

Reflective Practice to Promote Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

What is Reflective Practice?

This is a practice that is highly valued as it affords members of staff an opportunity to share and explore issues relevant to their relationships with students, families, colleagues and management. It encourages self-reflection, consideration of others, empathy, responsibility within team building and respect for all in their environment. Everyone from Early Years Staff, Lunchtime Supervisors, Teaching Assistants, Trainee Teachers, Teachers and Senior Leaders are included.

This practice has proved helpful in both Primary schools and Early Year settings. It offers members of staff an opportunity to explore and express their thoughts and feeling regarding issues within the working environment that are hindering or obstructive to emotional wellbeing. It is run and managed by a trained facilitator in the strictest of confidence. It aims to not only think about challenges and difficulties but to sensitively, creatively and productively find a clear way forward.

By offering this space the staff feel valued and considered. School staff have described their experience of reflective space as empowering, enabling and trusting. It has promoted team cohesion, respect and trust in themselves. It is noted that this experience of self-reflection and empathy has a domino effect on the children and families in schools.

What does a Wellbeing Practitioner do?

The role of the Wellbeing Practitioner is to manage and facilitate the time so that staff are able to name any relational issues they may be grappling with. These topics of discussion may range from thoughts and feelings evoked about children, families, members of staff and organizational aspects. It is an opportunity to encourage thinking about and imagining into the experiences of the other. The Wellbeing Practitioner encourages empathy and understanding for another's experience and perspective. She will encourage the staff to find a productive and sensitive voice, to support an opportunity to be heard and to experience facilitation towards a productive end result. When there is a sense of agency and empowerment there is less resentment towards authority.

The Wellbeing Practitioner takes an unbiased and non-judgmental stance as the facilitator. Their aim is to encourage the individual to think and to come to positive outcomes. They do this by modelling reflection as opposed to reaction, consideration as opposed to blame and allowing exploration as opposed to closed opinion.



Why have this in a school? Some of the following points highlight how this practice can help build the emotional Wellbeing of any school:

- ✚ The presence of the Wellbeing Practitioner as facilitator enables better understanding of any psychological and emotional issues regarding any children.
- ✚ Provides children and families who are vulnerable with another form of support. It affords better understanding and planning of support by a whole school approach.
- ✚ It encourages a whole school approach regarding support, understanding and respect.
- ✚ It promotes team building and a cohesive work practice thereby preventing hidden resentments proliferating.
- ✚ Allows empowerment and sense of agency amongst staff.
- ✚ Allowing the opportunity to express feelings about challenges and difficulties which fosters healthy communication and less stress.
- ✚ Cuts back on high turnover of staff due to harbouring resentments etc. because of inability to communicate productively.

Who does this apply to or who would this benefit?

- ✚ Provides school with a whole school approach to emotional wellbeing. Offering healthy communication skills, thinking about and imagining into the experience of the child, family and teachers so that there is better understanding of why the child and or family are this way.
- ✚ Challenging members of staff. This is an opportunity to encourage and model healthy communication skills without ostracizing and shaming particular staff members.
- ✚ Challenging children and families.
- ✚ All members of staff.
- ✚ Management Team.

Where does this take place? Due to the nature of the topics that could arise it is important that a room is designated for this process. It is important that it is not a room that has children or other staff members walking through. Privacy and confidentiality are of the utmost importance.

What would it look like and how frequently would this take place? It is recommended that following each part of the whole school training every staff member is provided with a reflective practice session. Once all staff members have been trained, further reflective space sessions can be provided at the discretion of the school leadership team.

