SCOPE
Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education

Remote Coaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Continuity and Innovation of Coaching Strategies Focused on Improving Practices with Children

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Introduction

Research evidence suggests coaching is a promising professional development approach in early care and education (ECE). It can improve the instructional practices of teachers and family child care (FCC) providers, the quality of the setting, and children's outcomes (Aikens and Akers 2011; Isner et al. 2011). Coaching is an especially important approach to professional development because it can be tailored in content and mode of delivery to meet teachers' and FCC providers' needs. Coaching might take many forms to meet specific needs of programs, teachers, and FCC providers, and coaching can be delivered in a variety of ways (in person, virtually, or with a combination of these approaches) (Aikens et al. 2017; Artman-Meeker et al. 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted services for children and families, and this had implications for the practice of coaching. During the early months of the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and most state and local government organizations deemed many early childhood educators essential workers (The Hunt Institute 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020; Swigonski et al. 2021). However, in response to state and local guidelines for safely operating early learning programs, some programs limited the number of children served, transitioned to providing virtual services, or closed entirely (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020; Swigonski et al. 2021; Crawford et al. 2021; Lloyd et al. 2021). As the pandemic progressed, more settings returned to in-person services, but safety concerns remained (Gilliam et al. 2021; Lee and Parolin 2021; Zero to Three 2020).

Within this changed ECE landscape, some coaches discontinued their work, whereas others rapidly adjusted the way they provided coaching; in some cases, this included a shift to virtual coaching services for teachers and FCC providers (Crawford et al. 2021; Lloyd et al. 2021). However, little is known about the specific changes to the strategies or delivery of coaching, or about the challenges coaches faced in making those changes.

This brief describes information about coaching that we gathered in 2021—about 18 months into the pandemic—from surveys and qualitative interviews with coaches, FCC providers, and center directors. We focus on understanding remote coaching and various coaching strategies, such as modeling and observation, during this time frame. In addition, we describe reported changes in the use of some coaching strategies by comparing information from the 2021 surveys of coaches with the 2019 surveys of the same coaches. We collected the surveys and interviews as part of the Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings (SCOPE; see Overview box).

The brief addresses the following research questions:

1. Remote coaching: How commonly did coaches use it in the fall of 2021 (about 18 months into the pandemic), and how did this compare to before the pandemic?

2. What advantages and challenges were there in remote coaching in the fall of 2021?

3. Did coaches feel prepared to coach remotely, and did they receive support?

4. What coaching strategies were in use for improving practices with children 18 months into the pandemic (in the fall of 2021)? Did coaches use those strategies remotely or in person? How did this compare to before the pandemic?

SCOPE used a purposive sample, and, as a result, is not representative of a particular coaching model or of a broader population of centers and FCC homes. The SCOPE 2021 sample is also small, which limits what can be learned about subgroups of the sample, such as coaches working remotely with center-based teachers.[1] In addition, although we compared coaching strategies before and during the pandemic and discussed changes that might have been prompted by the pandemic, we cannot say all the changes are a result of the pandemic. Nevertheless, these exploratory findings can inform the ECE field about coaching strategies used to support ECE teachers and providers during a time of change and crisis. The findings also indicate important areas for additional learning to understand what methods and supports might be beneficial to maintain or improve going forward.

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[1] We describe the patterns in this brief, but we did not conduct significance tests for the comparisons because of small sample size.

Overview

Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings

The Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings (SCOPE) was funded by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. Mathematica conducted this project in partnership with consultant Chrishana M. Lloyd (Myles Ahead, LLC); Child Trends; and the Children's Learning Institute at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. For a more detailed description of the study design, see SCOPE About the Study brief (ACF 2022).

SCOPE goals. The primary goal of the SCOPE project was to learn more about the ways coaching is implemented to improve instructional practices in early care and education. SCOPE focused on coaching in center-based classrooms and family child care (FCC) homes that served preschool-age children from families with low incomes. SCOPE also explored the programmatic and systems-level factors associated with coaching.

Data collection and respondents. SCOPE 2019 surveys: From February to July 2019, SCOPE conducted web-based surveys with coaches, center directors, center-based teachers, and FCC providers.

SCOPE 2021 surveys and interviews: From August to October 2021—about 18 months into the pandemic—SCOPE conducted web-based surveys and phone interviews with coaches, center directors, and FCC providers. Although the pandemic was ongoing in 2021, we did not collect data during a COVID-19 surge.

The centers and FCC homes included in SCOPE 2019 and 2021 mostly received funding through a Head Start grant or Child Care and Development Fund subsidies, but some settings received other types of funding to serve children in families with low incomes. We aimed to include a wide variety of coaching in SCOPE, and the findings are not representative of any coaching model or approach.

In this brief, we primarily focus on 2019 and 2021 survey findings and 2021 interview findings from coaches; however, we also highlight interview responses from some FCC providers. We present survey information for the 43 coaches who participated in the study in *both* 2019 and 2021. Survey topics in this brief include the frequency of engaging in specific activities during coaching interactions, the mode of delivery of coaching activities, and the relative difficulty of delivering coaching activities. Coaches might have worked across different types of settings, but when responding to the survey, they were asked to focus on one type of setting. Among the 43 coaches in the sample, 33 responded about their work with centers, and 10 responded about their work with FCC homes.

Of the 43 coaches surveyed, 9 coaches participated in follow-up interviews. During the 2021 interviews, coaches discussed the extent to which teachers' and providers' personal issues affected coaching, the frequency with which they provided emotional support to teachers and providers, and their engagement in other types of supports and activities.

## Key SCOPE findings presented in this brief

- Coaches who participated in SCOPE reported using remote coaching meetings more commonly in fall 2021 (about 18 months into the pandemic) than in 2019. They also reported spending more time coaching remotely than before the pandemic.

- SCOPE coaches reported more frequent coaching meetings in general (including both in-person and remote meetings) in 2021 than in 2019. There is some indication that the increased use of remote meetings in 2021 might have enabled coaches to meet with teachers or FCC providers more frequently.

