It’s All Connected: Paying Attention to All the Dots
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NMAIMH competencies addressed
Thinking
  • maintaining perspective
Reflection
  • contemplation
  • professional/personal development

The whole is more than the sum of its parts.
Aristotle

This year the focus for the NM Home Visiting Program has been to connect the dots. Part of the intent has been to see the connection between goals and the screening tools, for example, or observation of the parent-child interaction and the use of the database. But how do we pay attention to all these pieces and stay present with the family?

As we become more aware of how the dots are connected, we begin to see them not as separate pieces, but rather, part of a larger whole. A perfect example of this is the apparent contrast between case management and a focus on the parent-child interaction. In those instances where we are assisting a parent with a more case management-oriented task, is it possible to continue to notice the infant and the parent-child interaction? Can we weave the two together so that in the middle of assisting a parent to understand some of the language on a housing form, we notice that the infant is beginning to fuss and wonder with the parent what their child might be wanting? As we become more aware of how everything is tied together, we also begin to notice where the baby is and the interaction between parent and child more consistently.

In a similar manner, all these dots or pieces can be woven into our conversation with parents so that what at first may seem like discreet questions on an intake, as an example, becomes an opportunity for the home visitor and parent to discuss and explore who this family is. Likewise, the social history, which can sometimes feel
awkward and intrusive when viewed in isolation, becomes an opportunity to build relationships and trust through genuine curiosity and exploration of a parent’s past. For the parent, it could also be a chance to reflect on their early experience as a child and a way to gain a better understanding of how they parent their own child.

All of this presents us with an opportunity to shift our perspective in a way that is not so different from what happens during reflective supervision. We might begin our supervision by relating an incident from a home visit where we became reactive. As our supervisor sits with us and helps us turn activation into exploration, we often get to a point where we can see and hold not only our own perspective, but that of the baby, and the parent. In that moment, a shift often occurs and we see things more clearly. This too is not so different from the shift in perspective that occurs when a mother no longer sees her infant’s crying as an attempt by her infant to make her mad, but as a bid for her attention, perhaps because he is hungry or perhaps to feel the safety of being cuddled in his mother’s arms.

Getting to the whole that is larger than the sum of its parts requires that we first get to know and understand the parts. We need to become so familiar with the tools that they become second nature to us. As we spend more time in reflective supervision sessions, we notice that we also spend more time reflecting on what just happened during a visit (reflection on action). The more opportunities we have in staff meetings or supervision to discuss concepts such as mutual competence or the parallel process, the more we own these and make them part of who we are. As we integrate the various aspects or skills, the whole becomes larger because we connect the pieces and build on what we know.

**Talking points for supervisors**

- If you were to draw a diagram of all the different aspects of home visiting and how they are connected:
  - do you notice that there are areas you tend to notice more, less?
  - how does this impact your supervision of staff?
  - are there areas your home visitor tends to pay more or less attention to?
- Which aspects of the program still feel disconnected for you, for each home visitor?
- As your supervisee talks about a family or home visit, how well integrated are the various aspects of the program?