

Guidelines for Beginning and Maintaining a Reflective Supervision/Consultation Relationship via Distance Technology



Introduction

The cornerstone of infant mental health informed practice within the infant and early childhood field is reflective supervision/consultation (RSC). Defined as “a partnership formed for learning” (Shahmoon-Shanok, 2006, p. 344) or a shared experience founded on trust, mutual respect, curiosity, and wonder (Weatherston, 2016). RSC is co-created between supervisors/consultants and supervisees/consultees. Because of the complex and emotionally evocative nature of work with infants, young children, and families, professionals need a regularly scheduled time and place in which to pause and reflect on their experiences. Relationships allow us to grow and change, and RSC offers a safe and trusting relationship in which observations, thoughts, and feelings, professional and personal, may be shared with another or others. When one is heard, one can listen; when one is seen, one can see; when one is held in a responsive relationship, one can hold another. No longer alone, practitioners feel supported and replenished within the RSC relationship. They grow more competent, confident, and self-aware through RSC experiences in their infant and early childhood community.

RSC provided by distance technology has been on the rise in recent years. This has been a result of the continued recognition that RSC has garnered in the field of infant-early childhood mental health in addition to the need for equitable access to quality RSC. What was once an evolving medium to practice and offer RSC is now commonplace due to COVID-19. With great care, RSC that is offered by phone or video conference can create a safe base or a holding space for professionals committed to infant mental health informed practice. The following provides guidance for both the Supervisor/Consultant and the Supervisee/Consultee regarding best practices for entering into an RSC relationship that uses distance technology.

This document should be used as a companion document to the Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision/Consultation.



For the Supervisor/Consultant



Prepare Yourself

- Consider what helps you feel as regulated, connected, and present as possible for the professionals you are supporting. Utilize those resources as a way to care for yourself, and others. This might include what you can do directly before a session: a few moments of quiet, having your favorite beverage next to you, a quick meditation, as well as what you can do throughout your week or month: participating in your own RSC, journaling, exercise, finding moments of joy, etc.
- Prepare your expectations on the flow of conversation. Allow for more silence, notice the discomfort when people are talking at the same time, and read non-verbals when people are getting ready to talk (such as moving to unmute themselves). It will take extra time to get used to the unique rhythm of conversation in this format of RSC.
- Plan for how you will establish a sense of “being with” without being in the same room with the supervisee or consultees.
- Establish the parameters you will set up for the time to be most effective. For groups, the general format, structure, and timing of the ongoing meetings should be established and discussed in advance. This often includes a recommended format of a rotating, planned presenter for each meeting. For ongoing individual RSC, it is important to set the agenda together at the beginning.



Prepare Your Surroundings

- Join from a location that allows you to keep the experience confidential. This often means a private room. Headphones can also be helpful for maintaining confidentiality.
- Join from a location that typically has a strong internet connection. There may be times or locations when or where joining with cell data is best because it allows for a stronger connection. If it's available to you, you may wish to connect your computer to the internet using an ethernet cable.
- Reduce lighting behind you to minimize backlighting.



Prepare Technology

- Consider the following:
 - What distance technology platform will be utilized?
 - Is the platform accessible to all?
 - Is there a cost to use the platform?
 - Is the platform HIPAA compliant?
 - Have you taken the time to become comfortable with the platform so you can help troubleshoot with new participants?
- Headphones with a built-in microphone often work well for sound/voice transmission.
- Familiarize yourself with the platform functions you may need (mute, breakout rooms, waiting room, etc), and enable or disable settings as necessary (chat, breakout rooms, etc).
- Platforms have various ways of viewing participants. As a facilitator of groups, it may be most helpful to use a “Gallery View”, which allows you to see all group members at one time, and can help you track multiple members concurrently, as well as group dynamics as a whole.



Prepare Your Supervisees/Consultees

- Send an email ahead of the session with all necessary information about the platform, including tips that you have found are particularly helpful. Ask that the participant(s) agrees to join the meeting 10 minutes early for at least the first 2 meetings so that technical glitches can be worked out before the official start time.
- During the first meeting, discuss etiquette specific to distance technology. For groups, you may discuss things like muting self when others are talking, not using the comment boxes as it can feel the same as interrupting when someone is talking, etc.
- Also during the first meeting, outline the expectations of the participant(s) for if/when your technology stops working. It can be quite unsettling when the supervisor/consultant disappears.

For example, “If my technology stops working and I unexpectedly leave the meeting, please stay on the meeting and I will rejoin as soon as I can. I will also keep in touch with you by text (or email) or call you if I am having trouble reconnecting”. Similarly, make sure the participant(s) is aware that they should rejoin the meeting if they find themselves disconnected due to technology.