- In 2021, SCOPE coaches, center directors, and FCC providers identified both benefits and challenges of remote coaching, such as coach–teacher and coach–provider interactions, flexibility, and technology.

- Most SCOPE coaches felt prepared or very prepared to provide coaching remotely in 2021. Most had also received training on conducting coaching remotely, but some indicated additional training (for example, about online meeting platforms and strategies for engaging participants) would be helpful.

- In 2021, SCOPE coaches commonly used a variety of coaching strategies in person and remotely, such as modeling, observations, reflection and feedback, and setting goals.
  - In 2021, most coaches reported demonstrating or modeling skills and strategies with children through video exemplars at least sometimes. Coaches used video exemplars when working in person or remotely with teachers and FCC providers.
  - Coaches used a variety of approaches to conduct observations in 2021, including in person, live remote, and watching prerecorded videos, and observed more often in person than remotely.
  - Over 80 percent of coaches reported using a variety of reflection and feedback strategies at least once or twice a month in 2021, as in 2019.
  - Another strategy common in 2019 remained common in 2021: Almost all coaches reported setting goals with teachers and FCC providers in both 2019 and 2021.

Remote coaching: How commonly did coaches use it in the fall of 2021 (18 months into the pandemic), and how did this compare to before the pandemic?

Remote coaching meetings were common as the pandemic progressed, and most SCOPE coaches reported spending more time coaching remotely in 2021 than in 2019 before the pandemic.

Some coaches (42 percent) conducted all their meetings remotely in 2021, but a similarly large percentage of coaches (37 percent) still conducted all their meetings in person. Twenty-one percent reported a mix of remote and in-person coaching meetings (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Percentage of coaches who reported conducting coaching meetings only remotely, only in-person, or a mix of remote and in-person coaching meetings
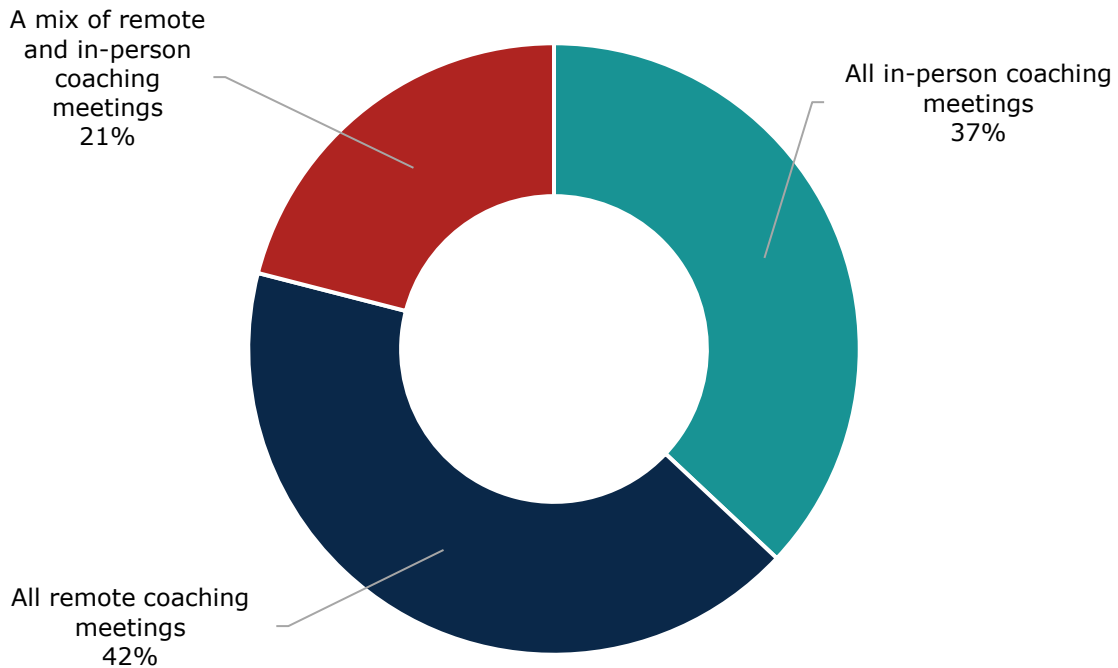

A mix of remote and in-person coaching meetings
21%

All in-person coaching meetings
37%

All remote coaching meetings
42%

Source: SCOPE 2021 Coach Survey.

Note: Coaches who reported any regularly scheduled coaching meetings (n = 43) were asked, "Of those [number reported] regularly scheduled meetings, what number are currently in person and what number are currently remote?" We recoded those who reported 0 remote meetings as all in-person coaching meetings, those who reported 0 in-person meetings as all remote coaching meetings, and the remaining as a mix of remote and in-person coaching meetings.

