

Reflective Practice Information Sheet

Reflective practice is a process of thinking clearly, deeply and critically about any aspect of our professional practice. It requires creating space to reflect on our work. Making a commitment to reflective practice has long been recognised as essential to processing the challenges associated with safeguarding work.

Reflective practice is important to help support a safeguarding professional's mental health and wellbeing.

Essential to maintaining wellbeing and performance in a safeguarding setting is the practice of deliberately engaging our reflective capacities. A good metaphor is to think of standing afar and looking upon our own thoughts, behaviours, attitudes and inferences we make about what is happening. The goal of reflective practice is to gain insight and promote greater personal effectiveness. It provides space to process our experience.

Reflective practice is a process where we: consciously unpack our experience; explore multiple perspectives; consider options for action; and find a way forward.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of reflective practice as an antidote to work-related trauma and stress that are common risk factors in safeguarding work.

Having regular, scheduled, reflective practice time is particularly important in roles susceptible to vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma is described as indirect trauma that can occur when individuals are exposed second-hand to difficult scenarios, situations and stories relating to abuse. This makes it a highly relevant and important ritual for safeguarding officers and leaders to adopt given their exposure.

Reflective practice is defined as a continuous dynamic process that involves thoughtfully, honestly and critically considering all aspects of professional experience and applying knowledge to practice.

To reflect critically requires an ability to conceptualise and analyse, together with a willingness to examine the assumptions underpinning one's practice, in order to improve it.

Reflective practice needs to be regular, ongoing and ideally become a life-long practice of taking time for self-evaluation, peer reflection and system evaluation and learning. It is not something we only do whilst being new in our roles. It is an essential process to meet the complex challenges that constantly arise in the course of our safeguarding work.

Benefits

- improved insight,
- enhanced wellbeing,
- higher motivation,
- reduced burnout,
- enriched learning.

The reflective cycle includes:

1. **Description**

Explore events, interactions and situations.

What happened?

Recalling the event, interaction, or situation and exploring the facts objectively including when and where it happened, who was there, what you did, what others did and the result.

2. **Inner Experience**

Processing the experience from the inside.

What were your reactions? What were you thinking and feeling?

Processing the experience from the inside and noting how you reacted, how you were feeling and what you were thinking at the time. You can also consider your inner experience directly before and after the situation if relevant and helpful. This stage also involves stepping into the shoes of others and exploring their perspective and what they may have been thinking, feeling and wanting.

3. **Evaluation**

Identifying the impact on self/others.

What has been the positive, negative impact on you/others?

Identifying the impact the situation had on yourself and others, both positively and negatively. This stage involves applying a number of lenses/perspectives to evaluate the impact of the situation. This is an opportunity to also evaluate your own beliefs and assumptions.

4. **Analysis**

Integrating the situation.

What sense can you make of the situation?

Integrating the experience and making sense of what happened. This stage is about rationalising the situation and drawing meaning and insights from it. It's about stepping back and exploring more deeply what has emerged from stages 1 to 3 in the reflective cycle. It includes analysing why the situation occurred as it did.

5. **Learning**

Learning from the experience.

What else could you have done? What learnings are you taking from this?

Identifying what you can learn from the experience. It's thinking about what else you could have done to process the experience differently; thinking about what else you might need to do next time to process the negative impact.

6. **Action Plan**

Setting commitments.

What would you like to put into place for the future?

The final step involves implementing learnings by setting tangible actions and commitments for the future. This stage is about identifying goal oriented actions that are specific, realistic and impactful that will not only help you in similar situations in the future but contribute to your overall wellbeing and safeguarding mechanisms.



The underpinning philosophy of reflective practice is that there is a difference between mechanically doing something in a habitual context and thinking in greater depth about whether one's approach constituted the best course of action.

Reflection can occur before, during or after an event. It can help process something that triggered you during your ministry. It can also help shape how you anticipate how you might approach something complex or challenging in the future. It is fundamentally about increasing our self-awareness.

Reflective practice helps safeguarding professionals and leaders identify their own motivations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The processing that occurs by reflecting can enhance our personal insight and grow our safeguarding practice.