- Offer space to discuss relational safety, the parallel to the work, and how the participant(s) wants to be sure they work to establish this within a virtual space.
- Offer regular opportunities for feedback and meta-conversation about the reflective process.

For the Supervisee/Consultee



Prepare Yourself

- Expect to experience more moments of silence, times when participants are talking at the same time, and other potentially awkward moments when beginning RSC via distance technology.
- Each participant is asked to commit to refraining from any sort of multitasking (cell phones, email checking, etc) in the same way they would if they were meeting in person.
- If in a group, listen, intently and without interruption, to the individual presenting material.
- If in a group, allow yourself to have thoughts and feelings in response to the material presented.
- Be prepared to offer feedback to the supervisor/consultant and/or group members, when applicable, about your experience, particularly related to the unique experience of meeting via distance technology.



Prepare Your Surroundings

- Join from a quiet, private space that is free from distractions and interruptions and allows you to keep the conversation a confidential one. This often means a private room. Do not join while driving.
- Headphones with a built-in microphone can be helpful for maintaining confidentiality and improving sound quality.
- Try to join from a location that has typically strong Wi-Fi/internet connection. There may be times or locations when or where joining with cell data is best because it allows for a stronger connection. If it's available to you, you may wish to connect your computer to the internet using an ethernet cable.
- Join the meeting a few minutes early to test out your video and sound before the session is scheduled to begin.
- Reduce lighting behind you to minimize backlighting.



Prepare Technology

- Ensure that your device is password protected.
- If using wireless internet, make sure your Wi-Fi is password protected and avoid using public Wi-Fi.
- Download the distance technology app used by your provider. Most apps can be used on a phone, tablet, or computer.
- If in a group, use mute. In group work, it will be important for each person to keep themselves on mute when they are not talking. This will drastically reduce background noise, and increase the clarity of the person who is speaking.
- Commit to having your video camera on. While there may be some instances when this is not possible, each participant should commit to having themselves appear by video. This helps establish connection, especially for groups, and allows for the use of visual cues to find the new “virtual rhythm”.
- Similarly, if in a group, use “Gallery View”. This allows you to see all group members at one time and can help cultivate the group environment and a sense of connectedness.
- Make sure you give yourself a bit of time to practice using the technology, test your microphone and speakers/headset, and learn where the buttons are for switching views, muting, and unmuting.

Combating Video Meeting Fatigue



Some professionals find themselves facilitating or participating in multiple RSC interactions per day. If this is the case for you, there are a few things you can do to mitigate the fatigue that comes with connections via distance technology.

Be aware of the reasons video meeting fatigue occurs. This includes:

- The increased need for sustained and intense attention due to a reduction in social cues and body language of others. Additionally, we put in extra energy to convey our attentiveness to others.
- Group meetings require us to take in much more ‘data’ than we normally would, by seeing multiple faces, and backgrounds at once.
- Meeting over a screen forces us to use direct visual contact (central vision) rather than be able to supplement with our peripheral vision.
- Due to the slight audio lag time, and intermittent audio quality inherent with internet connections, our ears and brains need to work harder to process what is being said.
- Video meeting technology platforms typically default to a setting in which we can see ourselves. Being distracted by one’s own video image can be taxing.
- Lastly, there is a theory that meeting in a virtual space can cause a feeling of dissonance. As Professor Gianpiero Petriglieri states, “our minds are together when our bodies feel we’re not”.

Here are techniques that may help combat video meeting fatigue.

- While we recommend using gallery view if video meetings are infrequent, if you are a group participant, consider changing to ‘speaker view’ where you only view the individual speaking. This can limit the amount of data your brain needs to process.
- Turn off “self-view”. This prevents your brain from being distracted and self-conscious.
- Turn your monitor so it’s not directly in front of your face. This allows our peripheral vision to engage and gives our central vision a rest.
- Prioritize breaks between video meetings, and use that time to engage in non-screen based activities, incorporate movement, a change of scenery, and rest your eyes.



Recommended Readings

- Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health. (2018). Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision/Consultation. Retrieved the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health website: <https://www.allianceaimh.org/reflective-supervisionconsultation>
- McCormick, A., Eidson, F., Harrison, M. (2019). **Reflective consultation with groups via virtual technology: What is best practice?**. ZERO TO THREE Journal, 40 (3). P. 64-71
- Shahmoon-Shanok, R. (2006). **Reflective supervision for an integrated model: What, why & how?** In G. Foley & J. Hochman (Eds.), Mental health in early intervention: A unity of principles and practice (pp. 343-381). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weatherston, D. (2016). **Reflections: Reflective supervision across time and space.** ZERO TO THREE Journal, 37(1), 50-53.



Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health

13101 Allen Rd
Southgate, MI 48195
allianceaimh.org