Reflective Supervision: Setting a Foundation for Reflective Practice in Your Program

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Lisa: Please stand by. Good day, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this Reflective Supervision conference. Just a reminder that today's program is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the call over to Ms. Amanda Perez. Please go ahead, Amanda.

Amanda Perez: Thank you, Lisa; and hello, everyone -- everyone out there. On behalf of the Early Head Start National Resource Center, let me welcome you all to today's audio conference, Reflective Supervision: Setting a Foundation for Reflective Practice in Your Program. We have been really struck by the interest in this audio conference and are glad to have a variety of folks on the line with us today. We've got program staff from all over the country, federal staff, and training and technical assistance providers, as well.

We're so happy to have all of you with us. And as Lisa said, if you know of folks who might want to hear this call at a later time, know that it is going to -- that it's being recorded and will eventually be posted on the ECLKC. So I have some news for you. We know that all over the country Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs are working really hard to ensure quality services and experience for vulnerable children and families.

And to support you in that effort, the Early Head Start National Resource Center is really excited to be able to provide you with a number of resources over the year to add to your resource libraries. This week, each Early Head Start program and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program will receive two books. One is "Learning through Supervision and Mentorship," and one is "A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision."

Today's audio conference is designed to provide some information on reflective supervision, and also to help you unpack those two books so that you can use them in a way that is most meaningful to your program. The chart on page 7 of your handouts can help with that a little bit. Over the course of the year, keep an eye on your snail mail. You will receive several more shipments rich with resources on a variety of topics related to quality services for infants, toddlers, and families.

Look for additional learning experiences from the EHS NRC that will provide opportunities for exploration of those resources on how they might best be used in your programs. And to get this one started, I'm going to have our expert panel introduce themselves. The first panelist barely needs an introduction. Angie Godfrey is the infant/toddler specialist from the Office of Head Start. Hi, Angie. Oh. Hello?

Angie Godfrey: Hi, Amanda. I'm sorry, I was on mute.Amanda: Oh, that was why...Angie: I said, nice to be here. It's wonderful to be here.Amanda: And we're so glad to have Angie here to provide federal guidance on this work. Thank you so much for being here, Angie. Jennifer.

Jennifer Cahill: Hello. This is Jennifer Cahill, and I work at Mount Hood Community College in Portland, Oregon and currently am overseeing the home-based model, as well as our parents as teachers model, there. So, I'm glad to be here.

Amanda: Welcome. We're glad to have you. Mary Ann Cornish.Mary Ann Cornish: Hi, everyone. I'm a seasoned Head Start and Early Head Start director. My background is in early childhood education, but I've spent the majority of my career focusing on leadership development. Some of us are able to demonstrate natural leadership abilities, others have to work on it; and I'm excited about talking about that work today.

Amanda: Mary Ann, we're so glad to have you. And finally, Sherry.Sherry Heller: Hi, I'm Sherry Heller. I am a psychologist specializing in infant mental health, and I have been fortunate enough to serve as a consultant to various Early Head Start and Head Start sites for a number of years. I look for -- and I'm excited to be here with everyone.

Amanda: And you have an important link to one of our books.Sherry: I co-edited the "Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision" book with Linda Gilkerson, and that'll be one of those resources you'll hopefully be -- be receiving in the mail in the next couple of weeks.

Amanda: And we're so glad to have you. Thank you, Sherry, for being with us. We have about an hour of discussion among these panelists, and then Lisa's going to come back on with instructions for calling in with your questions and -- and comments. So, we really look forward to having participants join the discussion at that time.

And we're going to begin now by talking about reflective practice. So in our limited time we know we can't get really deeply into why reflective practice is so helpful to work in Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, but we do want to touch on it. Jennifer, can you talk a little bit about what reflective practice is?

Jennifer: Sure. When we started our program -- we had been a very large Head Start program and -- for years. And we began this Early Head Start program, and fortunately, at that time, we had the luxury of time to get this rolling and started. So we were really out there researching what was already available, and we connected with Victor Bernstein.

We were lucky to connect with him. And he really talked a lot about Early Head Start being this time of intensity and fragility with babies, that babies are always changing, and that it was our responsibility to make our programs kind of a holding place -- a place that could be safe for families, safe for staff to sort things out and break things down into manageable steps.

So my favorite quote for him that kind of sums it up for me is that -- he states that, "We can't assume that any -- that we know why people do what they do, but that we need to gather information and that will help us develop an understanding of what is happening with a family." And for our program that works really nicely, both with staff and with families. So it's kind of a parallel process for us.

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. And it's a little different from Head Start, I think you told me.

Jennifer: Yes. It's just so... And -- and again, we're a home-based model, so we're in that house every week. We -- you know, I like to say we get to know the families better in some cases than -- you know, we see them more often than we see our own families in our personal lives. And so we really see the intricate interactions that are happening between parent and child in those settings, and staff bring a lot of that back to work with them.

It draws a lot of experience that they've had in the past, and this just really helps to make it a time that you can sit down, be uninterrupted, have time to sort things through, and slow the pace down a little bit.Amanda: Sherry, what would you add?

Sherry: I love all of Jennifer's quotes and all of her points, and I -- and I'd just... I mean, I think I'd like to highlight that the goal of reflective supervision, the work -- especially with babies -- and the constant changing, even the pace -- even the daily pace, much less the -- the day-to-day and weekly pace, is constant change. And so that kind of reflective practice and reflective supervision allow you to take a step back from what's going on.

And one of the phrases I like, it's "mindful consideration," where you just kind of step back and you think about what's happening. And as Jennifer quoted Victor, you know, we don't really know why but we can form hypothesis -- hypotheses, and look at other people's perspective and really kind of think about what's going on, and then maybe what our next steps may be or the next questions we may have. And it kind of -- by taking us back from the moment, we're not reacting through our emotions or out of our emotions.

We're able to kind of step back and think about those emotions and use them as information, but to really make some decisions in a nice, calm space that's going to help us to increase our capacity as professionals and to enhance the services we're providing to these children and families.

Amanda: And one of the things that we talked about in our -- in our planning was that -- that for some programs, this

really represents sort of a cultural change for them. This is a very different sort of approach. And you talked some about -- excuse me -- about the importance of engaging all the players in that. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Sherry: There's a whole chapter in -- in the book that it -- on implementing reflective supervision. And we -- you know, we committed a whole chapter to just, kind of, the planning process, thinking about how it's going to work in your program, and how you're going to implement it, and including all the players in your program as a part of thinking about how to use it and helping them to understand it. It is a different way of thinking for a lot of folks, especially those who are not in mental health, and it can be kind of frightening and overwhelming.

And so you want to make sure that you put the right -- that it's a process that everybody can be comfortable with and that can go at a pace that people are comfortable with, and everybody can understand and feel like they're a part of this whole process.

Amanda: So... And -- and I just want to say that, in preparation for this audio conference, we got lots of questions from folks in the audience -- lots of questions -- and we want -- we want to address as many as possible here. We had one question, Sherry, about the difference between reflective supervision and an open door policy with staff. Can you offer us a definition of reflective supervision here?

Sherry: Well, I think that you -- there's a nice page in the handout, page 5, that kind of talks about the components of reflective supervision. And the -- and the top -- the... All of those are very important. The top three I kind of think of as sort of the structure. If you're building a tepee, those would be the three sticks that kind of hold it up; and it's regularity, collaboration, and reflection.

So, I talked a bit about the reflection piece, and the collaboration piece is that, indeed, the two people come together and they -- they -- they celebrate successes and they cherish the strengths of the supervisee.

But they also partner in those vulnerabilities and they work together as a team so that the environment of the reflective supervision session is a nurturing, safe place where a supervisee can go and feel like they're not going to be judged and that they can really think about what's happening from all perspectives, and -- and work forward toward where they need to go as a professional and where they may need to go with the certain situation or family they're talking about.

Regularity talks to that; it needs to happen at a predictable time. And what happens as you... Over the course of doing reflective supervision, as the relationship develops, the supervisee knows, "Well, I'm going to get to talk to Ms. Jones on Wednesday. This is a topic I can hold 'til Wednesday," and they'll think about it before they go in on Wednesday. They'll already have processed it. As time goes by, they'll be more reflective in their thinking and they'll do more and more reflection outside of that session.

