



Guide to Phone Coaching Using MML Skills

Tools & Tips

by Don and Alex Flecky
Skills Intigration Specialists

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By Don and Alex Flecky, Skills Integration Specialists

This packet describes skills coaching by phone, offers guidance, and provides several documents that should be useful to you as you implement your MML program. As CHMC's Skills Integration Specialists and experienced leaders of MML classes, we have conducted skills phone coaching ourselves and are pleased to offer you the benefit of our experience.

Please note that this packet does not teach any new guidelines for skills coaching by phone, because it is **essentially the same as skills coaching in class!** As a "phone coach," you'll use the same techniques as an "in-class" coach, such as:

Structuring for Success (*helping people know what to do, giving directions*),
Modeling (*showing by doing, "Say it this way....."*),
Prompting (*giving a hint or clue, "and that makes you feel....."*), and
Reinforcing (*giving words of encouragement, "Great job" "Beautiful!"*).

The difference is that you have the opportunity to give your full attention to one couple as they dialogue for a full 30 minutes! Couples who have experienced it state that phone coaching has been the key to helping them turn these new skills into useful habits. Some have told us that they have learned more about the skills in several phone calls than they did in the 8-week class! These couples are experiencing the benefits of one-on-one coaching by phone; your couples will too!

Don Flecky

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- PACKET CONTENTS -

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DOCUMENTS: Download them, adapt them, adjust them; make any changes necessary.

DOCUMENTS FOR PARTICIPANTS:

*Info/Sign Up Sheet: Distribute to Participants

SCRIPTS FOR COACHES:

*Announcement Script: for announcing this program to your class

*Phone Coaching Script: for your actual coaching calls

FORMS FOR COACHES:

*Coaching Notes: Track calls for one couple on one page

*Coach's Phone Coaching Log: Report phone coaching time spent



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- PROGRAM DESCRIPTION -

THE SKILLS COACHING BY PHONE PROGRAM INCLUDES:

- 30-minute phone calls (this is the recommended maximum time per call).
- The couple chooses the topic prior to each call (enhancement or mild conflict topic).
- Weekly calls for 8 weeks - during the final 4 weeks of an MML class series, and the first 4 weeks after class has ended. If an MML class is conducted in 2 full-day sessions, calls begin after the first week and continue weekly for 7 weeks.
- After the weekly calls end, further coaching calls occur monthly for the next 3 months, and then quarterly over the next 6 months. (Total: 13 coaching calls per couple over a 12 month period)
- Coaches provide skill guidance only. They do not provide counseling or give advice or therapy.
- Coaches and Facilitators follow strict rules for confidentiality – topics discussed and other details stay private.
- Limited note-taking: Coaches take notes on skills used, not details about the topic.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS: As you conduct your 30 minute skills practice by phone:

- Careful preparation is necessary: since focused listening is essential, select a quiet place, plan for no interruptions (put the dog outside – give him a treat J) and no call-waiting tones (set your phone to temporarily disconnect this feature). Your goal is to fully concentrate on the call.
- Consider using a speaker phone, headset or wireless earpiece for yourself. This prevents the fatigue that comes from holding the phone to your ear.
- Keep an eye on your clock, for time flies and you'll find yourself saying goodbye more quickly than you'd thought!

SCHEDULING YOUR PHONE COACHING SESSIONS:

- We recommend scheduling sessions no more frequently than at 45 minute intervals. This allows time for you to log the time you spent and to decompress a little before your next call.
- Ideally, one volunteer phone coach will coach a maximum of 2 couples per week.
- E-mail a reminder a day or two ahead so that your couple remembers the exact time you will call and remembers to pick a topic beforehand. (*Hi _____. Just a quick reminder that I'll be calling (xxx) xxx-xxxx this coming Wednesday at 7:00 pm for our phone coaching call. Please be sure to pick a topic beforehand so we'll be ready to go! Talk to you soon!*)



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- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS -

The next several pages frequently asked questions that we and other phone coaches have received, and our responses:

1. Why phone coaching? What are its benefits?

From a research perspective, studies have shown that when people learn new skills in a classroom setting, they associate the new skills with the only place they used the skills: the classroom. In order for a couple to truly integrate the skills they're learning into their everyday lives, they must practice them at home, and they must practice them often. (This research is applied at universities nationwide, including California State University, Fullerton, where Alex teaches: communication classes routinely require students to use their new communication skills outside the classroom in order to develop those new skills into habits.)

