Getting Started: Introducing Reflective Supervision  
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NMAIMH competencies addressed  
Communicating  
- Listens to others; asks questions for clarification  
Thinking  
- Assigns priorities to needs, goals, and actions  
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.  
  o Understanding and respecting the beliefs and practices of the family’s culture.  
  o Following the parent’s lead.  
  o Providing regular communications and updates

Most people seem to agree reflective supervision is a good thing. Many people will also say, “But who has time?” Supervision that oversees administrative tasks such as completing reports, ensuring complete and accurate documentation or timelines, are more familiar and clear cut. Usually evidence of productivity is tangible. Supervisors can look in files, read reports, and can know whether work is getting done. Shouldn’t that be enough?

Reflective supervision demands more of us. We are asked to focus on the internal response of the practitioner to learn more about who they are, what brought them to this work, and ultimately what is the context of their relationship with the families they see. Relationship-based work involves a different level of intimacy for the reflective supervisor and the home visitor. How do we create an environment for the home visitors to feel safe, respected and heard? Similarly, what will home visitors do during home visits so caregivers will experience safety, acceptance and feel truly heard?

It is the role of the supervisor to create the “holding” environment (Winnicott, 1965) for home visitors. The supervisor defines the space for supervision by setting a routine time and place without interruption. This commitment to home
visitors gives the message, *I'm here for you right now and, I can be trusted with what you bring to me.*

Explaining the format or sequence of the conversation will help the home visitor form an idea in their mind about what to expect. As home visitors new to relationship-based work and reflective practices, they will appreciate guidance from the supervisor about how reflective supervision differs from administrative or other kinds of supervision they may have experienced.

What is the role of the home visitor in this equation? Home visitors have an active role in reflective supervision by: agreeing to participate consistently, preparing to share details about their observations and experiences with families, noticing how experiences may challenge their beliefs and values, and being willing to explore thoughts and feelings to increase awareness of self and others. While the decision making about the logistics of supervision are made jointly with the home visitor, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to “hold” and “contain” the home visitors reactions, reflections and felt experiences (Weatherston & Brown, 2009).

As the supervisors relationship grows and deepens, parallels between reflective supervision and work with families become more apparent. Trust over time will contribute to a mutually satisfying relationship between the supervisor and home visitors, and between the home visitors and the families they see.

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**An Idea To Try...**

Is there a home visiting experience of your own that you could describe to your home visitor as a sample situation? For example, sharing what the family was like, their living situation, what the baby was like, what you noticed about the parent and the baby’s relationship, and how you affected by your relationship with this family. Use as much detail as you can remember to provide the home visitor with a clear example of what you might expect the home visitor to describe to you during supervision.

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**References/Additional Resources**