And then they come in and they talk about it; and they know when to hold it and they know they can put it away and not fret over it while they're doing their other work. So it's like, "Okay, this'll get taken care of. I can kind of put it here." When it can happen moment to moment, when you open... The open door policy is wonderful, and I think it's a wonderful way to support reflective supervision, or the kind of work that we do with infants and babies in general.

And I will certainly grab plenty of my colleagues in the hallway and say, "I need a reflective moment from you," where I can sit down and run something by -- by them. But a lot of times the emotions are still involved there. You haven't had the time to step back, the -- the pace isn't set up, you can't predict if the person's going to be there.

The person who's listening, your supervisor at that point, can't really be an active listener where they can kind of shut out the rest of the world and the focus is on you all being in the moment and what you're discussing, because people are going to be in and out, there's going to be phone calls. And so all of that takes away from what reflective supervision needs to be. And that's why it really does need to happen at a scheduled, regular time, be it once a month, once a week, every other week. People do it -- you know, there's -- there's lots of things to consider.

And when you consider how often you're going to do it, you have to take a lot of variables into account, such as resources and -- and time and -- that people have available, and all those variabilities. But I -- if I know it's going to

happen then I can save stuff up and that -- and that session is going to be much more productive.

Amanda: So -- so we've learned a little bit about reflective supervision, and I wondered, Angie, if you could share your perspective on this. Why do you see reflective supervision as a valuable practice in programs?

Angie: Thank you, Amanda. And, you know, I was thinking, I -- I love listening to Sherry talk about the regularness of -- of reflective supervision and having it be part of -- of the structure of the program. And I also love that you included 1304.52(a)(1) as a regulation that we look to around reflective supervision, but it doesn't say reflective supervision in there anywhere. But I also think -- you know, when I was Head Start director years ago, I always thought people felt a little more comfortable when I said, "Well, look at this regulation."

And I think -- and it talks about a structure that supports the accomplishment of program objectives, and the structure addresses major functions and responsibilities assigned to each position and provides evidence of adequate mechanisms for steps -- staff supervision and support. And we all know that people think of supervision in so many different ways, you know, whether it's monitoring someone, whether it's, you know, checking the timecards, or the -- you know, that we -- we come at it in so many different ways.

And one of the things that I -- I -- why I tie this to the regulation is it -- there's an expectation for quality in all of the Head Start Performance Standards, and certainly there's one for supervision. And supervision really is support; and in order to provide support for the staff that you work with, you need to plan for it. You need to understand the families and the children you work with, the staff you work with, the dynamics, whether it's center-based or home-based, or, you know, the role of the child development specialist and the family child care provider.

You really are looking at, you know, how all of these pieces come together, and it's so important that reflection is a piece of that for many reasons. And again, when I go back to my days as a director, as well as now, looking at what regulations mean on a national level, it's understanding how close families live in -- staff live in proximity to the families we serve. You know, there's -- there's a fluidity to it.

We all hire parents, you know, to become staff members, and there's a closeness there that also needs to be supported -- and needs to be supported through reflection, through regular time together to focus on families, to focus on what you bring to the work and how -- how that can be supported, how that can -- how you can unpack some of the baggage that we all bring to the work through reflection in a -- in a safe environment. And it only becomes safe over time and with regularity.

And I do agree there are moments of reflection that are valuable, but I think knowing that you're going to be supported no matter how difficult the work is in a time, in a place, really does make the work better. And through the five orientations we just had recently, and through Birth To Three, the thing -- the question I hear the most around reflective practice is, "Isn't it expensive?" or "How do we find the time to do it?" And the statement I hear the most is, "We really want to do it but we don't know how."

And then the second piece is that it takes time. And I think one of the reasons I'm so excited about the two resources that went out and -- about this today is I do think it's going to support people's understanding that through a planful process of reflective supervision and practice, programs will have more time and more energy, and staff will have more time and more energy, to really focus on the work and what it is that children and families need from us every day during really hard times for everyone -- to provide those quality services.

Amanda: And -- this is Amanda. It's interesting, Angie, that you say that because that came up so often in our planning calls, is this piece about, you know, it does take time. It does take, sort of, a dedicated time. But what folks have found -- and -- and faculty will speak to this a little later in our program, but what folks have found is the time invested up front saves time on the back end.Angie: That's it exactly; it really is. That -- that is it exactly, so thank you.

Amanda: And that's one of the questions, too, that came up quite a bit as I -- as we asked questions -- as we asked participants for questions today. A lot of them talked about time. Many of them said that they're practicing reflective supervision already; some are thinking about reflective supervision; and for some it's a totally new concept. Mary Ann

and Jennifer, what sold the two of you on moving down this path toward reflective supervision in the beginning? And I -- we'll start with Jennifer here. Jennifer?

Jennifer: So I think it goes back to partly what Sherry said, was that it would allow us this opportunity to really celebrate our successes. And I think sometimes we can get so worked up in the chaos of the moment and what's going on; and we were starting this brand new program that's really doing different with infants. And even though we've been doing Head Start for so long, that this ability to, again, slow down, like Angie said, and just kind of stop ourselves and think a little bit more and slow down that pace...

And through that, we realized that we could -- we kept hearing this word, you know, mutual respect for each other. So mutual respect for each other -- meaning amongst staff, amongst management, amongst families -- and really bringing ideas to the table, because it's such an exciting time when you get to start this brand new program -- excuse me -- and make it what -- what you want it to be, that we wanted to take in all of the ideas and notions of the -- the families and the staff. So it was a great start; a great way to do that.

And what we also liked about it is that we really could look at what was out there, what we felt like there was already. Now, there's much more information out there, but there was already some information -- the information from Victor, the information from Rebecca Shahmoon-Shanok, and then the "Look, Listen and Learn." We used that a lot -- which is a little booklet that came to us when we first started our program. And it really had nice examples about the commitment to growth and change in organizations.

So it -- it helped us figure out a way to really practice this approach, to -- to practice with each other, you know, when we're venting, to -- to slow down and say, "Oh, well, what have you tried in this instance?" And then finally, just to nurture ourselves -- nurture ourselves, as well. You know, our goal is to nurture the families we're working with, but the work is so intensive that we have to nurture ourselves. And this is a way to do that when we have this nice space where we can, you know, expose ourselves a little bit.

We're kind of putting ourselves in a vulnerable situation, but we can expose ourselves to our mistakes and our differences, and then move forward and grow from that. So, that was exciting to us.

Amanda: And -- and -- and you talk about using those resources as an important piece of what you did. There is a page in everybody's materials that does have a number of resources in it that folks can look to, including "Look, Listen and Learn," and -- and that's certainly available to folks now if they'd like to reach out for that. But there are a number of resources out there. Mary Ann?

Mary Ann: Okay, here's what sold me on the concept of reflective practice. In working with staff in Early Head Start, I realized that the power of relationships is important, and the power of reflective practice in that relationship. In my research, I found that the invitation of reflecting together, meaning one talking and one listening, is a remarkable one. This year my program has been faced with tremendous challenges unlike those that I've ever witnessed in my career, mainly due to the economy.

Families are in crisis. So as we work in teams or individually, I wanted to create an opportunity to support staff and give them the opportunity to express their thoughts and focus, like Jennifer said earlier. So my task is to model by teaching, guiding, nurturing, and supporting. So whether in group or individual sessions with staff, there's mutual respect, open communications, and cooperative problem-solving. And this has become a key feature in our organization, but I want to say that -- that -- I'm at the top and I -- I'm sold on it.

So I think we didn't talk about the buy-in that needs to come from the top to make this a part of an organization that's going to be successful in practicing this.Amanda: And you're talking about, sort of, administrative support, board support, for -- for the work of reflection and reflective practice.Mary Ann: Yes. Mm hmm.

Amanda: Yeah. And -- and just to let folks know, in the -- in the Fenichel book -- the yellow book, as it's called -- there's a really helpful chapter from Linda Gilkerson and Carol Lou Young-Holt that regards, sort of, engaging that administrative leadership; so it's on pages 113 and 119. If that is an area of interest for you, sort of how you're going to

engage leadership in this cultural change, you might want to highlight that on page 7 of your handout -- so pages 113 to 119 in the Fenichel book, once that comes.