>> **Why use the phone?** Phone coaching is becoming more popular as an efficient tool to help people in a variety of ways. Note that John Gray (who wrote the Mars and Venus books) utilizes phone coaches. So does the Oprah-sponsored program, The Journey. This is because coaching by phone is efficient and effective; it costs little in terms of time or money. Also, it maximizes a volunteer's precious time: almost 100% of their time is spent helping couples, not driving to and from an event or meeting place. MML skills phone coaches guide and support couples as they practice new communication patterns and begin to turn these new skills into lifetime habits.

>> **From the couples' perspective**, some couples have told us that they have progressed more with using the skills in several 30 minute phone coaching calls than during the entire 8 week MML class! Some have noticed that their dialogues with a phone coach have gone 'deeper' than dialogues during class; they feel more comfortable expressing deep feelings in the privacy of their home rather than in a classroom setting. Very private issues can be brought up and very sensitive feelings expressed with no concern that others nearby will hear. Being "phone coached" has even been identified as what one couple liked most about the class on their class feedback form!



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- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS -

2. Won't I miss a lot because I can't see the couple's nonverbal communication?

Actually, little is lost. Remember that as coaches, we're trying to help couples verbally express their feelings in a skillful way. Many couples experience problems because they rely on their partner's nonverbal signals, which may lead to misunderstandings. For instance, one partner thinks "*I see it in her face - she's angry again,*" when actually, she may be sad, confused, or perhaps not even feeling a negative feeling! This misinterpretation is often the cause of unnecessary conflicts. Coaches should guide couples to skillfully "speak their feelings," which is better than relying on nonverbal signals that can be misunderstood.

And, remember that much of 'nonverbal communication' is in the tone of voice, which you definitely do hear! You can hear sadness, anger, disappointment, hope, and relief expressed through a person's voice, even if you can't see their facial expressions or body language. Whatever nonverbal content may be lost is more than offset by the benefits of frequent and convenient practicing with a phone coach!

3. What are some objections that you've had to answer?

The strongest objection has been that the couple just doesn't understand what the phone coaching program is about. Couples who haven't seen phone coaching 'in action' tend to be more hesitant because they don't quite understand how it works. A live demonstration in class makes all the difference for these hesitant couples.

Another objection that we expected to hear recently was that couples would be too busy, since our phone sessions would run during the holidays. So, we announced the coaching as an opportunity to help their holiday season run more smoothly with a weekly coaching session to resolve some typical holiday issues (*Do we really have to invite Aunt Mabel after what she did last year? Why do we always have to go to your parents' house for the holidays? You want to spend HOW MUCH on gifts? etc.*). We had maximum sign ups by our couples after presenting it from this point of view!



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- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS -

4. What's the best way to introduce the program to my class?

Let your couples see it "in action!" Ask a couple to volunteer to be 'phone coached' and have the couple sit knee to knee in the middle of the room. Have the couple set their cell phone on 'speaker', and have the other participants sit very close so that they can hear. Leave the classroom and call them. Using the script included in this packet, do a shortened demo (about 10 minutes total) which includes a greeting and set-up, just a few minutes of dialogue and coaching, and then final instructions to wrap up the session. After seeing this demonstration, most couples will clearly understand and be comfortable with phone coaching.

We also recommend that you continue to offer sign-ups, even after the initial sign-up period. Reluctant couples may need a little more time receiving coaching during their in-class dialogues in order to see the benefits of skilled dialogues in general. They often are ready later in the class to sign up for phone coaching.

5. How do I recruit skills phone coaches?

Let potential phone coaches know that this is a great way to fulfill a desire to help couples. Tell them that coaching two couples would only take a total of about an hour and a half per week. So, just **one and a half hours per week of volunteering** as a coach will produce a significant, lasting benefit for those two couples! Compare that to the time (and money) it takes to drive to and from a volunteer event!