Among coaches who reported doing any remote coaching meetings in 2021, almost two-thirds (63 percent) reported spending more time coaching remotely compared to before the pandemic; 15 percent of coaches reported doing remote coaching for about the same amount of time compared with before the pandemic; and 22 percent reported spending less time coaching remotely (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Most coaches reported spending more time remote coaching in 2021 than pre-pandemic
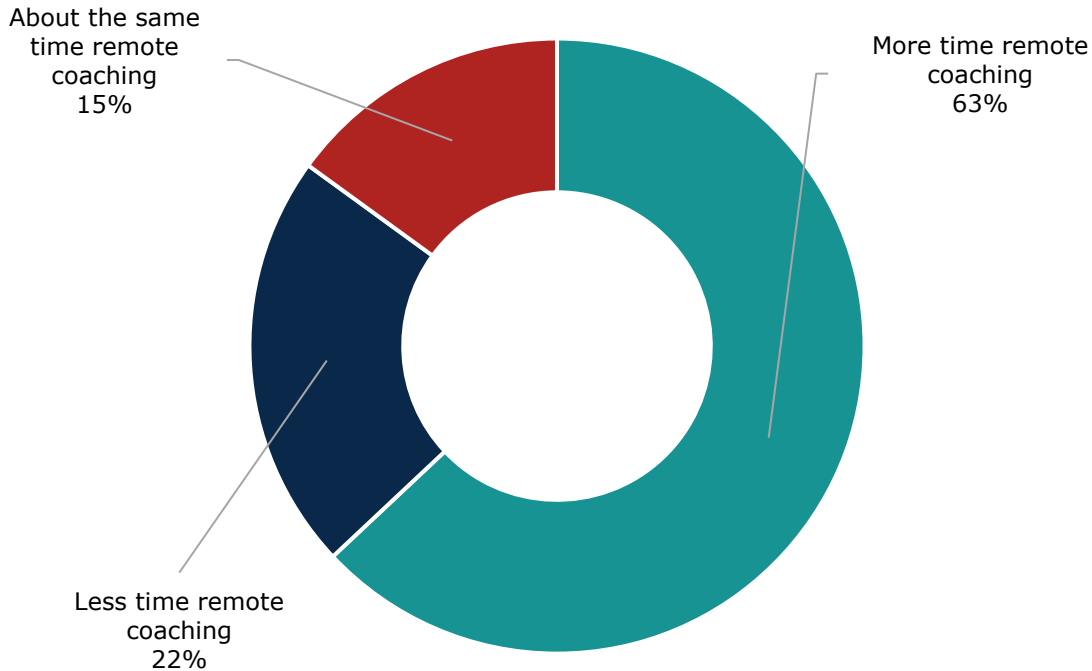
About the same time remote coaching
15%

More time remote coaching
63%

Less time remote coaching
22%

Source: SCOPE 2021 Coach Survey.

Note: Coaches who reported doing any remote coaching meetings (n = 27) were asked, "Thinking about the amount of time you spend coaching remotely now compared to before COVID-19 began in early 2020, would you say you spend more time, less time, or about the same amount of time coaching [teachers/FCC providers] remotely?"

Among the coaches in SCOPE 2021, remote coaching seemed to be more common for those working with FCC providers. Note that only 10 coaches who completed the SCOPE 2021 survey were associated with FCC providers so we should use caution in considering differences. For the 33 coaches who reported on their work with centers, 27 percent (9 coaches) reported having all remote coaching meetings with center-based teachers. By comparison, of the 10 coaches who reported on their work with FCC providers, 90 percent (9 coaches) reported having all remote meetings with FCC providers.[2]

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[2] Only 10 coaches who responded to the SCOPE 2021 survey were associated with FCC providers.

Frequency of coach meetings: Many SCOPE coaches maintained or increased regular remote and in-person coaching meetings in 2021. An increased use of remote meetings might have enabled coaches to have meetings more often in 2021 than in 2019.

Considering both remote and in-person coaching meetings, some coaches reported more frequent meetings in 2021 than in 2019 (Exhibit 3). In 2021, 47 percent of coaches reported having coaching meetings at least once a week. In 2019, only 23 percent had coaching meetings at least once a week.

In 2021, it is possible that coaches were able to meet more frequently with teachers when meeting remotely (Exhibit 4). The frequency of meetings appears to be different across the two formats. Specifically, 23 percent of coaches reported having remote coaching meetings two to three times a week, and another 9 percent reported having remote meetings about once per week. By comparison, only 9 percent of coaches reported having in-person meetings two to three times a week, and 16 percent reported in-person meetings about once per week.

Exhibit 3. Frequency of coaching meetings reported by coaches in 2019 and 2021
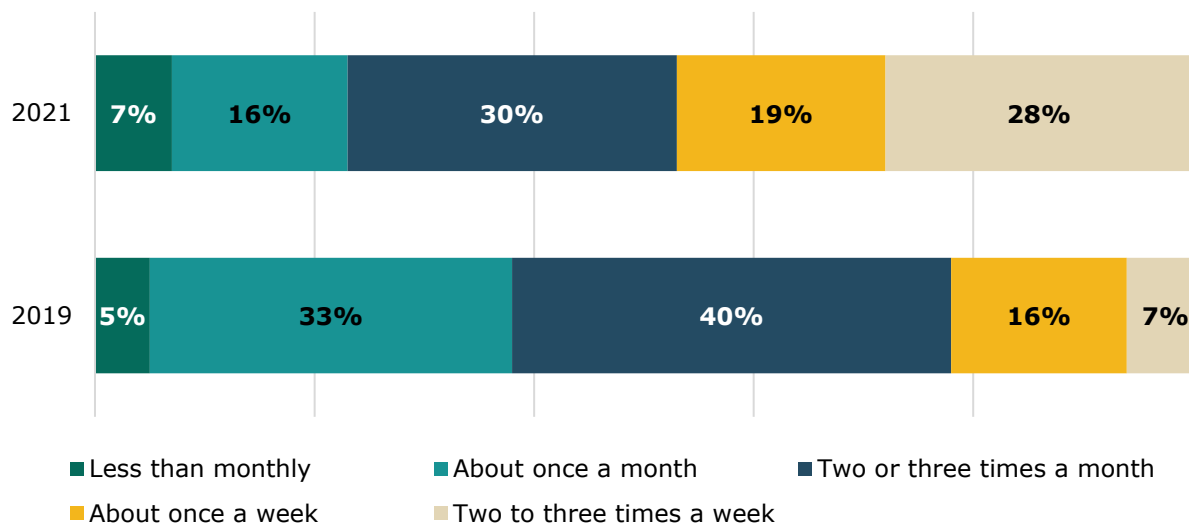
Source: SCOPE 2019 and 2021 Coach Surveys.

Note: This exhibit includes coaches who responded to the survey questions in both 2019 and 2021 (n = 43). In the 2019 survey, coaches were asked, "On average, how frequently do you have coaching meetings with an individual teacher/FCC provider whom you coach?" Coaches responded to the question on a 5-point scale: 1 = Two to three times a week, 2 = About once a week, 3 = Two to three times a month, 4 = About once a month, 5 = Less than monthly. In the 2021 survey, coaches were asked, "On average, how frequently do you have regularly scheduled coaching meetings with a teacher or FCC provider or teaching team?" Coaches were asked to report the number of meetings they had every week, every month, or every two months. We recoded the number of meetings coaches reported in 2021 so they were on the same response scale used in the 2019 survey.

