



1. Why is reflection important for childcare providers?

Childcare providers are consistently depleting their emotional resources through offering care and compassion to children, their families as well as their peers or colleagues. Reflective practice and supervision are cornerstones in professional development. However, focus on the early childcare field is consistently on the acquisition of knowledge (Ways of Knowing) and practice (Ways of Doing). Reflection, taking the time to pause and wonder, networks the knowledge and practice that professionals gain in trainings to “How they ARE” or (Ways of Being). The 3 critical areas of Professional Formation (Costa,), Ways of Knowing, Doing and Beings are glued with the practice of reflection.

Reflective practice is the daily use of wonder in our interactions. Reflective Supervision or Consultation are regular or expected sessions, using collaboration and reflection. In childcare work, each relationship impacts all relationships. If the thoughts and feelings that get stirred up through relational interactions are not examined, then they often turn inward or become harmful. Reflective supervision offers the safe and protected space to examine freely the feelings generated by the work with empathy, compassion, and non-judgement. The collaborative nature in reflection places the focus on the experience of the baby or child, where contemplation of *whys* and *what ifs* lead the professional to access the best possible use of self for positive outcomes.

Reflective practice and supervision are not a fix it session. The key to labeling reflection as professional development is found in the opportunity for both supervisor and supervisee to explore, develop an alliance and wonder about possible avenues for the supervisee to comfortably try on, integrating their own ideas and solutions to the experiences. The value of using reflection is that it prevents burnout or compassion fatigue, offers safe space for sharing feelings and thoughts, increases self-awareness, and motivates creativity and wonder that is shared with families and their children.

2. How might a director set up an environment that invites reflection?

A director, if currently not using announced reflective time, will want to begin slowly with introducing Mindfulness activities and gentle use of reflective questions. Most

individuals have feelings of vulnerability, when the initial reflective supervision question of “How does this make you feel” is presented. Especially, if there has been no PRACTICE with reflection.

A director is encouraged to name a regular, expected time as reflective and announce it, putting aside all administrative discussion and that no part of the conversation applies to any performance evaluations. Seasoned Reflective supervisors have shared that they meet for reflective sessions in a different space from administrative supervision. A shared successful way to introduce reflective practice to early childhood staff describes consistent use of a segment in the staff meeting for Mindfulness and reflection on an identified issue, such as parent engagement. Initiating reflection uses intent and balances any power dynamics in the relationships so that the conversations are collaborative. Confidentiality and safety are assured. A director may acknowledge that this feels vastly different from typical supervision and that the session may feel uncomfortable or stir up vulnerabilities. Individuals are respected and offered trust as well as empathy.

Learning and supervision does occur during reflective sessions. These are present through equally shared feedback and providing opportunities for professionals to explore their own solutions, access to resources or responses to policies and expectations.

3. What might a reflective group look like for early childhood teachers?

A reflective group will develop as described in group dynamics as going through stages of forming, norming, storming and performing. The environment will hold security, regularity, respect for all and trust. It is recommended that a centering or Mindfulness activity start the group time, as well as individual reflective supervision. Checking own’s state at the door or preparing to be open and respectfully listen requires a physical calm that divorces one from the busyness of the job.

The reflective sessions are not therapy however often they are regarded as therapeutic for professionals. This is time to step back, think about thinking and have introspection. Parallel process in feeling with others is available. The empathetic collaboration that is nurtured can be referred to in this quote from Jeree Pawl (1998), “*Do unto others as you would have others do unto others.*” The time in sessions is expected for remembering and recollecting how our experiences influence the daily interactions that we have with children and families. The expectation that linking these experiences to themes in relationships and education as well as applying resources to situations is powerful in defining Reflective supervision as professional development and a valuable learning tool. It is also a safe place to explore cultural awareness and ask curious questions to inform best practice.

4. How do reflective practice and parallel process help young children and families?

Reflective practice enriches an open-minded approach and strengthens empathetic listening. The professionals engaged in reflective practice and supervision use parallel process in their own interactions with others, including parents, caregivers, children, and colleagues. Parallel process is the way of being with another professional when that person feels emotionally secure in the interactions including words, tone, gestures and presence between you. Then that professional integrates the same way of being into their interactions with others, specifically families and children. The integration of being present then continues to positively impact a wide circle specifically the families serviced. It is the parallel process and use of professional self that children and families immediately “feel” when interacting with early childcare professionals, who are supported by reflective practice. Parallel process is a ripple effect in being the cloak of how we are, moving from professionals to parents to their children. It is powerful in growing as well as nurturing healthy social emotional relationships. Parallel process brings nurturing into focus and shows the model for respectful, trusting, and responsive interactions that build secure attachment.

The ability to promote and secure felt safety is key to changing reactive behaviors to responsive behaviors. It is in the practice of reflection that professionals become fully responsive in their interactions so that parallel process shares this promotional approach to healthy relational wellness with families and their children. It is life changing and peacemaking.

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