MML class graduates are a great source for in-class and phone coaches. CHMC offers coaching training which includes instruction in phone coaching. Newly-trained MML facilitators, who may be hesitant to begin leading a class, can get valuable experience with the skills by doing in-class and phone coaching. You can link these future facilitators with a current MML class that needs in-class and phone coaches.

Just a note about a personal discovery we've made: People whose disabilities may prevent them from attending a class can be a significant source of phone coaches. We know a gifted, caring person who had been involved in lay counseling ministries at her church but became disabled, preventing her from walking or sitting comfortably. She is now excited about using her gifts and desire to help couples as a phone coach from her home! Don't overlook any people who have a heart for helping marriages!

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION/SIGN UP

Dear MML Class Participants,

As part of *Mastering the Mysteries of Love*[®] (MML), you and your partner will receive skills coaching over the phone both during and after your participation in the MML classes.

The Value of Receiving MML Skills Coaching

You are learning many new couple communication skills in this MML class. Research shows that learning new skills requires doing, not just hearing. Regular practice both in and outside of class is the key to breaking old habits and locking in new skills. Phone coaching helps you practice these new skills at home conveniently – by having a coach ‘sit in’ with you by phone. This program is an efficient use of your time too: no extra time and money spent on driving somewhere to meet a coach in person.

MML Skills Coaching Program

The Coach provides skills coaching to you and your partner over the phone while you have a structured dialogue using the MML skills on a topic you choose. The goal is to help you practice the skills effectively so that they steadily become your natural form of couple communication.

The program includes:

