

Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision: Listening

Reflective practice requires that we listen intently to another or others. We need to listen to understand the realities that another person or persons are experiencing. We need to listen in order to understand the feelings that another person or persons are carrying. Reflective practice with very young children and families invites the professional to sit beside parent(s) and child together and to listen

What happens when we sit beside a parent and child and listen? We may stop talking and in the process grow still, sometimes making room for the parent and child to show us or tell us something. The telling may be non-verbal or the telling may be with words. The telling may be about the pregnancy, the baby, the relationship, themselves. The telling may be about the present or past. The telling may be about someone or some event or some feeling. By sitting quietly, we begin to hear what the parent and child want us to know and understand. We make room for them and for their stories. It is in the quiet of this “listening context” that feelings are awakened, for parents about their children and about themselves. Feelings are awakened for the listener, too.

Reflective supervision provides a “listening context” for the practitioner, a place to bring the “stories from the field” and the feelings awakened along the way. The supervisor who is “reflective” invites the practitioner to talk. Why? Having asked the practitioner to listen carefully, the supervisor must offer the same experience. As Jeree Pawl has so poignantly reminded us, we “do unto others as we want others to do unto others.”

A listening exercise:

We will work in pairs. One person talks about something on their mind (e.g., a situation, a point of change, a dilemma, a person, a relationship) for 10 minutes. The other person listens, observing carefully, without a response – limit gestures, words, nod of the head – to keep the full attention on the person talking. This is admittedly exaggerated, but I ask you to do this as an important part of the exercise. .

After 10 minutes, you will “debrief” with one another and then reverse the roles.

Share with the full group: What was your experience like? When you were the “story teller” and when you were the “listener?” What happened that was most meaningful for you? What was uncomfortable? What does this tell you about the importance of listening to reflective practice and reflective supervision?

What happens when we **really listen** to someone?

What happens when someone **really listens** to us?

Weatherston/Goldberg, 5/09

A Practical Exercise for Supervisors and Supervisees