

# Planning and Facilitating Group Reflective Practice

## A Beginner's Step-by-step Guide

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*‘Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning.’ D.Schon1983*



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## About this guide

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (USA) describes staff supervision and supported reflection as essential to building a trauma informed workforce, recognising that without it, repeated exposure to others' trauma erodes empathy, judgement, and the capacity to stay present with people in pain. The Scottish Government's National Trauma Transformation Programme goes further, naming reflective practice explicitly as one of the proactive measures organisations must put in place for staff emotional wellbeing.

Both treat reflection as a practical necessity, something a trauma informed organisation builds into the organisation.

- This guide is a step-by-step approach for leaders and staff wanting to introduce and implement group reflective practice.
- It explains the role and benefits of having a regular structured approach to thinking together in complex and demanding work environments.
- It offers practical tools and frameworks from starting conversations with your team, to facilitating and evaluating group sessions.
- Please share your thoughts and ideas for developing this toolkit by contacting [claire.ritchie@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:claire.ritchie@n-somerset.gov.uk)

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## An Introduction to Reflective Practice

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*Imagine that you come home at the end of a bad week where everything possible has gone wrong. When you walk in the front door you are confronted with a time machine which can take you back to Monday morning so you can live the whole week over again. You use this opportunity to think about everything that went wrong and what you could do to correct things, as well as trying to repeat the things you have done right. It may not seem like it but this is reflective practice — the act of thinking about our experiences in order to learn from them for the future. In real life you probably don't have access to time travel, but you can still work towards being a reflective practitioner.*

[www.libguides.cam.ac.uk](http://www.libguides.cam.ac.uk)

Reflective practice describes an individual or team taking time to think about their role and practice. What's going well, what's difficult, how they are feeling, and how they make others feel.

Reflection is a style of thinking, something we already do. However, this can become challenging when we are 'firefighting', dealing with crisis, or emotional exhaustion. By setting aside specific time on a regular basis, we give ourselves permission to think more deeply about the things which frustrate or motivate us.

Reflective practice is a structured approach to thinking about work in complex and demanding environments. It creates a safe space for meaningful discussion, enabling teams to:

- ✓ Understand each other better
- ✓ Challenge assumptions
- ✓ Surface differences in values and perceptions
- ✓ Reframe complex problems
- ✓ Embed learning into everyday work

Group reflective practice also helps teams consider the impact of the wider system and the emotional aspects of challenging roles, which can often cause anxiety. Acknowledging these emotions makes them more manageable and fosters greater engagement and resilience.

## Benefits of Reflective Practice for staff

|                                                                 |                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| • Reduced emotional exhaustion and burnout                      | • Stronger team relationships                          |
| • Increased motivation and innovative practice                  | • Service culture change                               |
| • Personal and professional development                         | • Improved staff retention                             |
| • More confident working with complex and challenging behaviour | • Successful outcomes for customers impacted by trauma |
| • Encourages consistency across staff teams                     | • Improved services through on-going evaluation        |

*"There is a robust evidence base demonstrating that teams who regularly meet to reflect on their practice are more effective than those who do not. Furthermore, literature indicates that effective teams achieve better outcomes for their client group."* West & Markiewicz, 2004

### Improvements in client support due to reflection

Better relationships

Helps us tolerate uncertainty

Challenges are framed as learning opportunities

Behaviour is viewed as communication

Feel safe taking positive risks

New approaches to working with old problems

## Overcoming Obstacles

| Potential Obstacle                                                             | Possible Solution                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Time and resources. Logistics of getting the whole team together</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief in and commitment to the benefits of Group Reflective Practice (GRP) is the starting point. Prioritise, diarise and protect time allocated.</li> <li>• Explore internal resources, can staff from different projects cover for each other? Can shared facilities reduce costs?</li> <li>• Consider replacing a team meeting with a GRP session once a month or bi-monthly.</li> <li>• Plan sessions in advance and look at how other services have managed the logistics.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Organisational buy-in and commitment</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review regularly and evidence the impact. Promote the experience of services that have implemented GRP reduced evictions, fewer warnings, happier and healthier staff.</li> <li>• Talk about it outside of sessions and show how learning changes practice, which benefits the people you work with.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Stuck in 'old' service culture and behaviours</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An external facilitator can help address this. If that is not possible, support internal facilitators to understand and feel confident in their role.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Staff reluctance, anxiety or avoidance of reflecting in a group setting</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff may be anxious or unsure about the process. Be ready, willing and able to respond to this promote the benefits and explore their fears.</li> <li>• Ask those who have already experienced GRP to talk to the team about it.</li> <li>• Practice reflection in different settings first: 1:1s, team meetings.</li> <li>• Demystify the process. Offer a briefing or workshop to staff.</li> <li>• Create a group agreement at the planning stage, setting out expectations and how you will manage disagreement.</li> <li>• Promote the process as one of inclusion — supporting and encouraging all participants to have a voice. Make attendance encouraged but voluntary.</li> </ul> |
| <b>No finances for a facilitator</b>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with peer group reflective practice with a rotating facilitator or chair.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## What staff are saying about group reflective practice