Sherry, I love -- you had such a nice phrase around this -- around this piece of, you know, what is it that reflective practice and reflective supervision offers.Sherry: I did?Amanda: You did; and what you told me is that -- you know, that people come into this -- this program sometimes with the knowledge, right?

Sherry: Right. You know, we get the... You know, I have been impressed as I've gone to the different Early Head Start programs. A lot of people know about infants and -- and toddlers in the programs, and know about development and supporting development. They've got the knowledge. It's kind of that -- the how, the application of it. And when I hear, you know, all these wonderful words from Jennifer and Mary Ann, I can't say how excited I am to hear about how successful their programs are at using this and -- and -- and how helpful they find it.

But they bring up so many important points. The power of relationships Mary Ann talked about, you can't... You know, babies learn through relationships, and we know that. That's just been demonstrated all throughout the research literature, and so we need to think about those important relationships and how we impact those relationships, and how we create our own relationship with the baby.

And we need to be able to think about how we do that and how is it impacting the baby's other relationships, and how is our relationship with the mom or the dad or grandma impacting their relationship with the baby, and all of these different variables. And it's very hard to do in the moment. You -- you may have the knowledge, you may be able to say there, you know, talk about momma's experiences of being parented and how she may parent the same way as she was parented, and that may impact what she does.

But in the moment, when she comes in and completely misses the baby's cue of trying to greet her and is just rushing to get stuff together to leave, how do we approach that mom and -- and help her to think about it rather than just being frustrated and -- and how can we engage her? And it's very hard in the moment, with the chaos of all the babies you're caring for, to do that, and reflective supervision allows you to think about the how.

It -- it allows... Jennifer talked about nurturing the nurturers -- and nurturers are very bad about taking care of themselves -- and the importance of celebrating. And this is a time with reflective supervision that supervisor's the historian, the historian of that relationship and where that relationship's been. And sometimes when we feel like we're hitting rock bottom with a certain family, that supervisor can say, "Well, six months ago, this is where they were. And look, they really have made progress and we -- you know, they're just at a different pace than we are."

"We need to take baby steps; or maybe we've backtracked. But they were here before, we can get back there." And sometimes that's just really hard to do when you're in the moment and you're really engaged with these families, to kind of step back historically and look at where things have gone or where they've -- where -- where they may be going. And I think that, you know, that's -- that's a little bit of what can happen in reflective supervision. And there's just so much more that comes from it and so much more of the benefits. I could go on for days.

Amanda: And so we've -- and we have talked some about the benefits, and there's certainly more in the books that are being offered. Let's talk honestly here about some of the challenges of providing reflective supervision. And we heard Angie refer to time and resource commitment, sort of, as a major one. Many folks, as I said, wrote in and talked about those particular challenges in their programs. Our faculty also identified those challenges. Mary Ann, can you talk a little bit about that piece in your program?

Mary Ann: Yeah. This is where I'm going to just swish the magic wand so Angie can -- can grant everybody two days a month in the United States to reflective practice. So I've just swished the wand over Angie's head. [Laughter]Angie: Oh, I wish I could do that, too. Thank you. [Laughter]

Mary Ann: Okay. All right, I tried. Time is the challenge, and this is where creativity and flexibility comes in, particularly when you're operating full-day/full-year programs for infants and toddlers. But you have to be mindful of planning, taking time to plan and build in time for reflective practices, and I think Angie talked about that.

But just as we support opportunities for staff breaks and staff meetings and professional development opportunities and wellness activities, we have to build in time for meeting individually or in groups specifically for the purpose of reflective supervision. And I know that we do such a good job in many areas, forming learning communities for a specific topic, like picky eaters and sleeping patterns and routines, we can form opportunities for reflective practice.

I aim at meeting with staff individually for an hour-and-a-half each month. The supervisors that I work with try to meet with individuals or in groups on a monthly basis. But at the beginning of each program year, we spend more time introducing or revisiting the concept of reflective practice so that it becomes a part of the culture of our organization. But time is a challenge. We -- we don't have it.

Amanda: Yeah. And we've heard particularly, too, about the challenge in the center-based model. Yeah. So Sherry, I know that you have some strategies here, some ideas in what you call your toolkit, right?

Sherry: You know, it's -- it -- it really... Time is -- is -- is the big... Time and resources, that's what I hear a lot of people saying. And -- and part of what I say is the Early Head Start community is so creative. They've -- they've -- they've figured out ways to solve so many challenges that other centers, you know, that are not within the Early Head Start community are still grappling with, and Early Head Start's moved on beyond it. So one thing I want to say is this is a creative group of people, and I believe that when they put those creative hats on they can come up with solutions.

And I'm always floored as I talk to people around the country about how they're doing reflective supervision with the creative ways they come up to make it work and -- and still stick within the components of it. And in -- in the book, the green book you're going to be getting, the "Practical Guide," there are some ideas there. People do phone supervision; so if they can't be at the same place, if travel time is an issue, they may do it over the phone.

Group supervision is a nice way to get a lot of people to be able to be reflective in -- you know, when -- when you're limited in time. And each person, you know, gets a -- each person may get a turn to present. There's a reference in the book. COPA has an article that's -- that's -- out there where they talked about how their organization have this, kind of, reflective case conference where they would -- one person would present a case and everybody else would kind of discuss it and -- and -- in a reflective manner.

So, there's -- you know, there's different ways you can do it. You know, some people have gotten really committed at their staff meetings: "Okay, that's the one time we're all together and we want to -- and this will be our first step at trying to do it, and we're going to say that 30 minutes of the staff meeting's going to be committed to some type of reflective process." And so in order to get that 30 minutes, memos can get sent out about, you know, topics that really don't need to be discussed. That can be done online.

And everybody needs to make a commitment that they're going to check their email every morning, or whatever. Or if you just need to meet with one person about something and this may be the only time you're going to see them, then let's do a parking lot. And people can put little post-it notes in the person they need to meet with, and we'll have 20 minutes after the meeting where people can go around and meet with and have those little conversations.

So, people have gotten very, very creative with how they go about doing this process. And the thing that I'm always struck by... I actually have this -- a quote one of my slides. One of the people that I work with who is the most resistant to this idea, she was one of the directors. She was not -- she said, "I'm not a touchy-feely person; I manage people. I don't want to do this, I'm not trained as a mental health person. I'm not interested in this."

And the administrative... She had really bought into this and -- and thought this was really important, and she says, "My time and our money needs to be going to these babies and not to -- to -- you know, and -- and not being spent on reflective supervision. People need to be able to take care of themselves." And so we talked through all of this, and we talked about, you know, how when momma's not happy, nobody's happy, and so that we really need to think about taking care of these teachers.

They're the mommas in these rooms, and nurturing them and helping them to feel cared for and nurtured so that they

can turn around and give all that they're required to give, which is such an incredible amount. And so, we got her to agree to six months that she would receive reflective supervision in managing her staff, and then afterwards we'd have another discussion and we'd talk about did she think it would work for the center.

She became one of my biggest proponents. She said she used to think that time would be the issue, now she would fly to reflective supervision. She couldn't wait to put her sign on the door, to sit down, and have that hour to herself; and she was just getting it twice a month for an hour. And how much it helped her to run her center better, to manage her people better... And eventually when it got incorporated throughout the center, she said the turnover stopped, some of the -- kind of the nit-picking little stuff that would go on between colleagues in the center wasn't happening.

People were taking more responsibility for what they were supposed to be doing. She was floored at how pervasive this model was in impacting lots of different things at the center, and she said, "My center just feels different and I can't believe I thought the biggest issue was going to be time and money."

Amanda: Wow.Sherry: So... [Inaudible]

Amanda: Yeah. And one of the things you said, Sherry, is that you find that when folks are the most stressed, the commitment feels like the biggest strain and is also the most needed. And so, really going back into that toolbox and really looking at intentionality, you know, how are we going to plan with the resources we have, the time we have? How can we be creative in really planning this time together?

Sherry: Exactly. We would find people getting stressed, that "I just don't have time, I just don't have the time." We would -- you know, we would slow them down and we would say, "Take a deep breath and let's think. The fact you don't -- that if you take the time to do this, you will -- we will -- it will help you to de-stress and kind of be able to suddenly find the time." And -- and sometimes that reminder was enough, and then they'd sit down and do their session and they would come back and say, "You were right, you were right."

