Onboarding Check-In Job Aid: The 4 Cs

Use at every orientee check-in. Orientation can be complete while onboarding is still failing.

Orientation vs. onboarding

Orientation: a time-limited introduction to the job, unit, and policies. It has an end date and a checklist.	**Onboarding:** the broader, ongoing integration into the role, team, and culture, often across the whole first year.

The four building blocks

Building block	Look for	Ask the orientee	Your NPD move
Compliance	Required HR items, mandatory education, policies, and credential checks done on time.	"Is anything required still hanging over you?"	Move what you can into pre-start modules so day one is about people, not forms.
Clarification	Orientee can describe what success looks like at 30, 60, and 90 days.	"What do you think is expected of you by the end of orientation?"	Share written role expectations and the competency plan in week one. Revisit them at every check-in.
Culture	Knows how handoffs, escalation, and mistakes are really handled on this unit.	"What has surprised you about how things work here?"	Say the unwritten rules out loud. Ask the preceptor to explain the why behind unit habits.
Connection	Can name a go-to person on every shift. Feels accepted, not alone.	"Who do you call when something goes sideways? Who do you eat lunch with?"	Assign a peer buddy separate from the preceptor. Make personal introductions to charge nurses and key partners.

Rate it, then act

For each C, rate **Strong**, **Partial**, or **Missing**. Start with the lowest-rated block. If two tie, work in this order: **Connection, Culture, Clarification, Compliance**. Connection is the level most linked to commitment and job satisfaction in research on Bauer's model (Meyer & Bartels, 2017).

My check-in notes

Orientee: _____ **Week:** _____ **Date:** _____

Building block	Rating (circle one)	Notes	Next step and owner
Compliance	S / P / M		
Clarification	S / P / M		
Culture	S / P / M		
Connection	S / P / M		

Red flags to act on this week

- Orientee says they do not know who to call for help, or that they feel alone on the unit.
- Checklist is on schedule but the orientee cannot describe what success looks like.
- An experienced nurse new to the specialty is on a shortened plan based on years of experience alone. Assess against the new specialty's competencies instead.
- Check-ins only cover skills sign-offs and never ask how the orientee is fitting in.

Why it matters: first-year RN turnover was 22.7% nationally in 2025, and the average cost of one bedside RN turnover was $60,090 (NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc., 2026). The first year is the onboarding window.

Dr. Kai M. Nissen, DNP, RN, NPD-BC®, CNOR®, LSSGB

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