Source: St Basils, Birmingham — staff reflections before and after participating in group reflective practice sessions.

'I have found the sessions really helpful in thinking in different ways about my work and the kinds of problems that it involves and have learnt more than I expected about different aspects of our work.'

'Now that we have had a few sessions and I have experienced how others are totally engaging in this experience it has completely reduced any feelings of anxiety or concern around how I might respond and enabled me to feel completely comfortable to take part (or not!) depending on how I feel without any judgement.'

'The sessions have really helped me feel a sense of belonging and support that have supported me through difficult (personal) times. They have helped me feel able to work at my best and increased my resilience.'

Bristol City Council Commissioning Team, 2025

## Three Steps to Introducing Group Reflective Practice

### Step 1: Questions for the Leadership Team

Before starting group sessions, it's important for managers and leaders to consider the following questions so that staff feel safe to participate and the practice is sustainable.

- ✓ What are you hoping to achieve from the sessions? Specifying your objectives is important so participants are clear what they and the organisation are going to achieve.
- ✓ Are staff clear on the purpose and value of attending?
- ✓ Will attendance be voluntary or mandatory?
- ✓ What will be the frequency and length of sessions? Every 4 to 6 weeks for 60 to 90 minutes is recommended.
- ✓ Have you allowed time in the staff schedule and case load?
- ✓ Will you use an external facilitator?
- ✓ Will the group composition be peers only, or will it include managers?
- ✓ How will learning be fed back into the wider organisation?

| Objectives of Group Reflective Practice                            |                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| For Staff                                                          | For the Organisation                                                              |
| Process the emotional impact of their work                         | Tangible demonstration of valuing staff                                           |
| Recognise the impact of personal emotions, attitudes and behaviour | Increase in staff retention and reduction in sickness and turnover                |
| Share perspectives about challenging and complex situations        | Confidence in staff problem solving and decision making, less reliant on managers |
| Increased self-awareness and professional development              | A culture that reflects the principles of trauma informed practice                |

## Step 2: Beliefs About Work Questionnaire

Once you have answered the leadership questions in Step 1, organise an opportunity for staff discussion. This tool can help start those conversations.

*Complete the questionnaire individually by circling the option that best reflects your view. Then discuss your answers with a colleague. Notice similarities and differences. Be prepared to share insights with the wider group.*

### 1. Staff are impacted emotionally by their work

|                |       |        |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|

### 2. Staff sometimes feel frustrated and "stuck" about how to support a client

|                |       |        |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|

### 3. There are times when decisions are affected by the emotions, feelings and beliefs of staff

|                |       |        |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|

### 4. I believe that group reflective practice can help us find different solutions

|                |       |        |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|

### 5. I believe that we need to make time for group reflective practice

|                |       |        |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Unsure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------|

## Step 3: Team Discussion and Planning Tool

After completing the questionnaire and team discussions, it is time to think about next steps. The presentation below is designed to help you facilitate team discussions around their experience, insights and concerns about group reflective practice. It also provides a guide to planning your next steps for implementation.

### Presentation

Set aside 90mins - 2hrs and use the presentation accompanying this workbook to start discussions with your team about how and when to implement reflective practice sessions.

### Introduction and content of presentation

Group reflective practice is a great way to start your trauma informed journey, providing staff 'time out' to process and consider the emotional impact of their work and identify new approaches to complex situations.

The aim of this planning tool is to help facilitate an exploration of the role and value of group reflective practice and steps to implementation.

