

Self-reflective practice



Just as every child is unique, so is the service that each childcare professional provides. One way to continually improve your business and meet the needs of the children in your care is to work on developing your reflective practice.

Reflective practice involves regularly looking at every aspect of your business and being honest with yourself about how you are doing. This enables you to put procedures in place to make any improvements or developments to your business.

The key is to look objectively at your practice and consider strengths and weaknesses. Try to identify any improvements that could be made to your setting, your daily routine,

activities with the children, and your risk assessments. Remember to highlight the many positive aspects of your business, too, rather than simply concentrating on a few areas that may need some extra attention or improvement.

How can self-reflective practice help you?

It might be that you have not yet explored self-reflective practice,

perhaps because of time constraints or because you are unsure of how to get started, but reflective practice can really benefit you and your setting. Sue McKeogh is a lecturer in early years education for the Open University and has tutored childminders over the past 23 years. Sue says, "By reflecting on your practice, you can gain an understanding of why you do what you do and the impact of your practice on the children and families

you work with; as a result you can gain self-esteem and confidence in the value of your role.

Being self-reflective can help you to move away from seeing your practice as just 'commonsense' to valuing the knowledge, understanding and skills that you have. This then professionalises you in the eyes of other early years professionals".

Discussing your practice with a more in-depth understanding can be beneficial as Sue explains, "Reflecting on your practice enables you to have a 'professional discussion' with your Ofsted inspector, and to articulate what you do and why, rather than feeling defensive and 'allowing yourself' to be inspected".

Developing reflective skills

Studying for a qualification can introduce childminders to the tools required for self-reflection suggests Sue, "Embarking on a qualification such as the Foundation Degree in Early Years means that you are challenged to explain your practice as part of your assessment, and this creates opportunities to develop reflective practice skills."

Talking with other professionals is also a key part of reflective practice. "One childminder found that her ability to discuss her observations around behaviour with the child's key worker not only meant the key worker saw her as a professional, but it introduced her to new ways of thinking about, and so reflecting on, her practice," says Sue.

Try talking to other childminders to share ideas and get new perspectives about your practice. Remember that every setting is different, so what works in one setting may not apply to your own, but talking things through with others can give you inspiration to try something new.

Applying self-reflective practice

Think about why and how you do things, and whether there are any changes that might benefit your practice. "Reflective practice encourages you to question everything you do in a focused

and constructive way," explains Sue. You might start by looking at policies and procedures. Which policies are working well, and why? Which policies do you think could improve, and how could you improve them?

Reflective practice can also involve looking at the physical space and equipment in your childminding setting. You might consider whether

you are making the best use of space and whether, for example, the most popular play equipment is the most easily accessible. If you have made any changes to your setting, how might your risk assessments need updating? Taking a step back and asking yourself these kinds of questions will allow you to continually improve your practice.

A reflective practitioner:

- takes professional responsibility for constantly improving the quality of their own practice
- thinks about the way they work, and why they choose certain ways of working
- considers working in different ways and introduces new ways of working
- plans how to maintain and develop their practice in future, seeking new information and training opportunities.

Reflective practice questions

- why did I do that?
- what was the outcome?
- what could I change about the way I responded?
- what would be the benefits of changing?
- how could I improve the way I....?

Reflective practice tips

- set time aside to take a step back and ask objective questions about your practice
- identify someone to reflect with who will challenge you to explain your thinking
- write it down – it can be really motivating to look back at your reflections in six months to a year, and see how your practice has developed
- remember reflecting on your practice is an opportunity to celebrate what you do well, as well as identifying areas for development.

Benefits of self-reflective practice

- an increased professional identity
- higher quality provision
- further acceptance by other early years professionals
- more confidence in what you do.

You can view NCMA's publication, *Being self-reflective* at www.ncma.org.uk/PDF/being_reflective.pdf

Self-evaluation form

Registered childminders in England can complete a self-evaluation form (SEF) to support their Ofsted inspection. The SEF is not compulsory; however, if you complete an SEF it will be used by the Ofsted inspector to plan the inspection for your setting and can help your inspection go smoothly.

The early years SEF is available to complete online at www.ofsted.gov.uk In Wales, all childminders are required by CSSIW to submit a Self Assessment of Service form (SAS) prior to their inspection. Full guidance is available at www.cssiw.org.uk