But when you get stressed out, it's kind of a sign of, "Okay, I do, I need to step back and reflect," because you're just kind of running around blindfolded, or aimlessly or without purpose, trying to get everything done when you don't -- when you don't take that deep breath and sit down and kind of mindfully consider what's going on.

Amanda: And I know we have a lot of direct service staff on the line who are listening in, and I'm wondering if they're nodding as you're saying that or what they're thinking as you're saying that. It would be interesting to be a fly on the wall for some of the conversations or comments after this phone call. Mary Ann, you talked about a lot about that -- there's really no prescription for this, that you really need to individualize how reflective supervision is used in particular programs, and you talked some about that earlier.

Mary Ann: I -- I -- I know that I talked about the -- the fact that you have to build trust and that many staff are just so accustomed to one aspect of supervision. And that's pretty much -- you know, this is what needs to be done, or this is not -- what's not going on well, and there's no opportunities to hear or -- or share and -- and focus. So, the reflective practice allows you to -- to get rid of the not having one-way communications or -- or no opportunity for discussion and feedback, or always focusing on the negative...

...and also gives staff an opportunity to -- to -- to say, you know, "That's a good question, I don't know the answer," you know, because folks always look to us and think we always know the answers. But it's okay not to know sometimes or to be unsure. So, I think taking the little steps that you need to build trust in order to move forward toward greater awareness and cooperative problem-solving -- and once you build that trust, morale stays high.

Amanda: Well, and -- and -- and that's sort of a later piece. So that's really individualizing reflective supervision for each person, you know, really looking at sort of what it is for each person. What I'm thinking of is individualizing for the program the plan around reflective supervision, and you had talked some about that.

I know in Sherry's book there's -- on pages 38 and 39 of that book, and I think you referenced this earlier, Sherry, there's that reflective tool, the Reflective Supervision Implementation Process Plan, that does suggest some of these

particular pieces that people can go to and say, you know, "Where are we? Can we do this? Can we do that to really support reflective supervision in our program?" Jennifer, how do you do it in your program?

Jennifer: Well, for us, I think in our home-based model there's a little bit more flexibility allowed because your staff is not in a classroom all day long. But again, it goes back to what Sherry and Mary Ann were saying that you -- you feel so overwhelmed with this message. When I first started, I was hearing that message of weekly -- regular, weekly supervision; and supervisors in our program supervise anywhere from, you know, 20 to 30 staff, so really breaking that down and looking at how -- how can I make it manageable?

And so, again for me personally, I think for most of the supervisors in our program, the -- the way we choose to break it down is to do about, similar to Mary Ann, an hour to an hour-and-a-half a month with each person. And then, again, we try to really build it into everything else that we're doing in the home-based model. So, the whole model is a reflective practices model. It's in -- there are questions that we ask in our forms, whether it's our lesson planning forms or our home visit form.

It's kind of embedded in everything that we do. And then as Sherry talked, I was really interested in hearing that because we also do -- I do something -- a bulletin when there's more newsy items to focus on, kind of tidbits, so that when we meet as a group monthly for our all-staff, we have started to move in a direction of that being more reflective rather than just a check-off list -- you know, got that done, got that done, got that done.

We try to build in 30 minutes in the beginning where we're doing some kind of a warm-up where we're really establishing a level of trust with each other in the group. Continuing to do that, and whether it's looking at value statements of each of us or having quotes around the room that we -- we choose to -- that we can relate to, I also do -- I try to keep a little journal that's an ongoing -- kind of building the story of each staff member when we're meeting so that I can pick up where I left off last month with that staff member.

And I also try to be responsive to them; and anything I said I'd follow up on, I go back to my little journal and make sure I really did follow up on whatever that was. I think the challenge there is that, you know, there has to be a very clear purpose about what reflective supervision is and what this meeting for 90 minutes is going to be looking like. And -- and... But there's, again, intentionality to it.

I try to closely relate it to other things that are happening Performance Standard- or regulation-wise. So if it's close to the 45 and 90 days, really looking beyond, "Oh, our screenings have to be done in 45 and exams in 90 days," to, you know, "What is getting in the way of this family getting that done," or, "What's getting in the way of you getting all your -- you know, your home visit completion being a little lower than -- than it usually is," so that we can really look at what's happening in their lives for them there.

But it's also not a friendship, and I think that's an important one -- is, you know, really establishing your own boundaries as supervisor so that you don't learn too much information about the staff. Because it gets -- the waters get muddied there and then we open ourselves to all kind of other issues happening. I also think... Oh, go ahead.Amanda: No, no; go ahead.

Jennifer: Well, I -- I let... So back to what others were saying, I let reflective supervision slip for a good year in there and we just got so busy with other things. We had gotten some more children in both the -- the PAT program and the Early Head Start program, and so I was supervising more staff. And I really found things kind of, you know, collapsing a little bit around me, and was -- it was very interesting for me because I tried to go back to see what has changed.

And I really found that, oh, I wasn't -- I did still have the open door policy, but I was not meeting regularly with people on a scheduled time. And so at that time, I brought that back again; and so monthly -- at the beginning of every month, I have a dedicated time that I set. I send out a schedule and people sign up. And they like to do it that way. So...Amanda: [Inaudible] So it's flexible to them every month.Jennifer: Mm hmm. Yes.

Amanda: Well, and we really have moved into talking about this trust issue, and I think it's a really pervasive one as

we think about, you know, how to help staff really feel comfortable with this process. Particularly as we're talking about exposing vulnerabilities, you know, folks might worry that it's unprofessional to do that or they might look incompetent to do that. And Mary Ann, I just wonder -- you know, you've talked a little bit about this, but how do you understand that trust issue and address it in your program?

Mary Ann: I think that, again, it goes back to relationship-based, and in your resources you'll find some -- some guidelines that talk about mutual trust and communications and active listening. All of those things take time. You have to practice, you have to model for others, and it -- it's not an overnight thing. So for me, it's been an ongoing journey, but it has supported my efforts in -- in -- in being successful, I think, in making sure that -- that there are -- that it is a trusting relationship.

Amanda: And you also model. I mean, I think that's one of the things I heard as we've been talking. You really model reflection in your interactions with your staff. So as they come to you and they say, you know, "I have this really tough experience with a family," then you come back to them and say, "Wow, you know, you really do. I've never been confronted with that before."

Mary Ann: And -- and sometimes you -- because of the -- the challenges that the families face now, I think that sometimes you may have to use resources. You use your mental health people; you use your community partners. And again, you know, you're there to give that support, particularly if it's -- if it's something that needs to be addressed then and there. If it's -- if it's something that is a follow-up, that doesn't require additional resources or support, it's -- it's much easier to pick up and -- and build from there.

Amanda: Jennifer, what would you add?Jennifer: Well, I would just add under this one that -- I like to call it, you know, ghosts of supervisors past. So, when -- when we get a new staff member, they bring everything -- every experience they've ever had, they bring to the table. And what I've found in some cases is that when I sit down to start this supervision, this reflective supervision, I've had people who were nervous. They were shaking, they were sweating, they -- I could tell they wanted to hurry up and get out of there. They were looking at their watch.

And it really takes... You know, in one case I asked. I finally said, "What's going on for you?" And she's like, "Oh my gosh, the only other time I've ever met with a supervisor before was when I was in trouble and I'd end up crying." And so, really looking at people's history, you know, what worked for them in the past with their supervisors? What -- how did they like being supervisors? What did they dislike about supervision? What rules would they like to see and what obstacles do they see getting in the way?

And then also, finding something that they're really passionate about and trying to help them build their story in that way, I think that works really nicely. I -- I know, at this point, a passion of each one of my staff and what -- where I can really get them going talking, and smiling and laughing about something so that it sets the stage for feeling more comfortable, from bus driver to food service on up. And the one thing I also want to add is just making sure that we are doing equal supervision for everybody that we supervise.

That home visitors don't get more or less than your drivers or your food service or your family workers. That there's really -- you're giving that message of equality. And then I wouldn't -- you know, I would try not to change supervisors. I think for -- for me it's worked because a lot of my staff have had me as their supervisor for a long time, so we really have gotten to know each other's idiosyncrasies pretty well.

