



# Reflective Practice

Home visiting is relationship-based work. There are few right answers in home visiting, and relationships can ebb and flow. Reflection, "stepping back from the immediate experience to sort through thoughts and feelings about what one is observing and doing with children and families"<sup>i</sup> is a crucial practice for home visitors. It helps you understand what you see, how you plan with families, and how you take care of yourself and the important relationships you build in your work during the course of home visits.



In the home-based model, reflective practices occur on three levels.

- Reflecting with the parents about their own experiences and how they understand their child's experience
- Reflecting on your own practice
  - Supervisors and home visitors engage in reflective supervision as a way to process and plan for the work
- Reflecting with parents and providing them with a way to talk about what they observe in their children and how they are feeling. This also provides an opportunity for parents to honestly discuss their thoughts about how it feels to work with you, the home visitor
  - Talk with families about daily routines and experiences you suggest and how they see their children responding
  - Reflecting can generate ideas for expanding successful efforts, clarifying misunderstandings, and imagining different ways to approach moments that did not work out well
  - Families should be encouraged to share their reflections on working with you

Reflection is an activity that takes time and should be built into the home visitor's schedule. Programs may encourage their home visitors to use journaling for reflection, to have home visitors meet in groups to reflect as peers, or to use reflective supervision. This also provides an opportunity for parents to honestly discuss their thoughts about how it feels to work with you, the home visitor.

# How To

You can reflect with parents by:

- Identifying a situation that deserves notice. It may be very positive; for example, immediately after the baby rolls over, he looks at his dad with a smile. Or it may be something less pleasant to address, such as a parent who says, "She's such a show-off. What a pest."
  - You might say, "What is it like to have him look at you as if he's saying, 'Look what I did, Daddy?' You sure are important to him." Or, "I wonder what it feels like to you when you think she's showing off? What is she pestering you for? It sounds like 'showing off' is not a very good thing. Can you tell me more about that?"
  - It could be tempting to say, "She's not showing off; she just wants you to be proud of what she can do," but that would show a lack of empathy for something the parent is really trying to tell you.
    - Head Start and Early Head Start are programs that serve both child development and the development of effective parenting. For children to thrive, they need parents who are invested and engaged in the process. Parents need to be heard.

You can help parents be reflective by:

- Inviting them to offer their observations first (e.g., "Let's watch Cade cruising on that couch. What does that tell you about her right now?")
- Helping the parent reflect on the meaning of their child's actions; for example:
  - "Do you notice how often he looks at you and watches you? Right now he wants to learn everything from you. When you respond and keep the play going, you're really helping him to stay with something and keep learning from it."
  - "She's working so hard for you to notice what she's doing. What do you think about that? Are there some things you enjoy doing with her?"
- Providing parents of children with disabilities and special health needs with sensitive support as they respond to those challenges

You can reflect on your own practices in the following ways.

*Reflecting on the Visit*

- Dedicate time. You are busy! However, reflection is such an important part of what you do; it is helpful to schedule time to reflect.
  - Plan it for a time soon after the home visit so you can remember as much as possible.
- Reflect on your own responses to the visit.
  - Did it feel productive?
  - Were the parents and child comfortable and engaged?
  - Was there anything of concern you needed to address—or wished you had addressed?
- Consider family feedback on the visit.
  - It can be helpful to set aside a few minutes for reflection at the very end of the visit. Some programs ask for parent feedback in writing. Sometimes, home visitors set aside time at the beginning of a visit to reflect on what happened the previous week. This can be a reflection on last week's visit or just a check-in about how families used last week's visit to move forward toward their goals.
    - How are family reflections similar to yours? How are they different?
- Be aware of the quality of relationship and the boundaries between the parents and yourself.
  - Too much distance may make the experience feel clinical and official to the parents. They may feel as though you are in charge. However, not maintaining some professional boundaries (e.g., talking about your personal life) can blur the lines between a professional relationship and a friendship. A friend can do things with or for a parent that you can't or shouldn't do in your role.
- Review whether:
  - The experiences of the visit followed the child's goals and interests
  - The parents had most of the interaction with the child
  - You helped the parents notice the link between their actions and their child's response
  - The family recognized the ways in which they promoted their child's learning in the visit
- Review the joint planning experience.
  - How did the parents' observations and ideas drive planning?
  - How did you bring in information from the assessment, the curriculum, and your own knowledge of the family's interests, routines, and resources?
- Consider whether this home visit was really individualized.
  - Were you flexible and able to make changes if the parents or child were not engaged?
  - How was it different from what you would have done at any other home visit?

*Working with Your Supervisor*