

Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision

Reflective supervision is distinct due to the shared exploration of the parallel process. That is, attention to all of the relationships is important, including the ones between practitioner and supervisor, between practitioner and parent, and between parent and child/youth. It is critical to understand how each of these relationships affects the others. Of additional importance, reflective supervision relates to professional and personal development within one's discipline by attending to the emotional content of the work and how reactions to the content affect the work. Finally, there is often greater emphasis on the supervisor's ability to listen and wait, allowing the supervisee to discover solutions, concepts and perceptions on his/her own without interruption from the supervisor.

The primary objectives of reflective supervision include the following:

- form a trusting relationship between supervisor and practitioner;
- establish consistent and predictable meetings and times;
- ask questions that encourage details about the child, youth, and parent and emerging relationship;
- listen;
- remain emotionally present;
- teach/guide;
- nurture/support;
- apply the integration of emotion and reason;
- foster the reflective process to be internalized by the supervisee;
- explore the parallel process and to allow time for personal reflection; and
- attend to how reactions to the content affect the process.

Reflective supervision may be carried out individually or within a group.

The reflective supervisor also needs to provide administrative and educational supervision. Some reflective supervisors schedule a meeting time separate from the supervision time that addresses administrative and educational objectives. Others choose to address administrative and educational issues during the regular reflective supervision meeting. Disciplinary action should never occur within a group supervisory session. In all instances, the reflective supervisor is expected to set limits that are clear, firm and fair, to work collaboratively and to interact and respond respectfully.

In sum, it is important to remember that relationship is the foundation for reflective supervision. All growth and discovery about the work and oneself takes place within the context of this trusting relationship.

Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision (continued)

To the extent that the supervisor and supervisee are able to establish a secure relationship, the capacity to be reflective will flourish.

“When it’s going well, supervision is a holding environment, a place to feel secure enough to expose insecurities, mistakes, questions and differences.” Rebecca Shahmoon Shanock (1992).

Best Practice Guidelines for the Reflective Supervisor

- Agree on a regular time and place to meet.
- Arrive on time and remain open, curious and emotionally available.
- Protect against interruptions, e.g. turn off phone, close door.
- Set the agenda together with the supervisee(s) before you begin.
- Respect each supervisee’s pace/readiness to learn.
- Ally with supervisee’s strengths, offering reassurance and praise, as appropriate.
- Observe and listen carefully.
- Strengthen supervisee’s observation and listening skills.
- Suspend harsh or critical judgment.
- Invite the sharing of details about a particular situation, child, youth, parent, their competencies, behaviors, interactions, strengths, and concerns.
- Listen for the emotional experiences that the supervisee is describing when discussing the case, e.g. anger, impatience, sorrow, confusion, etc.
- Respond with appropriate empathy.
- Invite supervisee to have and talk about feelings awakened in the presence of an infant, very young child, youth and parent(s).
- Wonder about, name and respond to those feelings with appropriate empathy.
- Encourage exploration of thoughts and feelings that the supervisee has about the work with children, youth, and families as well as about one’s response(s) to the work, as the supervisee appears ready or able.
- Encourage exploration of thoughts and feelings that the supervisee has about the experience of supervision as well as how that experience might influence his/her work with the children, youth, and families or his/her choices in developing relationships.
- Maintain a shared balance of attention on the children/youth, parent/caregiver and supervisee.
- Reflect on the supervision session in preparation for the next meeting.
- Remain available throughout the week if there is a crisis or concern that needs immediate attention

Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision (continued)

Best Practice Guidelines for the Reflective Supervisee

- Agree with the supervisor on a regular time and place to meet.
- Arrive on time and remain open and emotionally available.
- Come prepared to share the details of a particular situation, home visit, assessment, experience or dilemma.
- Ask questions that allow you to think more deeply about your work with children, youth, and families and also yourself.
- Be aware of the feelings that you have in response to your work and in the presence of a child, youth, and parent(s)
- When you are able, share those feelings with your supervisor.
- Explore the relationship of your feelings to the work you are doing.
- Allow your supervisor to support you.
- Remain curious.
- Suspend critical or harsh judgment of yourself and of others.
- Reflect on supervision session to enhance professional practice and personal growth.

Adapted from Michigan Association for Mental Health <http://www.mi-aimh.org/reflective-supervision>