



## Phases of a Reflective Conversation

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### **NMAIMH competencies addressed**

#### Thinking

- Sees and can explain the “big picture” when analyzing situations
- Sees and can explain the interactions of various factors

#### Communicating

- Uses appropriate non-verbal behavior correctly; interprets others' non-verbal behavior
- Actively listens to others; asks questions for clarification

#### Reflection

- Remains open and curious
- Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths and growth areas

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Reflective practice has some basic guidelines that we are all aware of and use as we structure our time with the people we supervise. Consistency, collaboration and reflection are the essential components of Reflective Practice. Safety, respect, a sense of curiosity, and compassion are core elements that we bring to the supervisory relationship. Given that, what does a reflective conversation actually look like? Although reflective supervision is a non-linear process, you can communicate consistency, reliability and containment by how you approach the process of the reflective conversation. For those who are newer to the process, Theresa Atchley, Sonja Hall, Sarah Martinez and Linda Gilkerson, in *A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision* (2009), describe eight phases of a supervision meeting from preparation to post supervision reflection:

- 1) Preparation
- 2) Greeting/reconnecting
- 3) Opening the dialogue/finding the agenda
- 4) Telling the story/focusing on the details
- 5) Understanding perspective/generating hypotheses
- 6) Considering next steps
- 7) Closing
- 8) Post supervision reflection

*Preparation* is for you – to get yourself ready to fully be with the person you are about to talk with. Clear your desk, turn off your phone, etc.; you may want to even review your notes from your last supervision meeting.

*Reconnecting* is a transitional piece – it’s a brief conversation that brings the supervisee from where they’ve just been to the present so you both can be in this supervision time together.

*Opening the dialogue* is where you invite the beginning of the process. “What’s on your mind today”?, or “Where would you like to start”, or “What would you like to focus on today” are invitations to your supervisee. Your job is then to listen.

*Telling the story and focusing on the details* is the next step once a topic has been identified. “What happened?”, “What was said?”, “What did you notice”? all encourage your supervisee to construct the story of the family scenario. With your curious questioning, your supervisee may possibly become aware of her own attitudes and reactions within a given situation. This is not the time to solve problems or make things okay. This is the opportunity to hear what is going on from the supervisee’s point of view.

*Understanding perspectives and generating hypotheses* is another part of the collaborative process. Together, you begin to wonder – possibly about how the mom feels while watching her child or what it is like for the child to have mom respond that way. As this collaborative process continues, hypotheses can be generated in a curious and exploring manner. The supervisee is supported to reflect on her own position and to toss around other perspectives.

*Considering next steps* comes **after** you have gathered information and formulated some potential hypotheses. This step helps to contain and organize what the supervisee has gleaned from the discussion thus far and, with your questions and support, come up with a potential plan for the next home visit.

*Closing* is an important piece of any discussion as it acknowledges what’s occurred so far and confirms plans for the next supervision meeting.

*Post supervision reflection* is an often overlooked component and yet is a vital one. Taking a few moments to reflect on key themes, supervisee’s level of engagement and your own feelings related to the session allows for a more complete sense of closure for you and readiness to move on to your next task.

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### **An Idea To Try...**

Whether you are new to reflective practice or a seasoned reflective supervisor, at your next supervision session, pay attention to the phases of your conversation. How do you start your session? Do you follow a certain routine in how you

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proceed? Do your steps match those listed above? Do you make time to reflect “post supervision”?

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### **References/Additional Resources**

Gilkerson, Linda, Scott Heller, Sheryl. (2009) A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision  
Washington, DC : Zero to Three