

Tool 9: Group reflection

This is a model of group reflection called Systemic Reflective Space (SRS). It was developed through a small-scale, practitioner-led qualitative research project to develop 'reflective space' in children's services. The approach is rooted in Tom Anderson's (1987) work on the reflecting team, and was adapted by Child Centred Practice and Research in Practice.

Systemic Reflective Space seeks to create space to explore experiences, intuition and ways of knowing to enable learning and help to transform practice. It does this through:

- > Building collaborative and reflective practice
- > Offering opportunities for an alternative view on aspects of a practitioner's work and for the practitioner to explore a variety of options in their practice
- > Employing the strengths and diversity of participants.

You can use this model in group supervision to support critical reflection that enables someone experiencing a situation to gain insight that will help them judge what to do.

Ground rules:

In order to facilitate the process, team members are encouraged to:

- > reflect the presenter's pace and style
- > connect comments to material that has been presented
- > look for strengths and be mindful of negative feedback
- > talk in a way that enables the presenter to listen
- > listen in a way that enables the presenter to give feedback
- > Ideas should be presented tentatively and not as solutions

(Jude and Regan, 2010: 11).

Getting started

In groups of around six, nominate one person to present a practice issue.

1. One participant presents a practice issue within a circle (approx. 15 minutes)

The issue is presented in story form – first of all from the point of view of the practitioner, then from the point of view of the service user and then from the point of view of other significant people involved. The practitioner can draw on resources such as pictures, objects and role play to tell the story.

The other members of the group pay attention to how the presenter talks about the issue. Their focus should be on emotional listening. Emotional listening requires a willingness to let others dominate a discussion and attentiveness to what is being said. Emotional listeners take care not to interrupt, use open-ended questions, reflect sensitivity to the emotions being expressed, and have the ability to reflect back to the other party the substance and feelings being expressed.

2. Presenter turns to sit with their back to the circle. The group converses and explores the issue (approx. 15 minutes)

The group talks about the situation without asking questions of the presenter. All participants must learn to ‘sit with uncertainty’. This involves a willingness to continually challenge one’s own assumptions and place knowledge in the context of values, past experiences, feelings and relationships to test them out. The group adopts an exploring (not a ‘solving’ or ‘expert’) stance. The aim of the exercise is to explore different ways of understanding the presenting dilemma and why their own attention has landed on the story in the way it has. The group can draw on resources such as pictures, objects and role play in their exploration.

‘What else could it be?’ is a helpful way for them to think about what has been presented along with asking ‘How is this dilemma the same as one I have experienced?’ More importantly, ‘How is it different?’ (a useful way for members of the group to check out that they are not relying too much on similar experiences of their own, or the shared wisdom of the organisation).

The group works to capture the ‘known’ and ‘unknown’ areas of the original presentation, recognising their own assumptions about what is happening. (What we sometimes call ‘thinking’ can just be a rearranging of our own prejudices and beliefs.)

The group generates a list of ‘curious’ questions the presenter should consider. However, they do not ask the questions and the presenter does not answer them; the presenter remains outside the circle, listening.

3. Presenter re-joins the circle and comments on the group’s discussion (approx. 10 minutes)

The presenter responds to the different discussions, viewpoints and questions generated, talking about what captured their attention and why. The group is to listen in silence to these points.

The presenter tries to remain curious about what they are attending to and how they felt with each response (reflection in action). They can use these prompts to help them:

‘The first thing I noticed from your discussion was ...’

‘It made me feel like ...’

‘Now I realise that ...’

‘This is what I would like to do about that ...’

4. Group discussion in the circle (approx. 10 minutes)

The whole group including the presenter then reflects on why different perspectives have emerged – or why they have not emerged, if there have been no alternative perspectives.

The group checks in that they are feeling OK and explores the usefulness of the process.

Source: Adapted from Jude and Regan (2010)