Amanda: Well, and I think one of the things you've described, Jennifer, is sort of the evolution of this process. And -- and all of you have described it, really. So there -- so there's an evolution of the way reflective supervision is implemented in every program on the program level and how it's experienced by all the supervisors and supervisees that are a part of the system. It's a -- it's a -- it's a changing process. It's dynamic.

Jennifer: Definitely.Amanda: Sherry, what about -- what about building trust in-group? I mean, we know that that can be a particular challenge, as well. How about -- you know, what would you say about folks that are starting some of this group reflective supervision about what they might think about in terms of really establishing that strong feeling of trust?

Sherry: Even when I'm doing individual, I always try... I love, I mean, all these wonderful points. I think you really have to give, you know, credit to how supervision has happened before. And so talk a little bit about what the model of reflective supervision is and that it -- it -- you know, it's... And I -- and I have a couple of different articles, depending on who the group is, that I like. Rebecca Shahmoon-Shanok -- chapter 1 in this book -- does a real nice job of kind of talking about what it is.

But I will give them that article and I'll ask them to read over it just so they can kind of get an understanding. There's even some samples in here. In -- in the book, Deborah Weatherston and -- and Carla Barron do a -- just -- they -- they have, actually, vignettes of their first couple of sessions together and -- and how it kind of developed over time, and it really helps people to get an understanding of what's supposed to be happening.

We -- you know, we talk about that, where this is not administrative, this is reflective, that we want them to come with where they're struggling and their vulnerabilities. They're not going to be judged on that. We want them to be open to feedback and we want them to come and think about things and ponder things. And that's what the goal of reflective supervision is, so we talk about all of that.

I know some agencies do, like, little contracts as to what's going to happen. And some agencies will even have, you know, part of the evaluation process because, especially if you have an administrator and a -- and a -- sort of like a supervisor playing the same role, that some of that evaluative process will be two way, or that they'll do part of the evaluation together to help it be more reflective. So, those components, I think, would be just as important when you were doing group.

I think that then you address the fact that you've got more than one person and everybody's going to be at a different level. So I do think you kind of think carefully about how you put people together -- matching them by roles, you know. Is it that you want to have only lead teachers and then assistant teachers, or do you want to have the lead assistant teachers pairs together? Some of this is realities -- resource and time allow it, but you also kind of think carefully about who you're going to put together.

You're going to know some people in your group may be natural reflective thinkers and others may be struggling with it more. So try to make sure you don't... That you have a group with a mix, would be something else you would think about. And then you start off the group kind of setting the rules. The key, and the most important rule, is the Las Vegas rule: What happens in this room, stays in this room. So, we're not going to go outside and we're not going to quote each other. We're not going to say she said this or she said that -- that we're going to keep it here.

We'll use the information to help us enhance our own capabilities, but we're not -- you know, it's going to be us generalizing outside of the room. And that also -- that, you know, you need to be respectful and -- and not interrupt each other, you know, because -- because some of those kinds of basic rules you decide ahead of time. If you know that -- I like to say that nobody has to participate. You'll be invited to ask, and I think you get a lot more out of it when you participate, but you don't have to if that's not your style.

And so, the facilitator -- facilitator would make sure to ask people in, but nobody has to talk who -- who doesn't want to talk. And so those kinds of things help to build trust over time. And in the beginning, we may do different kinds of... I like -- Jennifer talked about how she found a passion, or she talked about some of the stuff she does at the beginning of her administrative meetings where they have value statements that they discuss.

I'll -- I'll do different types of icebreaker routines in the beginning so we can get to know each other and become comfortable with each other at a different level. And so, if you could be any item in the household, what would you be and why? And -- and so they have to really think about that kind of thing. And there's some exercises, actually, in the back of the "Practical Guide." Gerry Costa and Laurie Sullivan did a chapter, and it's just full of different kinds of activities you can do with your staff to help them learn more about being reflective.

So all of that, kind of helping them to understand the rules and guidelines, to make the room safe, and then also what reflective supervision is, and then -- and then becoming comfortable with the reflective process and thinking

reflectively, I think are all very important components.

Amanda: And you've also talked, Sherry, about sort of choosing reflective supervisors carefully and sort of the moderators of those groups and the reflective supervisors in the one-on-one. Can you share your thoughts on that?

Sherry: We talk -- again, we talk about this in the book, and I think it's pages 30 to 33 that kind of -- actually is a box that kind of sets aside some of the things you want to think about. I think it's, you know, part... When you -- there are some people who can -- who think naturally reflectively or they've had a lot of exposure to it, and other people who it's more of a struggle with. I think when you're really starting and you're thinking about how you're going to put this into your program,...

...you know, in the best of all worlds, I would really want to see if I could get a consultant or somebody to come in who's trained in infant mental health and has experience with reflective supervision. That's the ideal, if you can have it. Even if you're going to, you know, have them come in and do some workshops and help you think about your implementation plan, and maybe doing some over-phone reflective supervision with the people that you hope to train to be reflective supervisors, and then have it kind of trickle down.

There's ways to think creatively about it, because, clearly, that's kind of expensive. But when you're thinking about in your program, or even if you're hiring somebody from the outside to be a reflective supervisor, you -- you know, I think the mental health training helps. People in mental health are supervised in a very reflective manner, so they tend to be comfortable thinking reflectively even if they don't have those kinds of -- that kind of terminology. And in -- in infant mental health is where it is used and that terminology is used.

So you know, ideally, infant mental health, then mental health, and then... But when you're talking to them, you want to present vignettes, struggles that you have in your center, and how -- and what would -- how would they approach it. And again, it's not what -- that there's any specific answer, it's you want to hear that they can think in a reflective manner, that they can look at all the perspectives. I like to talk about the pentagon.

You know, the pentagon has five sides. I'm going to walk you around the pentagon because there's going to be five sides to this story and we need to think about everybody's perspective, and the truth's going to be somewhere in the middle. And we don't even need to get to the truth, we just need to think about all the different players and -- and how they're influencing it, and then kind of think about it from that way. So being able to think from different perspectives for some -- for some folks, doing that is very difficult because if I can see your perspective then that means my perspective's wrong.

They can't hold more than one. So you really want to be able to understand that they can hold more than one and that they're not feeling like there has to be an answer, that it's a process of thinking and discovering and coming up with more questions, and forming hypotheses and more questions as you work your way toward it. And you want to see them demonstrate that level of thinking, and we give some vignettes in the books of -- you know, that you could, you know, come up with what you could use and what you'd want to look for in those kinds of answers.

Amanda: So this -- I'm sorry. So this is an interview strategy for supervisors as they're coming in?

Sherry: I -- I -- I... In the book we talk about it as an interview strategy, and I think that that's where you get your best understanding of how people are reflective. If, you know, you -- when you look through that strategy, you can think of the people that you employ, that you might be thinking are supervisors, and if they use these naturally. If they, kind of, are reflective naturally, and it's the way they think, then this -- then -- then clearly, you know, that -- that would also give you an answer that you could use those folks in this role.

Amanda: And one of the things -- I mean, we've had many conversations about this -- is that we know... And I've -- you know, I'm looking at this list of questions that came in from our participants. We know that mental health expertise is not always readily available. And one of the things you really talked about, Sherry, is trying to identify those folks if they're in your community or if they're out, you know, and about in the nation, you know, to really use phone supervision whenever possible, or if that's a need for the community. And you found that to be very successful.

Yeah?

Sherry: I -- I have found it to be successful. And -- and there's a whole different [Inaudible], and we -- and we talk about that a bit in the book. You know, you don't have some of the body language and your -- and your tone of voice takes a more important role on, and you kind of -- it's harder to kind of figure out what silences mean. Are they really processing? Are they completely confused? So, we talk a bit about that. I have found it useful. I have found people who are not -- who -- who even define themselves as not being phone people, being able to use it comfortably.

Now we've got Skype, which then even takes up a long-distance bill because that's free; and you can see it's video. And -- and there's a lot of talk about people trying to use Skype for reflective supervision. And then that's a little tricky because you both have to be in front of a computer with a web camera and that kind of stuff at a set time, and we tend to be by our phones more easily. But I think that that's going to be another -- another asset that people are going to start to use.

And so, you know, I think that -- that there are ways to access folks who may have the expertise you need to help bring them into the community, to get that expertise in your community, to -- to train folks, you know. Open it up to mental health folks to come in and get trained to do this reflective practice, because then you can use them to help you in the program down the road.