Exhibit 4. Frequency of remote and in-person coaching meetings reported by coaches in 2021
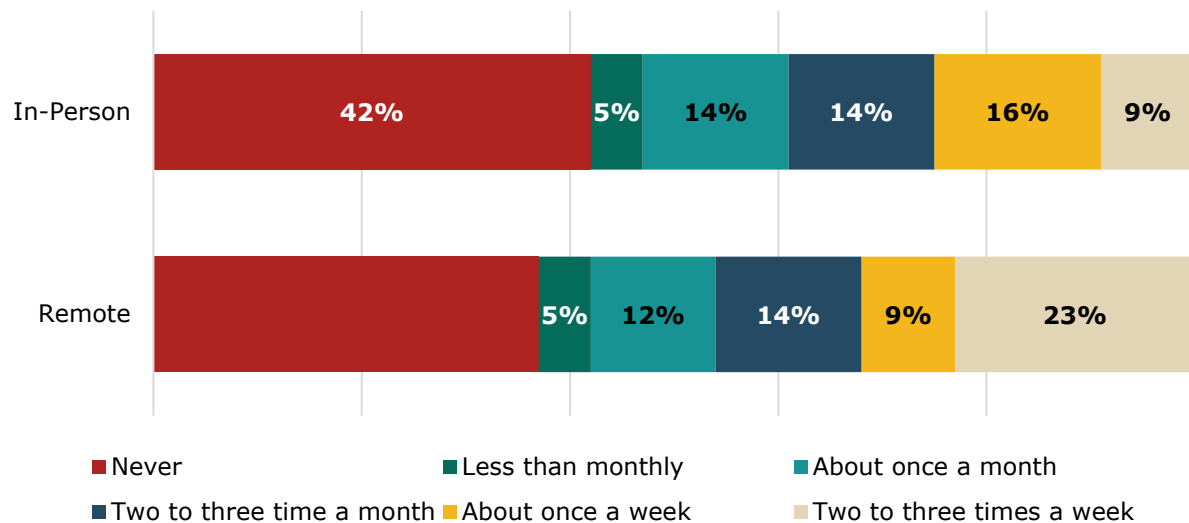
Source: SCOPE 2021 Coach Survey.

Note: Coaches who reported any regularly scheduled coaching meetings (n = 43) were asked, "Of those [number reported] regularly scheduled meetings, what number are currently in person and what number are currently remote?" For each number reported for remote and in-person meetings, we recoded coaches' responses into five categories: 1 = Two to three times a week, 2 = About once a week, 3 = Two to three times a month, 4 = About once per month, 5 = Less than monthly, 6 = Never.

What advantages and challenges were there in remote coaching in the fall of 2021?

In the 2021 qualitative interviews, coaches, center directors, and FCC providers provided more in-depth views on the advantages and challenges of remote coaching.

Remote coaching reduced travel to centers and homes, freeing time to provide more coaching support in 2021.

In the qualitative interviews, coaches, center directors, and FCC providers described the increased flexibility afforded by remote coaching. For example, with the switch to remote coaching, many coaches reported spending less time traveling between sites and more time on other activities. Some described using the time they saved to offer additional support to teachers and providers. For example, one coach said, "*Instead of spending 30 minutes driving … I can use that time to look for resources and then meet virtually.*" FCC providers noticed this shift in coach availability, and described having more access to their coaches and perceiving their coaching as being more efficient.

Some coaches also described using the time they saved from traveling to further their own professional development. One coach elaborated:

> *Something that's been really beneficial during this time is the amount of professional development we've been able to invest in. And applying that to our work with programs … has allowed a little more time for us to dig in deeper and actually retain that information and then be able to apply it.*

In 2021, SCOPE coaches had mixed views on the advantages and challenges of remotely communicating and interacting with teachers and providers.

Through qualitative interviews, coaches shared mixed perspectives on the advantages and challenges of interacting with teachers or FCC providers remotely. Some coaches found that remote coaching made it easier to communicate and coach, because scheduling was easier and because teachers and providers could focus more on remote coaching sessions when children were not present. One coach explained:

> *In person, sometimes when you're with a teacher ... they're so attuned to ... the kids ... it distracts them from being with you in the moment ... it's really hard to do quality coaching. When you get to do remote ... if they're in a quieter place, they actually focus on you and what you're trying to do.*

Other coaches had more challenging experiences with maintaining their own focus or the focus of the FCC provider. For example, some found it more difficult to maintain teachers' and FCC providers' full attention virtually. One coach explained:

> *... I think the dedicated time for coaching sessions didn't happen as much. The providers were in their own homes, and their kids would join, or their spouses would say, "Oh, well suddenly I have to go do something." So then [the FCC providers] would be managing all of their own kids while trying to have a meeting with me, so I didn't get that same kind of focused attention during our sessions.*

In addition to challenges related to focusing, coaches and directors said the lack of opportunities for spontaneous interactions was a limitation of remote coaching. One coach described this as significant because:

> *The work we do is extremely relational. It's extremely in the moment, and so ideally, it's face-to-face so that we can observe everything that's happening ... in the classroom and provide support in the moment.*

Another coach described how offering this spontaneous, in-person support formed and strengthened relationships with teachers and FCC providers:

> *Sometimes you go into the center and ... somebody is sick, and you have to help, you know, just jump in, and then that's something that I think helped. You're able to assist and in a nontraditional way, but that also reinforces that relationship to communicate or convey, "I'm here to help you with whatever you need."*

Many coaches described a sense of disconnect when interacting with teachers and FCC providers virtually. For example, one coach explained, "I like to read body language. Just that whole pause between you talking and me talking can be a little awkward." These coaches described this disconnect as a particular challenge because of the relational nature of coaching. On the other hand, a center director reported that challenging conversations could be easier to deliver and receive online (see below).

