NMAIMH competencies addressed

Direct service skills
- Formally and informally observes the parent(s) or caregiver(s) and infant/young child to understand the nature of their relationship, developmental strengths, and capacities for change

Reflection
- Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths, and growth areas; discusses issues, concerns, actions to take with supervisor, consultants or peers
- Consults regularly with supervisor, consultants, peers to understand own capacities and needs, as well as the capacities and needs of families
- Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work and to recognize areas for professional and personal development

If you were baking a cake for the first time, how helpful would the following instructions be: Buy some flour and eggs, mix them together in a bowl, and then put it all in the oven. Enough information? Probably not. What’s missing? We need more details if we want to bake a cake that is edible. We would need to know how much flour to use, how many eggs, if there are other ingredients needed, and at what temperature we should set the oven.

Detail is also an important ingredient in reflective supervision. Within the reflective supervision session the supervisee shares a home visiting experience that they wish to explore with their supervisor. Because the supervisor has consistently provided a supportive, nurturing, and reflective experience for the home visitor, she feels safe to bring up challenging situations. In turn, the supervisee is comfortable answering questions asked by the supervisor that help her explore the topic in more detail and at a deeper level.

This process is necessary in order to achieve the “shared understanding” that Victor Bernstein describes in Stage III of developing the “Shape of the Supervisory Session”. He talks about the supervisor getting a “verbal video” of the situation from supervisee. The verbal video is a detailed account of the situation by the supervisee. It is the supervisor’s job to ask questions that help the home visitor
provide specifics regarding what they observed, how they felt, what they were thinking, and how they reacted.

This process of relaying the verbal video encourages the home visitor to reflect on the situation by exploring her thoughts, feelings, and actions. Bernstein writes that this reflective process can help the home visitor develop a deeper understanding and come up with “next steps”. “Insight and new understanding often leads the home visitor to consider what she wants to try next”. (Bernstein V., Winter 2002-03). In this way the home visitor is supported in developing her own problem solving skills.

The details also assist the reflective supervisor by helping the supervisor get a clearer picture of the situation. Sometimes our tendency is to rush to conclusions or actions based on limited information, especially when the situation involves some sort of crisis. By slowing down the process through asking questions and listening, the reflective supervisor is less likely to rush in with a solution that could potentially make the situation worse. In addition, especially in crisis situations, the act of listening and allowing the other person to tell their story can “provide a calming influence on both parties”. (Bernstein V., Winter 2002-03).

By allowing the home visitor to provide a verbal video that leads to next steps generated by the home visitor, the supervisor sends a non-verbal message about the confidence he/she has in the home visitor to come up with solutions, which in turn can help the home visitor trust that the family can come up with solutions to the challenges they are facing. (Bernstein V., Winter 2002-03)

An Idea To Try...

- Find a newspaper or magazine article that you have not yet read. After noting the title, instead of reading the whole article, try reading just the first sentence of each paragraph in the article. When you get to the end of the article ask yourself:
  - Do I understand the article?
  - Could I accurately relay the ideas discussed in this article to someone?
  - What do I need to know more about?
  - What questions do I need to ask?

- When home visitors rush through a description or speak in generalities, think of this exercise and your role to ask the questions that will help the home visitor slow things down and explore their situation in more detail.

References/Additional Resources