Amanda: But I think, Jennifer, that you had some experience in really trying to build that expertise within your program.

Jennifer: Yeah. When we started, we had mental health therapists through our county that we were actually working with, and so we used them very closely in our reflective supervision. So they're not supervisors, so to speak, of the staff, but they facilitate conversation around reflective practice and reflective supervision in a group model for the home visitors.

And then when we were first starting up, our T -- T/TA providers through Portland State really suggested looking at consultants who were out there and who is available in our community. And we are lucky because in the Portland area, we have the infant/toddler mental health program through Portland State -- it's graduate certificate program. And more and more people are going and getting trained through there, and a lot of them are Head Start, Early Head Start, nurses, therapists, and even physical therapists.

And that's an online program, so even people in rural communities can go down and spend 18 months and get trained in that. And you really find that you're having a lot of online conversation together. I went through the program that gets at this whole idea of reflection, and it also is a great way to receive reflection yourself while you're in this program. So, I think more and more people are going through infant/toddler mental health programs.

So it should become easier for folks to find people out there because several states have them. You can look them up at -- California and Michigan and Massachusetts, I know, all have infant/toddler mental health programs. And they have great code of -- code of ethics that fit nicely with what we're all doing around relationships and culture and confidentiality, and this whole idea of reflective practice, so even that could be a phone or Skype consultation with somebody who had some of that more significant background in infant/toddler mental health.

And that idea... I just want to make sure that, you know, folks understand we're not saying that as supervisors we're therapists, but we want to provide this place so that we're always holding the infant in mind in the work that we're doing, because that's why we're here. So, I think that's really important to remember. And we -- we all project our own experiences on the families that we're working with. And our families do it; you know, if they're having hardships, they're projecting their experiences on their own infants and toddlers, and that's impacting their relationship as well.

Amanda: Yeah. And I think -- you know, as we're -- as we're sort of sharing this information, I think one important resource is really looking at the World Association of Infant Mental Health, or the State Association of Infant Mental Health. This is where Google is your friend and you can go online and sort of see if your state has a strong infant mental health program. I know a lot of programs have done that just by matter of course as they're trying to find

mental health support.

But, really helpful to -- to find out what that program or that state program is doing in your area and how they might be able to support your work on this point. We have one more question before we turn to questions from folks on -- who are participating. We talked a lot about balancing the different roles of supervisors. So Mary Ann, when you and I talked, what did you mean by that -- balancing the different roles of supervisors?

Mary Ann: We work in a compliance-, standards-, regulations-based world, and oftentimes that's what drives us as supervisors. And it's a tough choice that supervisors have to make; you know, which area should I tackle first. We can begin to work smarter by addressing the logistical standards, compliance things, electronically, you know. We talked about parking lots and blast-out alerts, memos, things like that, to -- to take care of some of those things.

And once you've achieved that, a systematic approach will emerge that allows supervisors to plan ways to provide that one-on-one feedback in terms of strategies for improving their work, resources, and discussions about the kinds of support that he or she may need. And in some cases, it may begin, we talked about, on a very personal level and then move towards that communications stage where you're thinking and you're -- you're discovering.

And it -- it kind of moves through phases. I think that that balancing, that putting the -- the -- the compliance standards things in one side and -- and addressing those, and then coming back to really what we do with infants and toddlers and pregnant moms.

Amanda: And Sherry, there is such a nice chapter in your book on this.

Sherry: Yes. Judith Patachie and Linda Gilkerson did a whole chapter on, kind of, the two -- the two separate hats. It's a question we get a lot -- people really, really, really struggle with. And people have gotten, you know, creative, again, with all kinds of -- of techniques. You know, some people'll sit in different spots so that when it's the administrative we're kind of sitting -- you know, the administrator's behind the desk and the supervisee's, you know, sitting at the chair in the front of the desk.

But when it's reflective supervision, we're sitting on the two chairs in the room, you know, or we -- it's even in a different room. The sign'll go up for reflective supervision. So there's ways to balance -- that balance the two. Really work hard at keeping, kind of, the administrative piece out of the reflective supervision session -- that this is what it is. And if there's administrative stuff to cover, because some -- in some programs, this may be the only time you really formally meet with your supervisor. You -- you may not see them again or talk to them again for a while.

And so sometimes it's just you have 10 minutes at the end to kind of touch base on some administrative pieces or stuff. Sometimes in the middle of the session, you know, issues will come up, be it mandated reporting, be it something that's going against standard or policy, and that's when you kind of need to slow down. And I will say, "I've got to put my administrative hat on right now."

Mary Ann: Right, right.Sherry: And we just -- we need to touch base on this and then we'll get -- you know, we can get back. And then when we get back to it, a lot of times we talk about, you know, how did it -- you know, how does it feel that this rule's in place? What is it... You know, so we talk about their feelings about it or -- or being upset about or angry with themselves that I forgot to do this and really feeling like I'm letting people down.

And as that trust builds, they're really able to say -- and open up much more and say, "I know I'm going to get slapped on the wrist for this, I know I shouldn't have done this. I did it and it happened, and I feel awful." And they can kind of process through it so that when the little slip comes, or when the reprimand gets written up, they've kind of processed through that or they're able to come and process through it with me.

Whenever possible, it's nice if you can kind of separate those roles. It's much nicer for me to do reflective supervision with somebody that I really don't have to answer to as their administrator, you know. I kind of enjoy that. And sometimes we will think about crossing over where the director at one center may do this reflective supervision for the teachers at an opposite -- another center, and vice versa. And so that -- that can kind of tease that apart a bit.

So you can get creative about it if you think it's really going to be issue. You can also speak for the benefits of having both of those roles together and how that can enhance the program and build trust and motivation. So it's -- you know, it's -- you know, it's kind of this double-edged sword, and there can be benefits to it. And you just kind of have to decide which -- which is going to work for you from a reality base or from your own preference, and then careful ways that you can balance it. And there's all kinds of suggestions in that chapter.

Amanda: Well... And Jennifer and Mary Ann both had just nice little tips that I just wanted each of them to share one of, so... [Inaudible]Sherry: Yes, they did.

Amanda: Jennifer, can you talk a little bit about your standards -- what you were telling me in terms of what you do with the Standards?

Jennifer: Sure. So what we try to do is -- is actually a little bit different than what Sherry was talking about, because we are set up so that we're also the supervisors of the staff. So when it comes to meeting the regulations or the Standards, we really try to approach it in a reflective manner again. So if I see that it's coming time for -- you know, 45 days is getting close, I'm trying to have conversations with the staff not so much about that this is a requirement -- a federal requirement that's -- that we have to follow, but the thought behind it.

Why do we want to do screenings within 45 days on children? What's the -- what makes it so important? And really address that. And what I find is, in turn, when people have a really clear understanding that these are aren't just, you know, silly standards put forward, they all have a reason and a meaning behind them, and they start to see that, then they're much more open to working on those. And it -- and it does, it feels like a sense of, kind of, unconditional regard about each other and the work that we're doing.

And in those cases where there's a big issue that might be a safety concern or something like that, I'll address those issues separate and immediately because they're very time relevant, so I won't wait until next months supervision. There are some things that you have to, you know, in the meantime, set up a meeting about. And of course, I think it was Sherry that said make sure I'm writing those down, that there's, you know, a memo in place, or that kind of thing. But it makes it in the long-run, I believe, a little bit easier to supervise some of those difficult issues...

...if you've had this reflective framework that you're working within to address everything else that you're doing with those staff members.

Sherry: This is Sherry. I can't resist, I have to jump in. I'm sorry. Jennifer, I want to just piggyback on how you talked about the -- the purpose of these regulations. I think, as administrators, a lot of times we get so involved in the regulations and the writing and the thinking about them that we kind of forget sometimes that our teachers aren't as up on it, that they're there in the classroom, and sometimes they really don't know the thinking behind it. And a lot of times just having that knowledge makes all the difference.

And I'm struck by how often I see this happen over and over again. And I just -- I wanted to highlight -- I think it's a really important point, and that's the advantage of this reflective piece. And then -- and -- and being able to kind of talk about why this is in place...

Mary Ann: Exactly.Sherry: ...and how we can make that work and... So lovely.