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A center director's perspective on an advantage of remote coaching

One director identified an additional advantage of remote coaching, saying that it made it more comfortable to have challenging conversations:
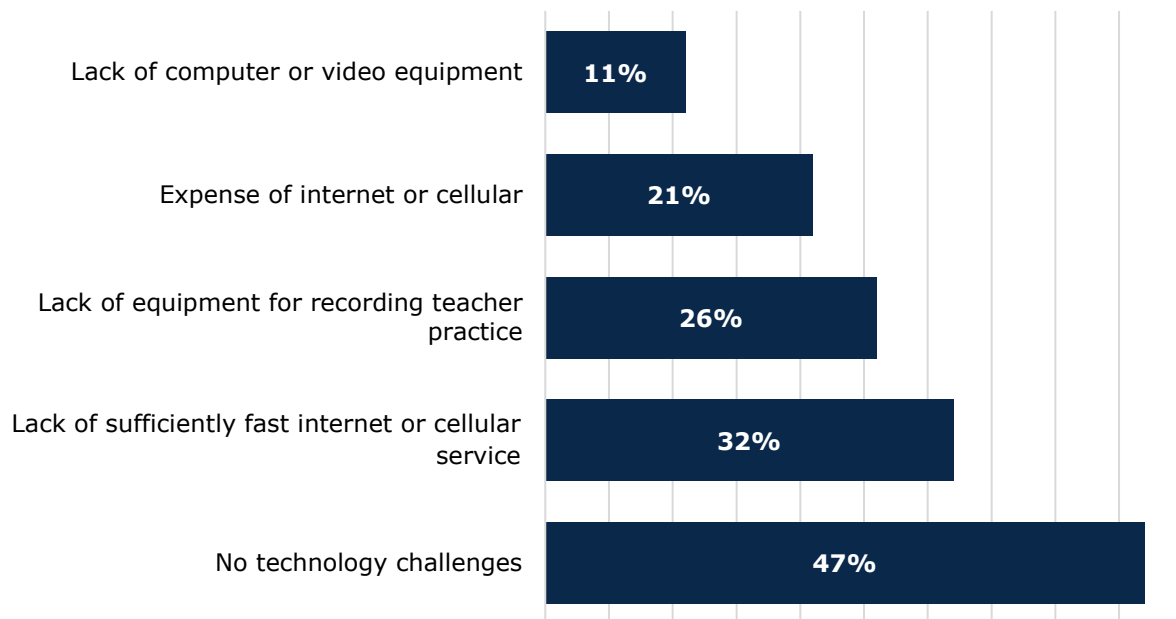
"I had a lot of people [saying] that they didn't think it was going to be effective, but ultimately, they felt comfortable ... One [teacher] told me that she actually really liked the online coaching, because she was comfortable in her own spot, and the coach was in their spot, and it just felt like she had her space and that she could receive that [challenging] feedback a little easier."

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Technology served as a facilitator and a challenge to remote coaching in 2021.

In 2021, SCOPE participants shared views on technology in coaching through the surveys and interviews. The surveys asked coaches and FCC providers specifically about challenges to coaching caused by technology. About one-quarter of respondents—24 percent of coaches and 28 percent of FCC providers—reported technology was often or always challenging for coaching. Center directors were asked about whether specific technology-related issues were a problem for remote coaching or were a reason their program did not engage in remote coaching, and they endorsed several challenges (Exhibit 5). However, 47 percent of directors did not report any technology challenges.

Exhibit 5. Technology challenges for remote coaching reported by center directors in 2021

Category	Percentage
Lack of computer or video equipment	11%
Expense of internet or cellular	21%
Lack of equipment for recording teacher practice	26%
Lack of sufficiently fast internet or cellular service	32%
No technology challenges	47%

Source: SCOPE 2021 Center Director Survey.

Note: Nineteen center directors responded to these survey questions in 2021. Center directors who indicated any coaching was done remotely at their centers were asked, "[Do/did] any of the following technical issues cause consistent challenges for conducting remote coaching at your center?" Center directors who indicated that coach–teacher meetings were conducted only in person were asked, "[Are/were] any of the following technical issues reasons why your center did not pursue remote coaching opportunities?" Directors could select all the issues that caused challenges for their centers.

Through the qualitative interviews, respondents shared that technology functioned as both a helpful tool and a challenge to coaching. The most frequently mentioned barrier was an initial lack of familiarity with the technology used to deliver remote coaching. One FCC provider described her learning process, saying:

> *At first, there were some bumps. I've never used Zoom. I'm not great on technology. I admit that it was a learning curve for everyone.*

One coach described this experience, saying:

> *It was just jumping in the deep end. That really had not at all been a part of what we did. We provided face-to-face coaching. We provided on-site, face-to-face meetings with teachers, we provided on-site, face-to-face training, so we had to have a very quick [course] in Teams and Zoom.*

Despite this learning curve, coaches commonly reported that they are now more comfortable with virtual coaching tools, and many reported eventually taking a supporting role in helping teachers or FCC providers with technology. One coach described this, saying:

> *As I learned how to do it, it became easier, and I became a resource for those teachers who were struggling with how to set up a Teams [meeting] and share screens.*

Did coaches feel prepared to coach remotely, and did they receive support?

Most SCOPE coaches who coached remotely in 2021 felt prepared.

