The Reflective Supervisory Relationship: What does it look like?
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Reflection
- Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths, and growth areas; discusses issues, concerns, actions to take with supervisor, consultants or peers
- Remains open and curious
- 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/or personal development

Communicating
- Actively listens; asks questions for clarification

The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important things we ever give each other is our attention. A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.
- Rachel Naomi Remen (1996, p. 143)

Relationships are powerful partnerships that ultimately provide opportunities for people to grow and develop in new and exciting ways. As such, the Reflective Supervisory relationship has specific components that allow for a mutually satisfying and trusting relationship to develop and deeper self-awareness and insight to be created. As in all relationships, both the supervisor and supervisee have responsibilities within this relationship. The supervisor is responsible for creating an environment where the supervisee feels secure to explore their thoughts and feelings. By establishing a routine of meeting regularly - with no interruptions - the supervisor is fully attentive, follows the supervisees lead, listens closely and uses empathic responses. Within such an environment, the supervisee is responsible for being willing to explore and think more deeply about their work, increase self-awareness of the emotional impact of the intensity of their work, and take in and use new insights.
Deborah J. Weatherston and Carla Barron, in A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision, state several suggestions for supervisors to engage in this process and encourage reflection with a supervisee. These are:

- Observe and listen without interruption
- Help the HV to feel competent
- Remain emotionally present and empathic
- Allow self to wonder and “not know”
- Remain curious and tolerate uncertainty
- Respond to the feelings as appropriate
- Hold the supervisee in mind as s/he listens to the details of their experience
- Hold and contain the feelings expressed
- Invite the supervisee to express him/herself without criticizing what s/he said or did
- Allow the supervisee to have and express feelings about the baby, the parent or the developing relationship

Trust plays a vital role in this reflective focused relationship and develops over time. As the supervisor listens, observes, reflects and responds in a supportive manner, the foundation is being created. Simultaneously, the supervisee is being asked to take the risk of sharing themselves as this foundation is developing. As such, a powerful, nurturing and supportive relationship is created.

An Idea To Try…
Choose one of the following…

- If you struggle with making regularly scheduled times to meet with your supervisee, commit to making that happen the next three months and see how the relationship changes/deepens with that consistency.
- If you tend to respond with a suggestion, practice listening without interruption for a period of time and see how that changes the dynamic.
- If you tend to have difficulty with others intense feelings, wanting to make them “feel better”, practice “holding and containing” their feelings without doing anything but listening and acknowledging. Notice where the supervisee is able to go with that type of support.

References/Additional Resources
Washington, DC : Zero to Three