- 30-minute (maximum length) phone calls.
- You choose the topics (enhancement, mild conflict).
- Weekly calls for 8 weeks (during the final 4 weeks of class, and the first 4 weeks after the final class).
- After this, coaching calls occur monthly for the next 3 months, and then quarterly for the next 6 months. (Again, this is to help you learn and master use of the skills over time).
- Coaches provide guidance in the MML skills only - not counseling, giving advice, or therapy.
- Coaches and Facilitators follow strict rules for confidentiality – your topics stay private.

~~~~~

## **Please fill in the following:**

Your Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # to be called: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Best **Day & Time** for you to be called (give 3 options below, with #1 being your first choice):

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

\*You will be contacted soon regarding your scheduled coaching time.



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## - ANNOUNCEMENT SCRIPT -

(NOTE: Use this script to tell your classes about skills coaching by phone before you start your sign-ups. Highlight what you want to say, make any changes you think are needed.)

**1) IDENTIFY:** *“You may have noticed that Skills Coaching by Phone was mentioned (on your brochure/sign up sheet/info sheet/the first day of class, etc.).”*

**2) DESCRIBE:** *“It is the same as the coaching you’ve had in class, except that a coach ‘sits in’ with you while you practice these skills from home. The way the coach ‘sits in’ is by calling you on the phone.”*

**>> It’s Not New:** *“Phone coaching is being done more and more. For example, John Gray (he wrote “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus”) offers phone coaching by coaches who live all across the country. Many other programs (relationship skills, life skills, even therapists, etc.) are offering phone coaching.”*

**>> It’s Practical:** *“Saves you time and money – 30 minutes maximum, and no driving time both ways coming here to practice with a coach during the week. Go on a date with all that saved time and gas money!”*

**>> It’s Beneficial/Valuable:** *“The most important thing you can do is practice the skills so that once class is over, it’s a habit. Research has shown that when people learn new skills in a classroom setting, they associate the new skills with the only place they used the skills: the classroom. In order to take the skills home, you must practice them at home, and you must practice them often.”*

If you use the “riding a bike” analogy regarding learning new skills, say *“You can’t expect to become a motocross/mountain bike racer with just a few minutes a week of group instruction. These ‘professionals’ have personal coaches; and that’s what you’ll be getting in this MML program: one-on-one communication skills coaching!”*



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## - ANNOUNCEMENT SCRIPT -

**3) DESCRIBE SESSIONS:** *“This week, you’ll begin practicing dialogues using an enhancement topic (or a topic taken from “A Time for Us” in your MML book). These first dialogues can be confusing, such as who holds the Expression Stick, when to switch roles, etc.”*

*“A coach will call you at the time you decide; it’ll last a maximum of 30 minutes. You can use a speaker phone or two extension phones. You’ll tell your coach the topic you’ve chosen and who is holding the Expression Stick, and you’re off and running.”*

*“Your coach will help you the same way they do in class practice sessions, except by phone. Remember that they won’t give advice about your issue; their job is to simply keep you ‘in skills.’ So, perhaps your coach will remind you that you need to Show Understanding, or change a ‘you’ statement into an ‘I’ statement - just like the coaches do in class. Remember also that coaches keep all your topic details confidential.”*

**4) DESCRIBE SCHEDULE:** *“Once a week you’ll be guided in the MML skills that you’re just beginning to use - this will help make them into habits. The program includes 8 weekly calls, beginning next week. (For the 8-week format): This means that during the last 4 weeks of the MML classes, you’ll have a coach helping you practice at home, by phone. After that, another 4 weeks of phone coaching will occur, and then there will be several more follow-up coaching calls at greater time intervals.” (For other formats): After that, there will be several more follow-up coaching calls at greater time intervals.*

**5) ANNOUNCE SIGN-UPS/DISTRIBUTE SIGN-UP SHEETS:** *“Tonight (or next week) we’ll do sign ups. Be ready to identify a few good days and times for a call, and then you’ll be contacted about final appointment details.”*

*“I believe you’ll find the experience very rewarding for the both of you!”*



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## - SUGGESTED SCRIPT -

**PURPOSE OF SKILLS COACHING:** To support a structured dialogue by a couple on an issue of their choosing.

**COACH'S PREPARATION:** Have your MML book in front of you.

Helpful pages are:

- |           |                           |
|-----------|---------------------------|
| pg. 10-11 | "Feelings Words" families |
| pg. 36-37 | "War Words to Win Words"  |
| pg. 27    | "A Time for Us" dialogue  |
| pg. 29    | Discussing a Problem      |
| pg. 81-90 | Skill Descriptions        |
| pg. 92-93 | Problem Solving Worksheet |



### **REMINDER: 4 HELPFUL COACHING SKILLS:**

1. **Reinforcement:** "Good job!" "You're both doing great!" "That was beautiful!"
2. **Structuring for Success:** Give directions, keep them on track, provide structure
3. **Modeling:** Give the words - "Tell him 'and I would feel so supported if you called me'"
4. **Prompting:** Give a hint - "And that makes you feel.... or "You feel stressed when....."

**NOTE:** The script below is suggested for the first coaching call. Over subsequent calls, as the couple progresses and better learns how to use the MML skills, the coach is likely to take a less and less active or intrusive role. The ultimate objective of the skills phone coaching is that the couple be able to have a perfectly skilled dialogue by themselves, on a conflict topic, without coaching assistance.

### **1) GREET THE COUPLE AND SAY,**

*"Have you picked your topic or issue for tonight's call?"* (It should be a real issue in the relationship – can be an enhancement issue, minor disagreement or conflict, etc.)

*"Tell me in one sentence what it is"* (Help them briefly identify the topic – don't let conflict occur). Then ask the other person, *"Is that topic fine with you?"*



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## - SUGGESTED SCRIPT -