In 2021, of the 28 coaches (65 percent of all coaches) who reported that they worked remotely with any teachers or FCC providers, 79 percent reported that they currently felt prepared or very prepared to coach remotely, and 21 percent felt somewhat prepared. No coaches working remotely reported that they were not at all prepared to do so (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. How prepared coaches who worked remotely with teachers or FCC providers felt to provide remote coaching in 2021

Somewhat prepared 21%

Very prepared 32%
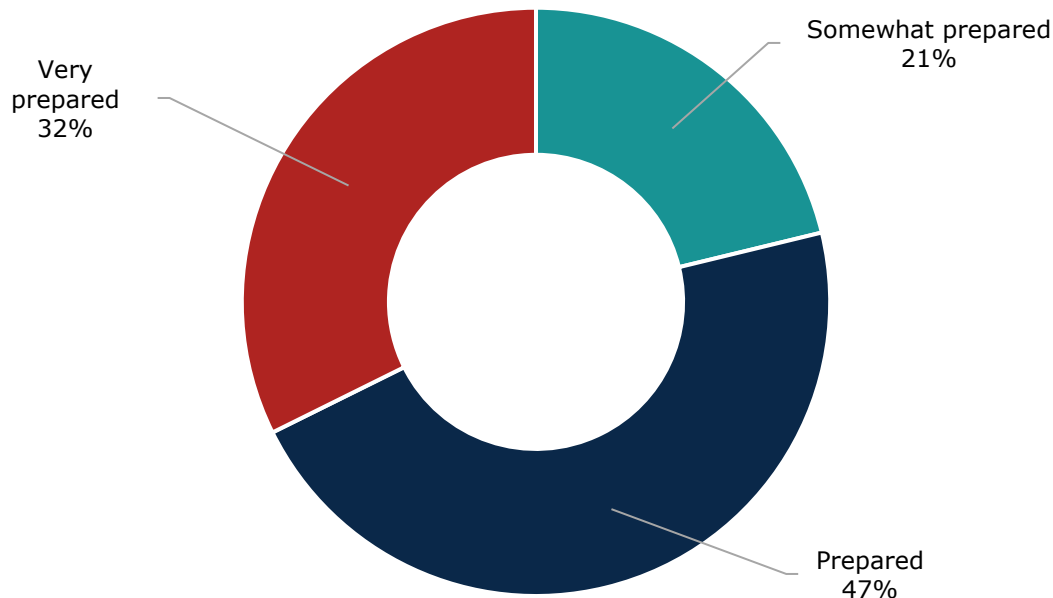
Prepared 47%

Source: SCOPE 2021 Coach Survey.

Note: Coaches who reported working with any teachers or FCC providers entirely remotely or both in person and remotely (n = 28) were asked, "How prepared do you currently feel to provide coaching remotely?" Percentages do not add up to 100 because of rounding. No coaches said that they were "not prepared."

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Coaches received training and equipment for remote work, but they desired more support.

In the 2021 survey, coaches also reported that they received training and equipment to support their work. Specifically, 69 percent of coaches reported receiving training on how to coach remotely. This might have helped explain that most coaches who worked remotely with teachers or FCC providers felt at least somewhat prepared to offer remote coaching.

In the 2021 qualitative interviews, coaches described receiving support for remote coaching, including training on virtual meeting platforms and equipment such as laptops, headsets, and computer monitors. Some said they would like to receive additional training on the following: advanced features of virtual meeting platforms, strategies and tools to engage participants in virtual meetings, and how to coach providers who used specific curricula when teaching remotely (for example, training on how to translate the Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum to virtual platforms).

What coaching strategies were in use for improving practices with children 18 months into the pandemic (in the fall of 2021)? Did coaches use those strategies remotely or in person? How did this compare to before the pandemic?

The pandemic and remote coaching required coaches to modify their practices. The survey and qualitative interview findings suggest that some coaches, teachers, and FCC providers adapted strategies for modeling, observation, reflection, and goal setting for remote coaching. For some of these strategies, we compared survey data from 2019 and 2021. Some of these questions were phrased slightly differently in 2021 because we hypothesized that the coaching process might look different during the pandemic.

SCOPE coaches regularly demonstrated or modeled skills and strategies live and via video in 2021.

Survey responses from coaches show that demonstrating or modeling skills was common in 2021, as in 2019, though coaches shifted the modeling approach they used over time (Exhibit 7).

In 2021, 81 percent of coaches reported demonstrating or modeling skills and strategies with children at least sometimes; in 2019, 91 percent of coaches did so. In 2021, 84 percent of coaches reported demonstrating or modeling skills using video exemplars (asking teachers and providers to watch on their own or watching together) at least sometimes; in 2019, 79 percent of coaches did so. These variations in coaching methods seem likely to be directly linked to the increase in remote coaching.

In qualitative interviews, some coaches described challenges with translating modeling to virtual platforms. For example, some coaches said their inability to model strategies with children was a limitation of remote coaching. However, using video exemplars for modeling may have been particularly easy to translate to a remote coaching situation. Among coaches who reported in 2021 that they demonstrated or modeled with video exemplars, 35 percent reported doing so only remotely; 45 percent reported doing so both in person and remotely; and 20 percent did so only in person.

