

# Building the Capacity of Reflective Supervisors to Respond to Complexities in Home Visiting

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## Purpose:

Our goal is to develop clear recommendations and procedures for training and supports, to build standards for quality reflective supervision mirroring those established for infant family mental health providers, and to improve supervisor and home visitor satisfaction.

## Topic Areas:

- Strengthen and broaden home visiting effectiveness
- Identify core elements of home visiting
- Promote the sustainment of effective home visiting
- Build home visiting research infrastructure
- Build a stable, competent home visiting workforce

## Background:

The retention of both families and home visitors is a continuing concern in the field. Low rates of program completion by families may be influenced by burnout or attrition of home visitors. Not enough is known about how reflective supervision contributes to staff retention and program success in early childhood programs, even though it is mandated within most programs. The parallel process of providing appropriate support to home visitors through reflective supervision, mirroring the supports being provided to families who are often high risk and living in adverse conditions, is considered to be a critical element of successful service delivery. Unfortunately, this essential component of infrastructure is frequently ignored by funders and program administrators. More national level efforts need to be occurring to improve and measure reflective supervision and its impact on home visitors and families. Many reflective supervisors have been minimally trained in the process, and are inexperienced in dealing with the complex problems and conflicts that arise during home visits. Both reflective supervisors and home visitors have repeatedly reported a need for more supports and greater organizational efforts to enhance their skills in order to reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction. Determining core elements required to effectively provide basic orientations to the process, and the benefits of virtual support for home visiting programs operating in geographic isolation and across wide areas of a state are all essential to its success.

## Methods:

We developed targeted trainings for reflective supervisors and home visitors, ongoing support for reflective supervisors using virtual platforms, and multi-pronged measures of the reflective supervision process. Mechanisms included WebEx support calls facilitated by expert mentors in reflective supervision, development of a rating scale for digital recordings of reflective supervision sessions, and interactive webinars focused on challenges reported by reflective supervisors and home visitors. We developed specific tools for self-assessment by reflective supervisors (Knowledge & Confidence of Reflective Supervisor) and to examine home visitors' experiences with reflective supervision [Reflective Supervision Tool for Early Childhood Settings (RST-ECS)].

**Table 1 Reliability of Reflective Supervision Tool for Early Childhood Settings (RST-ECS)**

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha for Combined (n=52)	Cronbach's Alpha for HV sample (n=36)	Cronbach's Alpha for EHS sample (n=16)
Experiences in the Work Environment	.955	.940	.977
Characteristics of Supervisor	.932 (n=49)	.917 (n=34)	.959 (n=15)
Actions of Supervisor	.959 (n=49)	.948 (n=33)	.974
Age (mean; standard deviation)	40.32 years (SD=10.8) N=47	41.88 years (SD=10.6) N=32	37.00 years (SD=10.8) N=15
Age Range	23-63 years	23-63 years	25-62 years

**Table 2 Knowledge & Confidence of Reflective Supervisor Tool**

Item	Not at all	Somewhat	Completely
1. I believe I have all the important characteristics necessary to promote and encourage reflection in the work the home visitors are doing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I am able to make the difficult work of home visiting easier for the staff to handle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I am able to empower & motivate the staff by using effective & respectful leadership strategies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I believe I should provide a model for decision making to the individuals receiving reflective supervision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I try to encourage creative & innovative solutions to problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I focus on the strengths of the home visitors & help them to remember these strengths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I handle the mistakes I see in ways that help everyone in the program to grow	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I understand the concept of "parallel" process occurring within reflective supervision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I have all of the resources and support I need to do the work required of Reflective Supervisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Do you understand how to help home visitors "hold" a mother with mental health issues who is not receiving mental health treatment?	Yes		No
11. How do you use reflective supervision as a learning process for the home visitors and for yourself?			
12. The most difficult part of being a reflective supervisor is:			
13. The thing I like most about reflective supervision is:			
14. Please describe some of the challenges you have faced in providing reflective supervision related to your supervisees' behaviors.			
15. What are the challenges you work to overcome related to your own behaviors during reflective supervision?			
16. What barriers have you encountered in providing reflective supervision?			
17. How have you handled ruptures that have occurred in any of your relationships with supervisees?			
18. What is done within your agency to insure the psychological health of the home visitors and yourself?			
19. What mental health supports do you have available for families and home visiting program staff?			
20. Please describe the resources and support you need for your work as a Reflective Supervisor			

## Implications

HARC PBRN could provide a platform for wide sharing of these research tools while encouraging evaluators across the United States to work together to develop large samples to examine their utility across multiple types of programs. Such research is needed in order to develop more appropriate trainings, policies focused on standards for reflective supervision, and improvements in home visiting practices nationally. This work is important to ensure retention and support of home visiting staff who are working to build buffers against adversity in the lives of infants, toddlers, and families.