### 1) GREET THE COUPLE AND SAY,

*“Have you picked your topic or issue for tonight’s call?”* (It should be a real issue in the relationship – can be an enhancement issue, minor disagreement or conflict, etc.)

*“Tell me in one sentence what it is”* (Help them briefly identify the topic – don’t let conflict occur). Then ask the other person, *“Is that topic fine with you?”*

### 2) SET UP THE DIALOGUE:

*“Okay, so (name), you brought up the topic; will you then be the Expresser, and (other name) will you Show Understanding?”*

*“Do you have your EXPRESSION STICK?”*

### 3) REVIEW THE 2 FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS:

Then say, *“Before we begin, just to give you a chance to refresh yourselves on the points of the skills, please open your MML Participant Books to Expression Skill on p. 82 and Showing Understanding Skill on p. 81, and review the main points quietly to yourselves. Let me know when you’re ready.”* ..... *“Ready?”*



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## - SUGGESTED SCRIPT -

### 4) BEGIN THE DIALOGUE:

*“Okay, (name) please begin Expressing by Remembering the Good...”* The Expresser then tells the Listener an underlying positive—“remembering the good”.

The coach then asks the Listener to Show Understanding to the underlying positive.

The coach asks the Expresser if the Listener’s showing of understanding was accurate. If so, the coach then asks the Expresser to express their next point. After that point has been expressed, the coach then asks the Listener to show understanding regarding that point to the Expresser’s satisfaction.

The coach then asks the Expresser, *“Is there more?”*

When the Expresser has expressed enough on the subject (to their satisfaction) and the Listener has shown understanding each step of the way (to the Expresser’s satisfaction), then the coach asks that they switch roles and exchange the Expression Stick. Now the new Expresser expresses his/her thoughts, concerns, desires, and feelings on the topic, and the Listener responds by showing understanding to the new Expresser, and the dialogue continues back and forth in this skilled fashion, i.e., Expression – Show Understanding – Switch.

In the course of the dialogue, the skills coach makes suggestions and gives compliments as appropriate and timely in the course of their dialogue, all with the express purpose of helping the couple to use and stay “in skill”. The demeanor of the skills coach should always be pleasant, supportive and encouraging.

**REMINDER:** An ongoing objective of the skills coach is to try to help the couple speak in ways that enable the conversation to **GO DEEPER – TO FEELINGS**; however, this should be done gently and not come across as intrusive or forced. Compliment when someone goes deeper in Expressing, Showing Understanding, or otherwise uses the skills well.



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## - SUGGESTED SCRIPT -

### 5) END THE CALL (but perhaps NOT the dialogue):

If thirty minutes has passed and the couple isn't finished, find an appropriate place to interrupt and say:

*"It's been 30 minutes and I'm going to sign off for this week, but please continue the dialogue until you both have said all that you want to say."*

You may ask the couple:

*"How was this experience for you tonight? How was it for you using the skills tonight compared to if you had not used the skills?"*

>> Confirm the next call's day and time.

Remind the couple that one of the main reasons for these skills coaching calls is for the couple to PRACTICE using the skills - so that over time the skills become their HABITS.

*"Please continue practicing the communication skills regularly. Have a great week!!"  
Goodbye!!*

# MML PHONE COACHING NOTES

NAMES OF COUPLE: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

*REMEMBER: Coach the skills, NOT the topic!*

|                                                                                                |             |                                              |             |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|
| Call #: _____                                                                                  | Date: _____ | Day: _____                                   | Time: _____ | to _____ |
| Topic: _____                                                                                   |             |                                              |             |          |
| Topic chosen by: _____                                                                         |             | Circle one: ENHANCEMENT - or - MILD CONFLICT |             |          |
| Skills practiced/Notes: (Showing Understanding, Expression, Discussion, Problem Solving, etc.) |             |                                              |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |
| Next scheduled call: _____                                                                     |             | Notes: _____                                 |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |

---

|                                                                                                |             |                                              |             |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|
| Call #: _____                                                                                  | Date: _____ | Day: _____                                   | Time: _____ | to _____ |
| Topic: _____                                                                                   |             |                                              |             |          |
| Topic chosen by: _____                                                                         |             | Circle one: ENHANCEMENT - or - MILD CONFLICT |             |          |
| Skills practiced/Notes: (Showing Understanding, Expression, Discussion, Problem Solving, etc.) |             |                                              |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |
| Next scheduled call: _____                                                                     |             | Notes: _____                                 |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |
| _____                                                                                          |             |                                              |             |          |

## 4 HELPFUL COACHING SKILLS:

- 1. Reinforcement:** “Good job!” “Great!”
- 2. Structuring for Success:** Give directions
- 3. Modeling:** Give them the words to say
- 4. Prompting:** “And that makes you feel?”