Exhibit 7. Frequency of demonstrating or modeling skills and strategies reported by coaches in 2019 and 2021
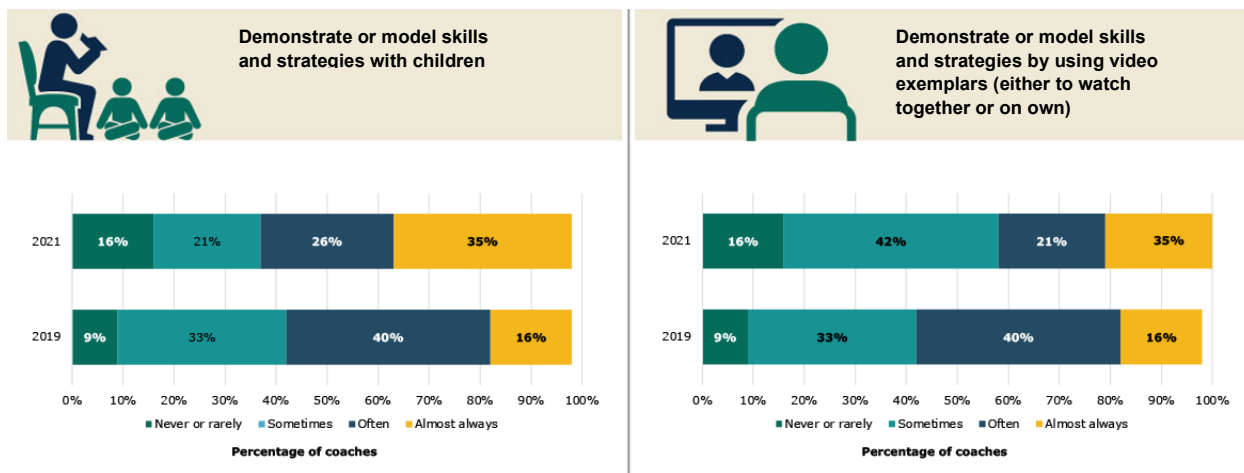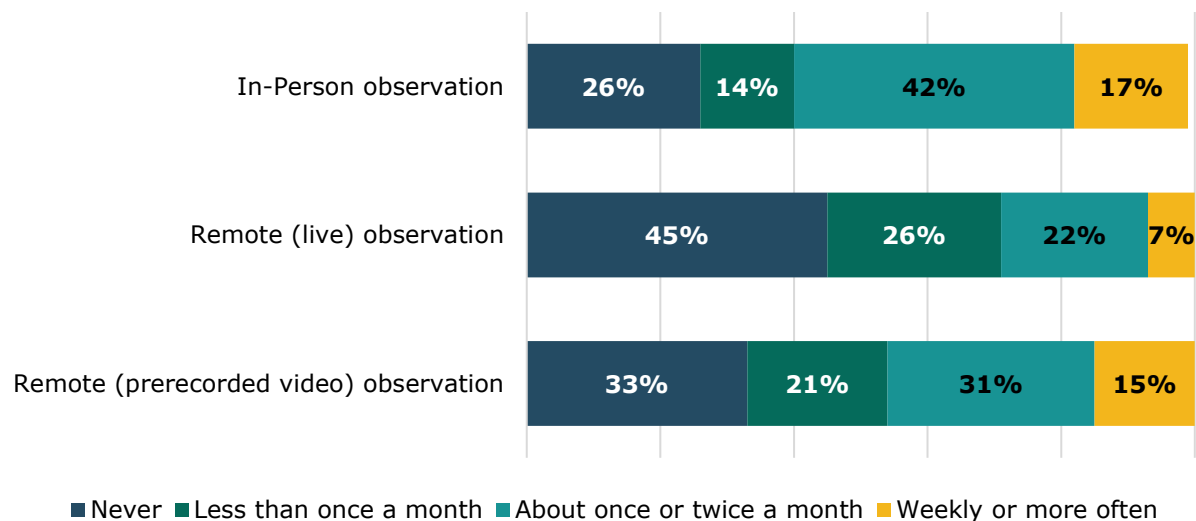

Source: SCOPE 2019 and 2021 Coach Surveys.

Notes: Forty-three coaches responded to the questions in both 2019 and 2021. In the 2019 survey, all coaches were asked, "When coaching a typical teacher/FCC provider, how often do you use the following practice and modeling strategies?" In the 2021 survey, all coaches were asked, "When providing coaching to a typical teacher/FCC provider or teaching team, how often do you currently use the following practice and modeling strategies during your interactions?" In both years, coaches responded to each item on a 5-point scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Almost always. The "Never" and "Rarely" categories were collapsed in the exhibit.

In 2021, coaches most often conducted in-person observations, but they also regularly used remote observation strategies.

- Coaches conducted observations in a variety of ways in 2021, more often in person than remotely. Coaches reported on in-person and remote observations separately, as some coaches did both. Fifty-nine percent of coaches conducted in-person observations at least once per month; 50 percent conducted some type of remote observations at least once per month, including live remote (29 percent) and/or by watching prerecorded videos (46 percent) (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8. Frequency of using observation strategies reported by coaches in 2021

	Never	Less than once a month	About once or twice a month	Weekly or more often
In-Person observation	26%	14%	42%	17%
Remote (live) observation	45%	26%	22%	7%
Remote (prerecorded video) observation	33%	21%	31%	15%

■ Never ■ Less than once a month ■ About once or twice a month ■ Weekly or more often

Source: SCOPE 2021 Coach Survey.

Note: Forty-two coaches responded to the 2021 survey. Coaches were asked, "When providing coaching to a typical teacher/FCC provider or teaching team, how often do you currently use the following observation strategies during your interactions?" Coaches responded to each item on a 6-point scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Less than once per month, 3 = About once per month, 4 = About every other week, 5 = About once a week, 6 = About daily (in the exhibit, 3 and 4 were collapsed as "About once or twice per month"; 5 and 6 were collapsed as "Weekly or more often").

Using a variety of feedback strategies was a core approach for coaches in 2019 and 2021.

In 2021, more than 80 percent of coaches used reflection or feedback strategies with teachers or FCC providers at least once per month. This included discussing with the teacher or FCC provider how the teacher or FCC provider was implementing the practice the coach had observed, providing verbal or written feedback on teacher or FCC provider strengths or areas for growth, and asking teachers or FCC providers to discuss what went well and what did not go well when using skills and practices targeted in coaching (Exhibit 9). Almost all (98 percent or more) coaches reported that they used reflection and feedback strategies in 2019 and 2021.

Exhibit 9. Frequency of using reflection and feedback strategies reported by coaches in 2021

Strategy	2%	14%	57%	26%
Discuss implementing practice	2%	14%	57%	26%
Provide verbal or written feedback on strengths and growth		17%	49%	34%
Discuss what went well and what did not go well		14%	55%	31%
Discuss difficulty using skills or practices	2%	14%	57%	26%

■ Never ■ Less than once a month ■ About once or twice a month ■ Weekly or more often

Source: SCOPE 2021 Coach Survey.

Note: Forty-two coaches responded to the 2021 survey questions. Coaches were asked, "When providing coaching to a typical teacher/FCC provider or teaching team, how often do you currently use the following reflection and feedback strategies during your interactions?" Coaches responded to each item on a 6-point scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Less than once per month, 3 = About once per month, 4 = About every other week, 5 = About once a week, 6 = About daily (in the exhibit, 3 and 4 were collapsed as "About once or twice per month"; 5 and 6 were collapsed as "Weekly or more often").

In 2021, using remote observation and feedback offered both opportunities and challenges.

