



## An Example of Reflective Supervision in Practice

In the following vignette, Allyson, an EHS director, has just attended a training for directors where she learned about the connection between reflective supervision and reflective parenting practice. A reflective program with caregivers who model and participate in reflective supervision can influence parents to become more reflective in their relationships with very young children. Reflective parents have more insight into their children's behavior and the parent's responses to that behavior. Reflective parents can also develop multiple responses to support a desired behavior in their young child. Over time, reflective parenting practice can help strengthen the relationship between parents and very young children. Allyson begins her program year by providing reflective supervision for her management team. She models her expectations for the rest of the staff:

*Allyson had been pushing her staff to talk with families about reflection, but she found that busy classroom staff weren't sure about how to do this - or even why. She vowed that this year would be different. She was going to find a way to use her training in reflective practice with her EHS team. She started the program year by providing regular reflective supervision to each member of her management team every other week. The management team, in turn, began providing reflective peer supervision for each other during the weeks they were not meeting with Allyson.*

*Julie, the center-based manager, scheduled a supervision session with Rena, a classroom teacher. They used the time to think about how to best support new parents to begin the process of reflecting on their own parenting strategies.*

*Rena began, "Last year I feel like I had good relationships with the parents, and they could really think about the different ways they parented their children, and how what we did at school and at home really supported the children. This year I have a few new parents that I'm finding it difficult to connect with. I try to share positive things with these parents about their children and ask them how things are going at home. The parents usually respond by saying, 'FINE'...with no more information. It's almost like they think I'm trying to get into their private family business."*

*"Hmm," Julie responds, "So you feel like these families see you as more of an 'intruder' than a partner?"*

*"It seems so," says Rena. "I mean, it seems obvious that I'm trying to connect with them to support their children...doesn't it...?"*

*Julie responds, "It may be obvious to you but your parents may be thinking something else."*



## An Example of Reflective Supervision in Practice (cont.)

She pauses. “You know, your question, ‘How are things going at home?’ could literally be taken any number of ways by your parents. It’s a very open-ended question. I wonder if after you have shared your positive observations with the parents, you asked a more specific question about the child’s progress at home.”

“You mean something like, ‘Your child learned 2 new words today. Has he been speaking more at home lately?’” asked Rena.

“Yes, exactly,” said Julie. Then added, “You know, Rena...it’s just the beginning of the year and some of your parents might still be adjusting to leaving their children with someone they just met.”

“You’re right, Julie,” answered Rena. “I just know that when I’m able to work closely with parents the consistency at home and school is so much better for the child.”

Julie offered, “It seems to me that if we want to encourage our new parents to begin the process of reflecting about their parenting practices with their children, we might want to facilitate a discussion about this early in the year.”

“It’s a great idea,” said Rena. “Maybe we could ask Allyson or even one of the other managers to facilitate a discussion about reflective parenting practice at the upcoming parent meeting.”

Julie chimed in, “And we could ask some of the other infant/toddler teachers who are comfortable to share how these parent partnerships have been helpful to them. I’ll ask Allyson about the agenda for the first parent meeting and find out if there’s time to put this topic on the agenda.”

In fact, the topic of the EHS program’s first parent meeting was *Reflective Parenting Practices and Strategies in Early Head Start*. A few weeks after this meeting, some of the new parents began sharing their parenting practices at home with Rena and some of the other infant/toddler teachers, thus strengthening the developing caregiver/parent bond. The caregivers appreciated the family expertise, and felt that they were in a better position to support the infants and toddlers in care. This is the circle of support in action.

Allyson began the program year with her staff embracing Reflective Supervision, and putting it into practice. Because her staff felt supported, they were able to develop meaningful, open relationships with parents. The benefits were two-fold:

- parents who developed a sense of trust and rapport with their young child’s caregiver, were more likely to share their own parenting practices with their teachers; and
- parents were also in a better position to support their own children when they developed meaningful relationships with staff to whom they could consult.