If you'd like any tips or advice on how to run the workshop, or have feedback please contact [claire.ritchie@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:claire.ritchie@n-somerset.gov.uk)

### Activities

- 1. Share your experience of reflective practice and create a definition*
- 2. Identify benefits for you, your team and the people you support*
- 3. Tips on overcoming hurdles to implementation*
- 4. Action planning, agree next steps*

## Evaluating Impact

It can be helpful to evaluate the impact of reflective practice for several reasons:

- ✓ Check that you are meeting your agreed objectives
- ✓ Identify staff worries or concerns
- ✓ Monitor change over time
- ✓ Evidence growth and professional development in staff
- ✓ Provide information for commissioners and funders
- ✓ Evidence a commitment to trauma informed practice

Ask participants to answer the following questions at the first session and regular intervals thereafter to assess the impact.

| Evaluating Impact |                                                                                          |             |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Theme             | Statement                                                                                | Score (1-5) |
| <b>Purpose</b>    | I am clear about the role of group reflective practice                                   |             |
|                   | I am clear about the objectives                                                          |             |
| <b>Process</b>    | We adhere to the group behaviour agreement                                               |             |
|                   | I feel safe sharing with the group                                                       |             |
| <b>Impact</b>     | It supports my wellbeing at work and allows me to process its emotional impact           |             |
|                   | It is developing my self-awareness and the impact my own emotions have on the way I work |             |
|                   | It helps me to feel part of a wider team                                                 |             |
|                   | It supports me to find solutions to complex issues                                       |             |
| <b>Comments</b>   |                                                                                          |             |

# How to Run a Group Reflective Practice Session

## 1. Purpose of the Session

- To create a safe space for staff to pause, share experiences, and learn from each other.
- To reflect on what worked, what did not, and what could be done differently.
- To reduce stress and build a stronger, more supportive team culture.

## 2. Preparation

- Choose a facilitator (someone confident, who can keep time and focus, contain the group, ask prompt questions and clarify understanding).
- Gather staff in a quiet, private space where interruptions are minimal.
- Allow between 45 and 60 minutes.

## 3. Structure of the Session

1

### Step 1: Check-in and Creating Psychological Safety

- Each person shares briefly how they are arriving today (e.g. tired, hopeful, stressed).
- Create a group agreement for expectations and behaviour.

*Agreement examples: Do not interrupt; allow people to finish their thoughts. Approach with curiosity rather than challenge or criticism e.g. 'Tell me more.' Model compassionate and non-judgemental behaviours.*

2

### Step 2: Choose a Focus

- Pick a recent event, client, or challenge to discuss.
- Agree as a group: 'This is what we are going to reflect on today.'

3

### Step 3: Describe (Facts)

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Stick to the facts first, without judgement.

4

#### **Step 4: Explore (Feelings and Reactions)**

- How did staff feel at the time?
- How did the client(s) feel?
- What worked well? What was difficult?

5

#### **Step 5: Learn (Findings)**

- What have we learned from this?
- What patterns do we notice?
- What might we try differently next time?

6

#### **Step 6: Action (Next Steps)**

- Agree one or two practical changes to try.
- Note who will do what, and when.

7

#### **Step 7: Check-out**

- Each person shares one word or thought on leaving the session.

## Appendices

As you become more confident in facilitating group reflective practice, you may want to try using the following models.

| Driscoll's Model of Reflection: Worksheet                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>1. Description of the Event — What happened?</b><br/> <i>(Focus on recalling and recording details)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of returning to the event?</li> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• What did I see?</li> <li>• What was my reaction to it?</li> <li>• What did other people do who were involved?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p><b>2. Analysis of the Event — So what?</b><br/> <i>(Explore meaning, emotions, and impact)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did I feel at the time of the event?</li> <li>• Were my feelings different from others who were involved?</li> <li>• Did I feel troubled? If so, in what way?</li> <li>• What were the effects of what I did or did not do?</li> <li>• What have I noticed about my behaviour by stepping back?</li> <li>• What positive aspects can I now see in this event?</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>3. Proposed Actions — Now what?</b><br/> <i>(Move from insight into change and future action)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the implications for myself and others?</li> <li>• What difference does it make if I do nothing?</li> <li>• Where can I get more information to face a similar situation again?</li> <li>• How can I modify my practice if a similar situation happens again?</li> <li>• Which aspects of practice should I tackle first?</li> <li>• How will I notice whether I am any different?</li> <li>• What is the main learning I take from reflecting on this event?</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

### The 4Fs Greenway's Model of Reflection: Worksheet

#### Facts — What happened?

*(Stay objective, stick to observable details)*

- Who? What? Where? When?
- What happened before and after?
- Any surprises or predictable moments?
- What was most memorable, different, or critical?
- What did not happen that you expected or hoped for?

#### Feelings — What did you experience?

*(Name emotions, not judgments)*

- What feelings did you notice at different points?
- When did you feel most or least involved?
- What other emotions were present?
- When did you notice yourself controlling or expressing feelings?
- What were your personal highs and lows?

