Reflective Practice: Use of Self
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Direct Service Skills
- Observing and listening
Working with others
- Building and maintaining relationships
Reflection
- Contemplation

Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive that is youer than you.

—Dr. Seuss

What do you bring to the relationship when you begin the home visiting process? You bring you...and all your training and all the learning you’ve done to become a home visitor. You also bring a lot of other things—your experiences, your attitudes and biases, your feelings, your fears your hot buttons, your calming reflexes, all these things good and bad—all of it!

The following information was presented in IMH Foundations Training, conducted by Peggy MacLean, PhD, IMH-III and Karen Longenecker, LCSW, IMH-III. These were my take-aways from the first of the series of sessions.

A key component of any helping practice, including home visiting, is reflective practice. Being able to slow down, pause, evaluate and integrate information and formulate a thoughtful response to a situation is key to the helping process. Understanding use of self “the capacity to observe and be aware of one’s own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as an important source of communication and information” (Hevron, M.C., Ivins, B. and Weston, D. R., 2005) serves the home visitor well in the execution of their duties.

What is Use of Self?
It is awareness of our feelings, our values and beliefs that may be activated during a particular event. It is the spin that we put on the situation, bringing our own personal experience to it. The home visitor must practice perspective-taking, that is, be able to see the situation through the eyes of another person, outside of their own private personal experience. It is the ability to be curious and to seek to understand from another’s lens. It is important to have in mind a series of questions to further acquire
information and to get clarity about the issue without imposing judgment. It is putting your own personal triggers or presses on hold in order to be in the moment for the other person. By understanding your own triggers and presses, you are helped to better understand those of the parent or caregiver.

Sometimes, a home visitor being able to flex their “pause” muscles serves them well. The ability to hold the tension and tolerate conflicting ideas while realizing their own personal anxieties, triggers or presses serves to enable the home visitor and the parent or caregiver to further explore the situation. They may “wonder together” and consider alternate views. Together they may reorient or reframe a parent or caregiver’s interpretation of the event.

It is important for the home visitor to be aware of what they are feeling during this process. The home visitor can bring those thoughts to a reflective supervision session with their manager to further explore and deal with any personal feelings or thoughts they may have after the session.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- What are your triggers? What activates you?
- How do you monitor your body when you experience a trigger or get activated?
- Who do you go to in order to “unpack” a difficult experience? What does that meeting look like?
- Role play with your teammates about difficult events you’ve encountered in a home visit

References/Additional Resources