

A COLLECTION OF TIPS ON BECOMING A:

# Reflective Supervisee

“Reflective supervision is a collaborative relationship for professional growth that improves program quality and practice by cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities” (Shahmoon-Shanok 2009, 8).

A collaborative relationship is a partnership where individuals bring their best thinking to identify strengths or address concerns around the families and children they serve. No one is expected to know all the answers.



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## Meet Janine.

Janine is a new home visitor in an Early Head Start program and first-time reflective supervisee.

**i** This information sheet is designed to use Janine's situation to provide examples of how reflective supervision fits into your daily life.



## "I've never heard of 'reflective supervision.' What should I expect?"

During orientation Janine learned that reflective supervision is a process for better understanding the intimate and emotional work that she does with families. Janine was curious, so she asked a co-worker, "Do you meet with our supervisor every

week? What do you talk about?" Janine's colleague assured her that everyone in the program had regular time with a supervisor to think about the work they do with families and their feelings about that work. She said it was an extremely valuable time and had helped her to grow not only professionally but also personally. Janine was perplexed and still unsure about how this process worked and what would be expected of her.

## Creating a safe relationship takes time.

Janine understood that "cherishing strengths and partnering around vulnerabilities" (Shahmoon-Shanok 2009, 8) meant that she would feel supported, respected, and valued by her supervisor. This sense of being understood would enable Janine to feel safe exploring and sharing a range of feelings, reactions, and experiences regarding her work (both positive and negative) with her supervisor. Janine learned that she wouldn't be expected to share everything from day one.

*SUPERVISOR*



## Some things to remember:

The trainer addressed a few other components that were important in helping to create a positive, reflective space. Janine should arrive to her sessions on time, clear distractions by turning off her cell phone, and protect the scheduled reflective supervision time from interruptions or cancellations.

## Exploring and thinking deeply

Janine would be expected to share detailed observations, thoughts, feelings, and concerns about one or two of her families. Together, she and her supervisor would consider which aspects of a relationship, interaction, or situation to explore further. This was very different from her previous experiences with supervisors. She understood that she would be expected to think about her own beliefs, values, and assumptions within the context of her work. Janine could see how these aspects could affect her interactions with children and families. Janine liked the idea of slowing down and considering how her behavior may have affected a specific situation.



Janine's co-worker shared this example of how a willingness to explore and think deeply might look:

"If you have a strong belief that children should be raised in a two-parent family and you are working with a single-parent family, then that belief could bias you toward that family. Reflective supervision would give you a safe place to explore that belief and how it might be affecting your work."

## Time to step back.

Janine learned that reflective supervision also included examining and increasing awareness of the relationship between one's professional life and personal life and how the two affect each other. This made sense to her because she remembered how hard it was for her emotionally when she lost her mother, and she could see how it affected her behavior with the children and families in her care. Having a safe place to understand and share those difficult feelings in relationship to the work would have really been helpful. Her colleague highlighted the importance of acting on new insights and awareness to strengthen practice, as that was the ultimate goal of reflective supervision. Janine liked the idea that she was to take what she learned, act on it, and then return to reflective supervision to consider carefully how it all played out. Janine felt better that she wasn't expected to know but rather to be willing to try and consider. That felt less scary than worrying about doing something wrong.



Be patient with yourself.  
This is an opportunity  
to grow and learn.

Janine felt reassured when the trainer stressed that the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts and feelings and those of others is challenging and can be a bit uncomfortable at times. She felt optimistic that, over time and within a safe, nurturing, and supportive relationship, her own ability to be reflective could be enhanced.

## Six months later ...

... Annie, a new hire, approached Janine to ask her about reflective supervision. Janine told Annie that, at first, she was hesitant about reflective supervision, it takes some time getting used to, but that now she finds herself rushing to her reflective supervision meeting because that time is so valuable in helping her do her work. Janine tells Annie that reflective supervision has contributed to her having a deeper understanding of her own values and beliefs and how they impact her work with children and families. She knows she is a better teacher because of it.



## References:

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Shamoon-Shanok, Rebecca. 2009. "What is Reflective Supervision?" In *A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision*, edited by Sherryl Scott Heller & Linda Gilkerson, 1-22. Washington, D.C: ZERO TO THREE.

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