#### Findings — What does it mean?

*(Step back, analyse, make sense)*

- Why did things work or not work as they did?
- How did your feelings influence your actions and outcomes?
- What opportunities were missed? Any regrets?
- What would you like to have done differently?
- What new understanding do you have now?

#### Future — What will you do next time?

*(Turn insights into action)*

- What has already shifted in your thinking?
- What choices do you now see?
- If this happened tomorrow, what would you do differently?
- How can you use what you have learned in practice?
- What one concrete step can you take forward?

# Frequently Asked Questions

These are some of the questions most commonly ask after reading the guide. They are intended as a quick-reference companion, not a replacement for the full document.

## Q1. Can group reflective practice still work if it's mandatory?

The guide recommends voluntary attendance because choice and a sense of control are part of what makes the sessions feel safe. That said, mandatory attendance doesn't automatically undermine the practice if it's introduced carefully.

- Be transparent from the outset about why attendance is expected, not just encouraged.
- Build a group agreement together so staff still have a say in how sessions run, even if attendance itself isn't optional.
- Make participation in any one session voluntary, staff can attend but choose not to speak.

## Q2. We don't have budget for an external facilitator. Does that mean we shouldn't start?

No, instead

- Start with peer group reflective practice, using a rotating internal facilitator or chair.
- Support whoever facilitates to feel confident in the role, even informally.
- Revisit the option of an external facilitator later, once the practice is embedded and its value is easier to evidence to budget holders.

## Q3. How will we know if it's working?

The guide sets out five reasons to evaluate impact: checking you're meeting your objectives, monitoring change over time, evidencing growth and professional development, providing information for commissioners and funders, and demonstrating a commitment to trauma informed practice.

Practically, this means:

- Use the evaluation tool (Fig 4) to track themes like purpose, process, and impact over time.
- Look for softer signs too such as staff retention, sickness levels, and confidence in handling complex situations.
- Review regularly, not just once, so you can show on-going change rather than a single snapshot.

## Q4. What if something distressing comes up during a session?

- The group agreement and check-in at the start of each session exist precisely to help build the psychological safety needed before this material surfaces.
- A confident facilitator's role is to contain the group, this includes knowing when to pause, slow down, or hold a moment rather than rushing to fill it.

- If something raises a safeguarding concern or a staff member's own wellbeing needs individual support, group reflective practice should sit alongside, not replace, existing supervision and safeguarding routes.

#### Q5. Some of our staff may be sceptical or anxious about this. How do we bring them on board?

This is a very common starting point, the 'before and after' staff quotes in the guide (Fig 1) show how far views can shift once people have experienced a session.

- Dispel myths early- be clear about what reflective practice is and isn't.
- Let people who've already experienced it talk to sceptical colleagues directly.
- Keep early attendance encouraged but voluntary, so people can opt in once they feel ready rather than being pushed.
- Use the Beliefs About Work questionnaire (Step 2) as a low-pressure way to open the conversation before sessions even begin.

#### Q6. What's the difference between this and clinical supervision or a regular team meeting?

- A team meeting is usually task-focused — it covers logistics, updates, and decisions about the work itself.
- **Clinical supervision** is typically one-to-one, with a focus on an individual's casework, professional practice and accountability and case formulation. The supervisor is expected to have specialist skills and expertise in the relevant discipline.
- Group reflective practice sits apart from both. It's a group space focused on the emotional and relational impact of the work — how staff are affected by it, not what needs doing next. The guide's seven-step session structure (check-in, focus, describe, explore, learn, action, check-out) reflects this — it moves through feelings and meaning before it ever reaches action points.
- Being explicit about this distinction with staff early on helps prevent confusion.

#### Q7. How do we stop it becoming just another meeting that loses momentum after a few months?

A few practical safeguards.

- Protect the time in the diary the same way you would any other priority — the guide is direct that this needs to be planned in advance and treated as an investment, not an optional extra.
- Keep evidencing impact rather than assuming the value is obvious. Use the evaluation tool (Fig 4) regularly so the benefit stays visible to staff and to the organisation.
- Make sure learning from sessions visibly feeds back into practice. If staff never see their reflections lead anywhere, the sessions can start to feel pointless.
- Revisit the group agreement periodically. Momentum often dips when the original purpose gets fuzzy, so checking back in on what the sessions are for helps reset focus.

## References

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### **North Somerset Council**

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Please share your thoughts, experience and ideas for developing this toolkit