Reflection Questions for Families on Social and Emotional Development

Reflection is an active process of considering a belief, interpretation of an experience, or observation and the conclusions one makes about those interpretations or observations. Early interventionists guide caregivers to use reflection to consider their feelings, practices, interactions, and perspectives about their child and how they promote their child's engagement and development. The use of reflection in early intervention builds the caregiver's capacity to be aware of and continually consider or refine their strategies and approaches in supporting their child.

Knowing the types of questions to ask and preparing questions before early intervention visits can help providers build their skills supporting caregivers' reflection. This resource provides examples of reflective questions early intervention providers can ask caregivers to gain more specific information on social and emotional outcomes, co-regulation, and challenging behavior. Questions are categorized and adapted based on Rush and Shelden's Framework for Reflective Questioning (2011[1]). A planning sheet is provided for early intervention providers to plan questions in preparation for an early intervention visit with individual families.

Early interventionists can ask different types of questions to help families reflect and plan goals around their relationship with their child and their child's social and emotional development, regulation, and behavior. The following pages contain descriptions of and sample questions across four question topics:

Awareness

Analysis

Alternative

Action

1 Rush, D. D., & Shelden, M. L. (2011). The early childhood coaching handbook (First Edition). Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Examples of Reflective Questions

Question Type	Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Question Examples
 Awareness Questions Help the early interventionist and the caregiver to identify: ▶ What the caregiver knows ▶ What is currently happening (e.g., parent/child skill, routine, behavior)	▶ What do you already know about (e.g., co-regulation, emotional literacy, social and emotional development)? ▶ What do you and your child like to do together? ▶ When are you and your child most (insert emotion)? (e.g., happy, relaxed, calm, dis-regulated, frustrated) ▶ How did you feel when...? ▶ How does your child tell you what they want or don't want? ▶ Tell me what (behavior/routine/activity/time of day) looks like. ▶ What (parts of your day, activities, places, or people present) is this behavior most likely to occur? ▶ What have you tried so far? ▶ What usually happens after your child (insert behavior)? ▶ What usually happens or what does your child do when you (insert strategy)?
 Analysis Questions Help caregivers to think about how what is currently happening in terms of knowledge, skills, behaviors, or outcomes compares with what they would like to happen. Help caregivers to draw conclusions and assess current beliefs, behaviors, and knowledge. Help to answer how and why.	▶ What things did your parents do to parent you that might also work for you? What would you like to do differently? Why? ▶ How were emotions expressed/talked about in your family growing up? How would you like that to look for your family today? ▶ Why do you think you felt that way when...? ▶ Knowing what you do now about (e.g., your differences in temperament, your child's SE milestones), how might that change your approach? ▶ How helpful was that strategy for you and your child? Why?

Question Type	Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Question Examples
	▶ How did your child respond when you (insert strategy)? Why do you think that worked/did not work? ▶ Why do you think your child can (insert skill) during (insert routine) but not during other times? ▶ How do you think your child would respond if you did that? ▶ How does your child's behavior align with (or differ) from your expectations? ▶ What did you do that made a difference in (insert activity or child's response)? ▶ Think about the moments in your day when you feel the calmest. What was your child doing? ▶ Think about momements in your day when you feel dysregulated (e.g., anxious, stressed, upset). What was your child doing? ▶ How did (you or your child) feel when... ? ▶ What bothers you about that behavior? Why?
 Alternative Questions Help early interventionists include families in decision-making by helping families think about: ▶ choices available before joint planning ▶ new ideas or solutions to try	▶ What activities or items does your child like? How could you embed learning opportunities into these times of day with these things? ▶ What are some things you could teach your child to do instead? ▶ How might you respond differently next time? ▶ What else do you want to try before your child (insert behavior)? ▶ When are the moments in your day when you feel like you can try something new? ▶ What are some ideas you have for trying that? ▶ What are your ideas for helping your child (insert skill) before our next visit?

Question Type	Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Question Examples
Action Questions Help early interventionists and caregivers engage in shared decision-making during joint planning by: ▶ Identifying what the caregiver and early interventionist will do between visits ▶ Establishing a focus for the next visit ▶ Including alternative solutions to use if the plan doesn't work	▶ How would you like me to support you with this plan? ▶ What do you want to happen between now and our next visit? ▶ What will you do to help your child know that transition is coming? ▶ What challenges do you think might occur when implementing this plan? How will you handle them? What support do you need? ▶ What might you do to redirect that behavior? ▶ When (insert behavior) happens, which of these responses will you use? ▶ What will you do when you start to feel (e.g., angry, upset, frustrated, anxious)? ▶ What will you do to help your child calm down in those moments? ▶ I heard you say you wanted to work on helping your child learn emotions. Which of the ideas we discussed today around teaching emotions do you want to use between now and our next visit? ▶ What choices will you offer during (insert routine or activity)?

Tips for Guiding Reflection

- Use open-ended questions to encourage more in-depth responses
- Use a picture or video to support reflection
- Allow wait time for families to respond
- Rephrase questions as needed to support caregivers' understanding of content
- Use questions to help caregivers think about how the information or strategies shared match their priorities, understanding, viewpoints, or ideas
- Be flexible with ways families can share their reflections (e.g., journal, email, voice recorder)
- Invite families to take time to reflect with other important people in the child's life
- Start small; think of one area of focus to reflect on at a time

Reflection in Action!

A family you support shares that their 18-month-old wants to be held all the time, and if they try to put them down, the child has tantrums. Below is a list of questions that you might use (only selecting a few) to guide the family's reflection.

Awareness Questions

What does the caregiver know?

- Have you noticed your child using any self-soothing behaviors (e.g., bringing their hand to their mouth or using a pacifier or a calming toy or blanket)?
- Are there parts of your day when your child is able to stay calm when you aren't holding them?
- What does your child do when you put them down?
  - What does it look like? Sound like?
- What skills do you think a child needs to be able to stay calm when you put them down?
- What strategies do you use to calm your child down?
- What feelings come up for you when your child starts to tantrum?

Analysis Questions

Compare/contrast

Explore beliefs, behaviors, and knowledge

- What bothers you about your child's tantrums? Why do you think you feel that way?
- How could putting your child down look different from what is currently happening?
- When you tried (insert strategy), what did you think might happen?
- How are the current supports you are using working for you?
- How will you and your child know they can stay calm without you holding them?

Alternative Questions

Brainstorming ideas

- What are some self-soothing behaviors you think your child could learn?
- What could you say or do to help your child stay calm when you can't hold them?
- How might we break this down so that you and your child feel successful during moments when you have to put them down?
- What times of day can your child practice staying calm when putting them down with adult support?
- What can you do if your child tantrums when you have to put them down?

Action Questions

Planning for practice

- What materials/resources do you need to implement this?
- Which of the strategies we listed do you think will work for you and your child? If that strategy isn't effective, what will you do (i.e., what is your back-up plan)?
- Who else will be involved in this routine, and how can you inform them of the plan?

Planning for Your Next Visit:

Use this section to plan questions you want to ask about an area of focus for your next visit.

Area of focus for the visit: _____

Awareness Questions

What questions will help the caregiver reflect on what they know?

Analysis Questions

What might the caregiver explore, understand differently, or learn more about?

Alternative Questions

What questions can help the caregiver and me develop ideas for strategies?

Action Questions

What will I ask to make a plan for practice and the next steps?

IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

University of South Florida

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