Amanda: Well... And I can't see Angie, but I am just imagining that Angie is smiling right now as she is hearing you all discuss the Standards in this way. Mary Ann, you had such a nice strategy to share, too, about the split.

Mary Ann: I think that -- I think modeling is -- is very important. For those staff that I -- I supervise, hopefully they're able to -- to model reflective practice, either individually or in -- in groups. The dynamics change when staff change, so you have to be -- to -- to realize that, you know, one individual may take more than that hour-and-a-half. So -- so just getting that intensive work and the initial -- the initial investment that you put in with staff I think really pays off on -- on the -- on the other side.

One of the things that I wanted to say is space is so important, and finding space where you can be confidential and having people be relaxed. And I think Jennifer talked about, you know, staff coming in very nervous and with a pen and ready to take notes and -- and things like that. And I always share with -- with folks that come into my office that this is a safe place, you know. They're like, "Oh my God, I'm in the director's office," you know. And I'm like, "Oh my God, this is a safe place. This is a good thing, because if we were someplace else you'd really have something to worry about."

And -- and I think that, you know, that message has kind of gotten around, you know. They're in her office, that's a good thing.Amanda If she's approaching you outside the office, that's when you get concerned?

Mary Ann: Maybe. [Laughter]Angie: Amanda, this is Angie.Amanda: Yeah.Angie: You know, I was smiling and I -- I do -- I hope the folks on the -- on the line are really resonating with this, particularly the piece about, you know, the balance and the leadership. It really can happen, and so I... This is -- I'm just having the best time listening to this, so I'll be quiet now. [Laughter]

Amanda: Thank you, Angie. And I think, Lisa, that we're ready for folks to get their instruction on how to call in with comments or questions. We've got about 15 minutes for those.

Lisa: Thank you. And ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to ask a question today, please press star 1 on your touch-tone telephone. If you're using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, everyone, that is star 1 if you have a question today. And we'll pause for just a moment.

Amanda: And quickly, while we're pausing, I just want to ask this one important question of our faculty. You know, one thing that really strikes me, especially as we're considering parallel process, is that leaders in reflective programs also benefit from reflective supervision. So I just wanted to ask each of our panel -- or each of our program staff where they turn for support. Jennifer?

Jennifer: Mm hmm. So the -- the biggest support that I see in my agency that I get is through one of our contracted mental health therapists. She has a -- a very strong background in infant/toddler trauma. And I meet with her monthly, and she's also the one that meets with my staff for their group supervision, and so we work really hard to prioritize that. And occasionally, I'll even call her if I get worked up, you know, between our -- our month time. And I've really found that -- that that's helped me the most, because of her specific experience in infant/toddler mental health. So...

Amanda: And Mary Ann, how about you?Mary Ann: I almost have to echo the same response. The mental health professional that we contract with does the same thing. But one of the things that I want to point out is that I was able to find somebody that knows about the cultures of the families that we serve so that we can be culturally responsive. In addition, since staff are -- is of the cultures that we serve, it's -- it's very important for her to -- to be able to guide me in strategies and approaches and one-liners, and things like that.

So in addition to -- to planning out -- designing and planning the program, she's my -- my support and -- and pretty much my sounding board.

Amanda: And people can be very creative, you know. I've heard strategies like, "I've partnered with another Early Head Start director;" "I have -- you know, I'm talking to other folks in my community, maybe a mentor that I had in school." I mean it's interesting how -- and often it's an informal sort of support and not as regular as we might really hope for, but people are really making sure that they reach out and -- and connect with someone. Lisa, do we have any calls or questions?

Lisa: We do. Our first question today comes from Janet Harris.Amanda: Hi, Janet.Janet Harris: Hi.Amanda: What's your question?

Janet: Actually, a few of my colleagues were not able to make this conference, so I've been asked to ask you all: Will

this be recorded and archived somewhere for a later reviewing?Amanda: I love that question. It actually will be; it's -- it's being recorded right now and it will be available on the ECLKC. Mm hmm.

Janet: Okay, great. ThanksAmanda: You bet. Do we have another question or comment?Lisa: We do; our next question comes from Barbara Curtis.Amanda: Hi, Barbara.

Barbara Curtis: Hello. My question is two-fold, please.Amanda: Okay.

Barbara: Regarding... There's been a lot of discussion about infant mental health -- infant and toddler mental health person possibly being, I guess, most able to implement reflective practice without, I guess, a lot of training or whatnot. So I was wondering if you could speak a little bit to the role of the experienced early childhood specialist or -- or early childhood development coordinator also being able to -- to be able to implement reflective practice.

And then the other part of that is what role -- as I'm thinking of systems, what role and how do you keep records or documentation and reporting back out to, say, the -- maybe the early childhood services coordinator about the progress that staff are making? So I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about those two things.

Amanda: Sure. So let me send the first part of that question to Mary Ann because, Mary Ann, you have talked about the value of experience in early childhood as a piece of looking to reflect -- looking at reflective supervisors. Right?

Mary Ann: I -- I... Yes. And -- and I think that this is -- this is a question that... I don't know. It's -- it's a difficult question, but I think that the early childhood supervisors, again, are wearing two hats in many cases. So the information that they're keeping in their journal and log for the support and concerns to get recorded, the things that the -- the standard space, the requirements... And again, it's -- it's two -- it's two different opportunities to talk, and sometimes they cross but sometimes they don't.

Sometimes you'll see some of the information that may surface in a -- in a -- when somebody does something really, really good in terms of, "Congratulations you've achieved this, you've achieved that; you've mastered this, you've mastered that," and it may be a -- a little thing. So we -- we want staff to take little steps. For teachers that I may consider master teachers, you know, if -- if -- if they talked about a professional goal, and -- and this is something that they want to do, that's recorded and we give opportunities for that.

So I think you'll find in some of the documentation that the supervisors have, and then again in the -- the -- the personnel records, you may find some of the certificates or -- or more complimentary kinds of things.Amanda: Nice. Sherry, did you want to add anything there?

Sherry: Yeah. I mean, I think it's like we talked about. If it's two different roles and that reflective supervision, you know, needs to be, you know, not... The roles can overlap, but it needs to kind of stand in and of it's own. And the reason we recommend infant mental health is because they have been trained, typically, in the reflective process and thinking about babies and families reflectively, and providing services to them in a reflective manner.

And you know, if you've got an experienced early childhood coordinator who's -- who's received reflective supervision, who's been trained in it, then certainly they can provide that role. But I would not automatically assume because that they are that coordinator that they could do that.

Mary Ann: Exactly.Sherry: They -- you know, they -- they may need some extra training...Mary Ann: Yes.

Sherry: ...to do it. But it's -- you know, certainly that could be a person who could fill it. And it would depend on that persons characteristics and traits, as well as their training and experience.Amanda: But I think that's an important point, that I don't think anybody is saying it can only be an infant mental health person, just that those skills come natural...Sherry: Right.

Amanda: ...or are trained into those infant mental health people, but that there are folks that do have those skills in other fields.Sherry: Right.

Amanda: And -- and those fields, comprehensively, are still important to Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. What about this documentation question? Jennifer, is that something you do in your program? You talked about journaling...Jennifer: So I -- I might need some clarification on the question, but my understanding was that if we're meeting with the staff then what are we passing on? Is that... What are we passing on to the ed person, is that the question? Or...

Amanda: Barbara, are you still with us?

Barbara: Yes, I am. Thank you for allowing me to clarify the question. The -- the question is, as you work with staff day to day or week to week, month to month, of this reflective practice process, how -- how are you documenting their progress towards their professional growth? And then how do -- are you using -- is it recommended to use, sort of, a synopsis of that progress to share with the -- I guess, the administrative person without breaking the confidentiality.

You know, just to say, "Here's what -- you know, you're paying me all this money to come in here and do this work with your staff so far, I'd just like to give you some update on their -- on the progress." Is there anything you recommend to accomplish that?

Jennifer: Well, what we... So -- so because of our -- our set-up's a little bit different, but I do something similar to that with our mental health therapist. And there -- there's a very clear message that what they're discussing in the group, if -- if she feels it crosses over into supervision and, you know, an administrative level needs to be brought in, she -- they know that she will let me know that and tell me that. And that's very clear and upfront in the beginning.