In the 2021 qualitative interviews, some of the interviewees had experience with in-person observation while others had experience with remote observation (live or recorded). Some coaches commented on the limitations of recorded observations, including:

- Managing the logistics of recording

- The challenge of providing sensitive feedback to teachers or FCC providers remotely

- Some teachers' or FCC providers' discomfort with being recorded

- Having less time for observations

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One FCC provider commented on a challenge of remote observation:

"It's harder for [the coach] to pick up on the little nuances of the interaction between the provider and the child."

. . . .

Some coaches also noted that, when using remote observation, they had to adjust their approach to providing feedback and making suggestions because they were unable to provide teachers or FCC providers with hands-on support. One coach explained how she adjusted her practice:

> *Instead of being able to physically help [teachers or FCC providers] adjust their environment, we're creating [virtual drawings of] floor plans and giving recommendations that way.*

However, many coaches, directors, and FCC providers identified advantages to remote observation. They noted that it helped teachers or FCC providers self-reflect after reviewing video footage, and it was more flexible and convenient for coaches, teachers, and FCC providers. In addition, some coaches described being able to conduct remote observations more discreetly, which they found valuable. One coach explained:

> *We get so much more information as the observation goes on, because eventually that teacher kind of forgets that they're being watched, and you start to see some of their true practices. It's opened up those coaching relationships and conversations …. When you're in the space, you never know, are the kids acting up because there's a new person here, or are they acting up because of the flow of the room? And with the video observations, it was really nice to see the true flow of the room.*

Goal setting remained common in 2021.

Finally, in the 2021 survey, we asked coaches whether they were still setting formal, specified goals with teachers and providers. Almost all coaches (98 percent) reported that they did. This is similar to 2019, when 93 percent of coaches reported setting formal, specified goals with teachers and FCC providers.

In the 2021 qualitative interviews, coaches and FCC providers described continuing to engage in goal setting and action planning remotely as part of observation and feedback sessions. One coach expressed a preference for goal setting in person, rather than remotely: "*Face-to-face, it's easier to say, 'Well, so how do you think you can do this? What do you think you can do to improve this?*'"

Summary and implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ECE landscape and the way coaches support teachers and FCC providers. The results from the SCOPE surveys and qualitative interviews demonstrate several key lessons.

SCOPE key takeaways about use of remote strategies in coaching

- **Remote coaching meetings were more common 18 months into the pandemic than before the pandemic in 2019**. In addition, coaches had more frequent coaching meetings with teachers or providers, potentially because of the use of remote approaches. However, 58 percent of coaches still regularly held in-person meetings. Almost all of the 10 SCOPE 2021 coaches who responded about their work with FCC providers indicated that they only had remote meetings, likely due to pandemic safety concerns.

- **In 2019 and 2021, coaches implemented a variety of coaching strategies in their work with teachers and FCC providers.** Eighteen months into the pandemic, coaches reported regularly using demonstration and modeling, observation, reflection and feedback, and setting goals, with subtle shifts from the patterns of these strategies in 2019. Notably, in 2021, coaches used video exemplars both in person and remotely for demonstration and modeling. A smaller percentage of coaches were using in-person observation in 2021 than in 2019, but in-person observation was still being used more frequently than remote live or prerecorded observation.

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- **Coaches reported they felt prepared to coach remotely in 2021, but coaches, center directors, and FCC providers identified benefits and challenges of remote coaching.** Coaches reported they received support for remote coaching, but in qualitative interviews, coaches identified several areas where additional support would be helpful (for example, training on online meeting platforms and strategies for engaging participants). Through these interviews, coaches, center directors, and FCC providers reported mixed experiences in remote coach interactions, flexibility, and technology. About one-quarter of coaches, center directors, and FCC providers reported persistent challenges because of technology, which is consistent with other studies (Crawford et al. 2021).

Areas for further exploration on remote coaching

- **The field needs to develop a deeper understanding of how coaches (and coaching developers) define remote coaching, and how coaches are implementing common coaching strategies such as modeling, observation, feedback, and goal setting remotely.** SCOPE coaches reported using these strategies in person and remotely, but there are likely differences in how coaches implemented these strategies when they were in person with a teacher or FCC provider and when they were engaging over a screen. A deeper understanding of such nuances will inform efforts to accurately measure the strategies in future research, and develop training and guidance for coaches to effectively coach remotely.

- **Research should address whether coaching strategies are as effective or differently effective when used remotely.** Coaches, center directors, and FCC providers reported advantages and challenges to remote coaching. For example, there were mixed opinions on feedback methods; some found it easier to give and receive feedback remotely while others found it more challenging. Examining effective feedback and engagement practices for remote coaching and which work for which ECE practitioners could increase the effectiveness of remote coaching. With remote coaching, coaches, teachers, and FCC providers might benefit from efficient communication, remote observation strategies that feel less intrusive, and—for coaches specifically—saved time that would otherwise be used for traveling to see teachers and FCC providers.

Future research should explore what other supports for coaches, teachers, and FCC providers might help make remote coaching efficient and effective. SCOPE findings point to the importance of providing technology support and training. Coaches reported a sharp learning curve as they approached new technology. Coaches would likely benefit from support focused on implementing a coaching strategy in a remote context. Identifying remote platforms that allow for fluid and natural interactions, particularly in the context of coaching, could help support coaches and enable more successful remote interactions between coaches and teachers or providers.

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Reminders about interpreting SCOPE findings

- SCOPE participants were purposively selected, and the information learned from these surveys cannot be generalized to a specific ECE coaching approach or group of centers and FCC providers.

- The SCOPE 2021 sample is small; the brief therefore describes patterns, highlighting areas important for further exploration.

- COVID-19 changed the practice of coaching in ways we do not yet fully understand, notably increasing the use of remote strategies. The surveys and qualitative interviews used in SCOPE 2021 were designed while those changes were happening. Therefore, questions likely did not fully capture coaches' experiences in this changed coaching landscape, and coaches might have interpreted the questions about remote and in-person coaching in different ways.

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