

Tool 11: Levels of reflection

Gillian Ruch (2000) has identified four levels of reflection.

This tool helps you to consider what level of reflection you use and how to increase the depth of your reflection

You can use this in supervision to identify what level of reflection is needed for a particular situation.

You can also use it to deliberately engage a deeper level of reflection when you had been using technical or practical reflection. This tool supports critical reflection on cases and also development of your professional capability.

Technical reflection – This is a pragmatic form of reflection that compares performance with knowledge of ‘what should be done’ as set out in standards, policies, timescales and procedures. This is often used as a quick response to a question of ‘what should I do?’

- > When do I use this level? When is it appropriate?

Practical reflection – This is reflection on how we are making sense of situations. By helping the practitioner to look back and learn from practice experiences, supervisors build practitioners’ capacity to ‘reflect in action’ and ‘reflect on action’. This may be the level that is used in a ‘reflective discussion.’

- > When do I use this level? When is it appropriate?

Critical reflection – This deep layer of reflection includes a focus on power relationships and social and public contexts. It recognises the impact of the practitioner on the situation. The term ‘reflexivity’ often refers to this type of reflection.

- > When do I use this level? When is it appropriate?

Process reflection – Drawing on psychodynamic theory, this deepest layer aims to explore conscious and unconscious aspects of practice and how these shape judgements and decision-making. Emotions and unconscious responses generated in engaging with people are surfaced and managed to contain their impact on practitioners’ wellbeing and on their ability to assess risk.

- > When do I use this level? When is it appropriate?