And when I'm doing supervision with the staff, I am the person who helps develop their professional development goals and -- and facilitates that happening and -- and the progress there. So that makes it pretty easy for us because we -- we do it together. And because I've been kind of journaling on my own, I can bring that information forward and look back at the time that we've been together.

And we look at that two times a year; so we look at it about every six months. Where -- where are people right now? How are they doing on what their goals are? Do they have any new goals or are they still going in the same direction? Or sometimes I'll say, "Wow, it's sounds like you have a new goal that you'd like to -- to add to your portfolio," and -- and then we'll bring that out again. So our -- our set-up's a little bit different, so I'm not sure I can quite answer your question. Mary Ann, you might be able to answer that piece better.

Mary Ann: Well, I think mine is -- is -- is pretty much similar. When -- when I meet with the supervisors, you know, that's a part of our discussion and dialogue. So as -- as -- as we transition into formal -- the opportunities two times, three times, a year to look at professional development plans, that information is transferred over. And during those sessions that we have, we talk about updates, challenges, and things like that. But it's not a primary piece of -- you know, of our discussions.

Amanda: Lisa, do we have another question? I think we have time for one more.Lisa: We do, and our next question will come from Cynthia Allen.Amanda: Hi, Cynthia.

Cynthia Allen: Hi. I really just had some comments more than I had, you know, any questions, if that's okay.Amanda: Yeah, just for a couple minutes we can do.

Cynthia: Okay. When -- when discussion took place on the reasons why we -- like the 45 day deadline compliance and things like this. Well, I like to think of it as -- as progressing towards instilling compassion in staff, where we justify -- not just state the Standard or the regulation, but to justify the true underlying reasons of why we do what we do, you know. And I think sometimes we get lost in that as supervisors. And I just wanted to make that comment.

Mary Ann: That's a good one.

Cynthia: And -- and we don't always see those new hires, or even some of our staff that have been with us for a while,

coming and -- and developing that compassion that we need to have -- you know, that we should have in this line of work. And the other one was, one of the wonderful things that I think has really worked for me is when we're sitting down and -- and looking at reflective supervision with staff, that it's always good not just to discuss it, but I like to have them go ahead and evaluate themselves.

And I think this really helps them to see basically what they see as far as their performance is concerned and how they perceive themselves in their performance, and I think that's really important. And that's all the time I'll take.

Amanda: Oh, thank you, Cynthia, for that strategy. And -- and I am so sorry we did not have time for more questions, but we're almost done with our 90 minutes together and we want to make sure we release you all on time.

We talked in the beginning of this conference about why our panel implemented reflective supervision in their programs, and Cynthia was a great way to bring us back to that piece. But I wanted to sort of, in conclusion, go back to Jennifer and Mary Ann and ask, after doing this work for a while, what do you see as the value of reflective supervision in your programs? And Jennifer, I wonder if we can start with you?

Jennifer: Sure. So... Well, my biggest [Inaudible] that I see is that we have very little staff turnover, and so that's remarkable to me and makes my life so much easier. And the people who I'm working with are very committed and comfortable in their jobs, and I see it in the services to the families when I'm observing the socialization or going on a home visit with them. And what I'm seeing is, more and more, families are dealing with tougher and tougher issues with the state of the economy.

And so, it's -- it's really hard to keep that sense of hope for a family and not panic or fly off the handle easily in some cases when they come back from a home visit. And -- and I see that they really try to hold it together until we can meet, that they have this calm presence. They help families become a little bit more calm and focused and -- and plan out their next steps in their lives. And I've also seen, lastly, staff really begin to take initiative.

They are doing some of the training in our program; they are doing some of the facilitation of groups; they're bringing issues to the table; and really beginning to practice this approach in everything that they do. And that, to me, is so exciting.Amanda: Oh, yeah. Mary Ann, what would you say?

Mary Ann: I just want to -- to -- to leave some takeaways. Our work with children and families today requires different kinds of expertise. And I need to have staff feel comfortable recognizing their own strengths and skills and yet be able to call on others when they can't meet every need. And this is just not a "let's wait and see what happens next" environment that we're in today when we work with infants and toddlers.

So our job is to focus on positive outcomes. And reflective practice not only can offer a parallel practice, but it can help staff focus on those outcomes and they can be thoughtful and intentional in their daily practices. To -- to take away, this is an appetizer for -- for those of you who are listening to continue to use the tools, the handouts, the reading materials, to make this a part of the culture of your work. Supervision is important, but reflective practice takes time and it doesn't happen overnight.

The outcomes... When you need to make strategic changes in an organization, there's more buy-in when you change directions. Those trusting relationships are from the top down and the bottom up; they're solid. And staff feels supported, and they can rely on supervisors or colleagues when they need support in difficult and challenging situations.Amanda: Lovely. And Sherry, what would you add here to conclude here?

Sherry: I mean, I think -- I have two points. And it's -- it's -- it's lovely, because Jennifer and -- and Mary Ann said so -- so many wonderful important things about it. But one thing I think would be not to be frightened, that it can be really overwhelming. And I've been out there working with centers doing this, and the -- the sense of people wanting it and -- and knowing it's important but not knowing how to do it and being frightened by it really is what lead to the creation of the "Practical Guide for Reflective Supervision," because it is doable.

And you know, like Mary Ann said, it's a process and it's not going to happen overnight, and that you need to look at

your program and its needs and its resources and its time commitment and figure out what works for you. You know, it's, to me -- I think of it as, like, a buffet, you know. Some of us start with dessert first; some of us go for the salad; some of us get a little bit of everything. And you need to, kind of, pick from it what's going to work for you, and then you just go back for seconds and thirds. And -- and you add on until you've got what's going to work for your program.

And then the second piece -- and I -- I think kind of hones into how important I think reflective supervision is. When I did a lot of my work with some of the Early Head Start centers up in East Baton Rouge Parish, as we've got this reflective supervision piece engrained into their program, you know, Louisiana was hit by Katrina, and by Rita too.

Really devastating hurricanes all throughout the south; Louisiana was impacted, not just New Orleans. But when Rita came, there was plenty of other cities that were impacted. And there was an influx -- a tremendous influx of people into the Baton Rouge area, high needs people that needed to be served by Early Head Start. And so the centers I would work with grew rapidly from two to five centers, tripling the number of children that they serve, tripling their staff.

And they -- and they said repeatedly to me, "I'm so glad that we had reflective supervision in place because we would not have been able to handle this crisis without it," and that that was a key component to them being able to expand their services and to serve these really needy families from other areas who were in stress and displaced themselves. And so, you know, having it in place now, maybe when you're not in crisis or maybe because you're constantly in crisis, can really help for down the road when we don't know what's going to come.

Amanda: Absolutely. Angie, is there anything that you want to add in conclusion?Angie: Just thank you to everyone -- to all of those on the line and to Sherry and Jennifer and Mary Ann. I just -- I -- I felt it as I was sitting here. I felt it come to life, but I also felt the practicality of it for programs and I just hope that folks can move forward with it. So thank you, Amanda, for giving everyone the opportunity today.

Amanda: Well, and I really want to echo what you said, Angie, about thank you and -- and for you, also -- for Jennifer, Mary Ann, Sherry, and of course, to you for spending this time with us today. I thought it was a tremendously rich conversation. I just want to call people's attention... I know you all are looking forward to seeing those books arrive at your doors this week; use them well. Look also for information on the EHS NRC webcast on Reflective Supervision that's planned for late February. We're really looking forward to that.

And of course, there are other resources that might be helpful that we referenced earlier listed on page 8 of your packet. Finally, we hope that you will make some time for reflection on this conference on discussion and planning with your staff. The Applying the Information Handout on page 6 in your handouts may be really helpful in generating some thoughts. And I am -- I really would hope that people send back their evaluations to us.

One final housekeeping note. There are a few days left to respond to the call for proposals for the Birth To Three Institute. But we would love to have the opportunity to learn from you in June; we hope that you will send in a proposal. Look for that on our website at www.ehsnrc.org. Thanks again for being here today and for the work you do everyday. And now I'll turn it over to Lisa to end the call.

Lisa: And ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude today's conference. We would like to thank you all for your participation. Have a great day.--End of Audio--

-- Premalink for viewing (requires Flash and javascript)

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