



Promoting Reflective Practice

Technical assistance (TA) providers use reflection to help infant and toddler caregivers think more deeply about their work and to promote responsive caregiving practices. TA providers can guide infant and toddler caregivers toward deliberate and focused reflective practice, which in turn can move teachers toward more sensitive and responsive caregiving practices.

Supporting reflective practice may be one of the best things a TA provider can do to improve quality. Reflection helps teachers think about their caregiving practices and develop greater self-awareness. Ideally, TA providers not only serve as reflective partners for caregivers and teachers, they also foster reflective partnerships among child care professionals. Thus, TA providers help build caregivers' capacity to continue with reflective practice after TA services end.

TA providers build teachers' reflective capacity through thoughtful scaffolding. The following characteristics of reflective teachers are excerpted from the article "Becoming a Reflective Teacher" (Carter, Cividanes, Curtis, & Lebo, 2010, p. 1):

- ◆ Examines his or her own reactions to children or their actions to understand their source.
- ◆ Is curious about children's play and watches it closely.
- ◆ Documents details of children's conversations and activities.
- ◆ Takes time to study notes and photos to puzzle out what is significant.
- ◆ Eagerly shares stories about children's learning with families and co-workers.
- ◆ Asks co-workers and children's families about their insights
- ◆ Reads professional literature to learn more
- ◆ Share photos and stories of themselves to hear their views
- ◆ Changes the environment and materials to encourage new play and learning possibilities

A TA provider can foster these characteristics through thoughtful strategies such as a reflective cycle.

"Reflection is a time to slow down, to see what can be learned if we take the time to carefully look at and listen to ourselves, and those with whom we work."

(Parlakian, 2001, p. 16)

Using a Reflective Cycle

Reflection can support many aspects of a child care provider's work, including individualizing care, embracing families' cultural diversity, fostering relationships with families, making caregiving routines meaningful, appropriately guiding children's behavior, and building effective partnerships with coteachers. Scheduling regular time to use a reflective cycle with teachers helps keep reflection focused and intentional.

Building Time for Reflection

All teachers need to have time to engage in thoughtful, critical reflection. However, finding time for this practice can be a challenge. TA providers can help teachers think about how to find the time for reflection, whether in a



family child care home or a child care center. Finding times that already exist within the daily schedule is a good starting point. Here are some examples:

- ◆ When infants and toddlers are sleeping or resting (if possible given individual schedules)
- ◆ Before families arrive
- ◆ After families depart
- ◆ Staff meetings: In center-based programs, administrators can build in time during staff meetings to allow teachers to work in small groups or one on one with a TA provider
- ◆ Curriculum planning time

Elements of a Reflective Cycle

There are a variety of reflective cycle models that can guide a TA provider and teacher through the reflective process. In general, most reflective cycles include steps such as observation, documentation, time to think and reflect, and opportunities to plan actions and implement new practices or ideas. Some models refer to the steps as a *cycle of inquiry* that includes observation, reflection, and application (Chu, 2012). The steps of a reflective cycle are best facilitated with thoughtful support and guidance.

Here are a few examples of different reflective cycles that could be used:

- ◆ The Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988) uses the steps of description, feelings, evaluation, conclusions, and action.
- ◆ The Lawrence-Wilkes/Ashmore model (Lawrence-Wilkes & Ashmore, 2014) is an integrated model focused on critical reflection.
- ◆ WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) uses a three-step cycle called [Acknowledge, Ask and Adapt](#) (Amini Virmani & Mangione, 2013). The approach was developed specifically to support teachers in learning to interact effectively with families and handle culturally sensitive issues in responsive ways. The process can be applied to many different situations.
- ◆ The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation brief [Working toward a Definition of Infant/Toddler Curricula: Intentionally Furthering the Development of Individual Children within Responsive Relationships](#) presents a process that highlights responsive interactions and supportive relationships in infant and toddler curricula.

Resources

[South Carolina's Infant and Toddler Field Guide: Strengthening Professional Practices of Infant & Toddler Care Teachers](#), developed collaboratively by South Carolina and Ohio, along with Peter Mangione (WestEd) and Kay Albrecht (Innovations in Early Childhood Education, Inc.), gives teachers scenarios to practice reflective thinking using a cycle of Watch, Ask, Try.

The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center has a variety of resources that can support reflection, including the following:

- ◆ ["Reflective Supervision: Setting a Foundation for Reflective Practice in Your Program"](#)
- ◆ [Reflective Supervision: A Tool for Relationship-Based EHS Services](#)
- ◆ [News You Can Use: A Circle of Support for Infants and Toddlers – Reflective Practices and Strategies in Early Head Start](#)



- ◆ [Practice-Based Coaching \(PBC\)](#)
- ◆ [Tip Sheet: Dialogue Tips from the Experts](#)
- ◆ [Partnering with Families: Building Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships, module 5: “Reflective Supervision”](#)

Early Educators Central has the following resources:

- ◆ [Resources for Trainers, Consultants & Other Professional Development Specialists](#)
- ◆ [Know – See – Do – Improve Framework](#)

References

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