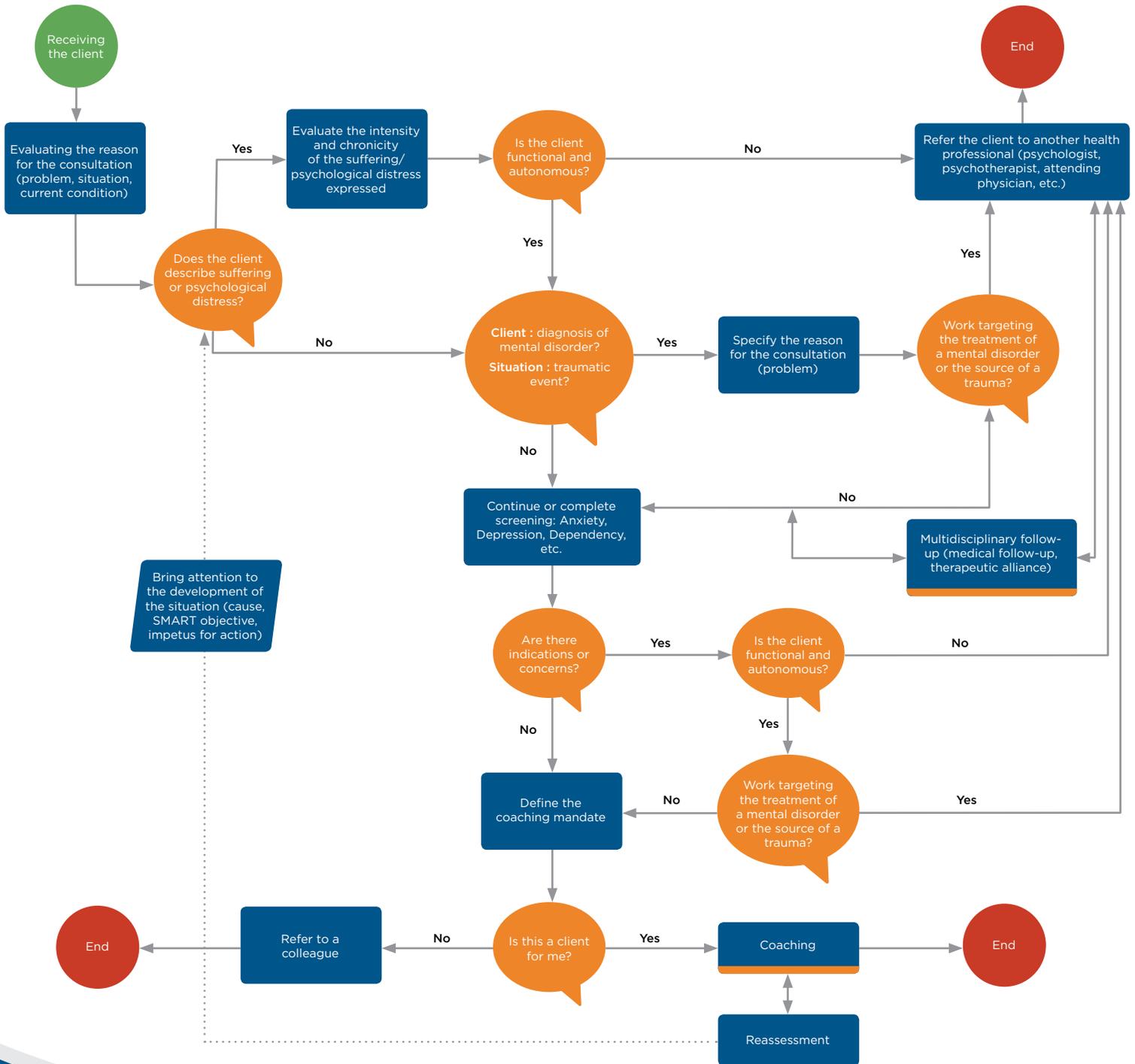
To guide the professional with respect to the boundary between coaching and psychotherapy, SICPNL has designed a decision-making tool. Beyond the techniques used in NPL coaching, this tool illustrates the decisions to be made with respect to the client (key element no. 1), the mandate (key element no. 2) and the cause (key element no. 3) in order to respect the guidelines that delimit the coach's territory.

Legend: Decision-making process:

	Beginning of process
	End of process
	Action
	Choice
	Complex process
	Data

# DECISION-MAKING TOOL - BOUNDARY BETWEEN NLP COACHING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Recommended training:  
 "Psychopathological Guidelines for Coaches"



## ANNEX

### WORKING GROUPS

#### THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN NLP COACHING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

##### For the Montreal region

Under the direction of Marianne Gagnon and Anne-Laure Nouvion:

- Nathalie Galarneau, certified NLP coach
- Suzanne Gaudreault, trainer and certified NLP coach
- Carole Hardy, NLP-certified coach
- Sylvie Lefebvre, attorney and certified NLP coach
- Brigitte Lévesque, NLP therapist
- Giovanna Lucia, certified NLP coach
- Monique Turcotte, certified NLP coach
- Maria Vieira, certified NLP coach

##### Special Collaboration:

- Sébastien Beaulieu, PCC, organizational psychologist and executive NLP coach
- Dominique Dorais-Pagé, Ph.D. (psychologist) and certified NLP coach
- Francine d'Ortun, Ph.D. and certified NLP coach
- Sylvie Guignon, Ph.D.
- Sylvie Lefebvre, attorney and certified NLP coach
- Guillaume Leroutier, trainer and certified NLP coach

##### For the Quebec region

Under the direction of Monique Turcotte and Jacques Gagné:

- France Bélanger, certified NLP coach
- Elaine Boulet, certified NLP coach
- Linda Danis, certified NLP coach
- Dominique Dorais-Pagé, Ph.D. (psychologist) and certified NLP coach
- Dany Francoeur, certified NLP coach
- Pauline Francoeur, trainer and certified NLP coach
- Martine Hébert, certified NLP coach
- Colette Normandeau, master trainer and certified NLP coach
- Guylaine Otis, certified NLP coach
- Danielle Ouellette, certified NLP coach
- Line Paquette, certified NLP coach
- Sylvie Tremblay, certified NLP coach



**SOCIÉTÉ INTERNATIONALE DES COACHS PNL**

C.P. 76027, Comptoir postal Mascouche  
Mascouche (Québec) Canada J7K 3N9

Tél. : 1-888-863-4981 • Courriel : [info@sicpnl.org](mailto:info@sicpnl.org) • Web : [www.sicpnl.org](http://www.sicpnl.org)