Moving Towards Self Reflection
Mary Zaremba, MA
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Working with Others
• Builds and maintains effective interpersonal relationships with families and professional colleagues by:
  o respecting and promoting the decision-making authority of families understanding and respecting the beliefs and practices of the family’s culture
  o following parents’ lead
  o following through consistently on commitments and promises
  o providing regular communications and updates.

Reflection
• Seeks higher degree of agreement between self-perceptions and the way others perceive him/her.

Many of us think of ourselves as being naturally reflective. When describing ourselves to others in a social or work situation we often name what we do, who we are and how we make our contribution in the world. For example we might hear someone say, “I teach school”, or, “I’m a mechanic”. Beyond that we may define ourselves as being either an extrovert or introvert, by a sign of the Zodiac or as a vegan. Upon introduction to reflective practices and supervision, home visitors may decide that they are either reflective by nature, or not. Is this true? Are we born reflective? How can reflective functioning be encouraged? Costa & Sullivan, (2009), suggest that reflection is a human capacity that can be grown over time. Participation in learning opportunities can “nurture and strengthen” reflective functioning because all of us are continually learning and re-learning in all aspects of our professional lives.

Fundamental to nurturing our reflective capacity is attending to our feelings and experiences, as they arise, in our relationship-based work. Prior experiences trigger internal stirrings, (feelings), and likewise, our feelings or internal responses influence our experiences.
Our challenge as supervisors is moving into this scary area of affect with supervisees who are unprepared or not sure they want to take this step. After all, we may hear, what does this family’s troubling situation have to do with me?

Costa and Sullivan offer two questions that focus on this dilemma. The first question focuses on the understanding of the relationship of the baby with the caregiver, “Who is this baby to this caregiver/family?” The second question, “What is going on inside of you…the helper?” turns our attention to the internal feelings of the home visitor. The thinking here is that the story of this baby and family may “awaken” a remembered story in us. Understanding this essential relationship between this caregiver and this baby at this point in their relationship is basic to anything and everything the home visitor may do or say. The home visitors comfort, discomfort, enjoyment, or ambivalence given the answer to the two questions reflects his or her own history.

However, these personal explorations are intended to be focused on the context of their work with the family and do not need to be shared explicitly during supervision. Reflective supervision is not psychotherapy! In other words, the home visitors are not expected to share details from their personal and private lives. What is expected is that home visitors begin to connect what they see and hear during home visits with their internal reactions and hopefully discuss those in the context of this baby and family.

Using the two questions suggested by Costa and Sullivan encourages the home visitor, who may be either new to supervision or think themselves as non-reflective, to explore these affective dynamics gradually and safely in the context of their relationship with the family.

An Idea To Try…

If a home visitor brings up a personal, private issue to supervision, try re-framing to ask in what way their issue could affect their relationship with a specific family they see.

To encourage reflectivity, ask are there families you prefer to see and some you don’t? What’s something that you enjoy about that family? What don’t you enjoy about the other family? Being specific about a family avoiding generalizations about “some” families versus others.

To help tune in to affective dynamics between care giving and child, you could ask, “How do you know Grandma was upset with ______ (childs name) ______.”

Reference/Additional Resources