

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

What is Reflective Practice?

Reflective Practice is an umbrella term for both reflective supervision and reflective consultation. Reflective practice is a type of clinical practice that relies on people's experiences to improve the way they work. Those who work in the social services and human services fields experience high rates of vicarious trauma, stress and burnout – all of which affect the quality of service provided by an organization.

Reflective practice consists of either the supervisor or consultant meeting with the worker on a regular basis to examine his or her past actions, emotions, experiences and responses, and use that information in understanding how he or she responds to current situations. Additionally, it helps those involved work through stressful and/or traumatic experiences in an effort to reduce the negative impacts these experiences have on employee's personal and professional lives. This method is increasingly being adopted in child protection and childcare arenas where retention rates or low and work-related stress is high.

Background

Reflective practice has been identified as an effective tool with child welfare workers (Gibbs, 2001). For child welfare workers, the rates of burnout and stress are high. They are often young, inexperienced, overloaded with work and unable to think on a larger, conceptual level about their cases. Typical supervision often focuses on administrative management, and does not include time set aside to talk through cases conceptually at a deeper level and to address the worker's feelings toward those cases. Reflective practice can assist in addressing the emotionally intrusive nature of child welfare work and seeing how all the pieces fit together. It is an important tool in practice-based professional learning as a method in bring together formal learning or therapy and practice.

"We all have thoughts, feelings, and experiences that we carry into our work. The job of reflective consultation is to quietly seek out these internal processes and see how they impact our decisions. Once we are aware of our own internal processes, we can make more thoughtful decisions that benefit those clients we are working with. Not being aware of these things means making decisions based upon assumptions, personal feelings, and biases that often go unrecognized without this type of consultation."

- **Jennie Cole-Mossman,**
LIMHP

*Co-Director of Nebraska
Resource Project for
Vulnerable Young Children*



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Why Does it Matter?

Reflective practice helps the practitioner attend to the emotional content of the work and identify how his/her reactions to the content affect the work. Working in the 'helping field' can be stressful and demanding work and without the proper tools to help them appropriately manage their emotions, many aspects of their personal and professional lives are negatively impacted which often leads to high turnover rates in such agencies.

The Benefits

- ◆ Improves case conceptualization and critical thinking skills
- ◆ Promotes appropriate management of emotions
- ◆ Strengthens relationships between supervisor and employee
- ◆ Contributes to professional identity and career development
- ◆ Positively affects workplace culture and accountability

Nebraska Center on Reflective Practice-Our Initial Work

- ◆ Train the Trainer program including child welfare and early childhood education specialists
- ◆ Initial Program Evaluation
- ◆ Cohort trainings including child welfare supervisors and administrators, family support service providers, attorneys, CASA staff and volunteers, early childhood education workforce and childcare workforce



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