

Top tips for reflective practice

For playworkers and other professionals involved in children's play

Reflection is a term playworkers use to describe thinking deeply about what we do to improve our professional practice. It's an essential part of our ongoing learning and should be considered as continuing professional development. Reflective practice is a structured approach which at its simplest means: identifying the problem, reflecting upon or analysing the problem, and then drawing conclusions and planning for the future.

1 Reflection time

Some of us will reflect while doing another task such as driving home, exercising or relaxing in the bath and others benefit from writing or talking with others. Understanding when reflection comes naturally is useful in helping us know when and how to work things out.

2 Don't force it

We tend to prefer to reflect by either talking, writing, drawing or expressing, so using our preferred methods will help us to reflect more easily. For example, a playworker who prefers to talk things through may have to write eventually but that may be recording the outcome of reflective practice rather than the process of reflection itself.

3 Working as a team

Reflective practice should be nurtured within our teams, so we need to make sure that there are opportunities for group and one-to-one reflection. This could be through team meetings, supervision support sessions or informally throughout the working week.

4 Be a critical friend

The aim is to help others to critically question their practice, their decisions and actions whilst being supportive and understanding.

5 Asking 'what if' and 'why' questions

These sorts of open questions help us to probe different possible approaches.

6 Keeping an open mind

To critically analyse our successes and failures we need to be open to new ideas or ways of looking at things. Nurturing a culture of trust within our team will support this.



7 Active or passive?

‘Active reflection’ is where we make time to really think about a problem by actively feeding the thought process. ‘Passive reflection’ is where we reflect without really meaning to and thoughts and solutions present themselves as if from nowhere. In practice, both forms of reflection are useful so sometimes we may need to allocate time to really think about a problem whilst for others it may be more effective to allow thoughts to flow freely in a more meditative way.

8 Examining theory and our core beliefs

These will influence how we act so it’s crucial that we consider them in our reflections.

9 It’s reflective PRACTICE

Without a definite outcome it’s just thinking about the problem. There should always be an outcome to our reflective practice – for example making a mental note to do things differently in future, attending training to help us in our roles, adding an item to a team meeting agenda, updating a risk-benefit assessment or discussing practice-based solutions with our team.

