

# Reflective Communication

## *Cultivating Mindsight Through Nurturing Relationships*

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*Reflective supervision is a relationship for learning (Fenichel, 1992). The partnership nurtures a process of remembering, reviewing, and thinking out loud about a specific child, the people who surround that child, and what happens, or does not, between them. It could be said that reflective supervision enhances vision, clarifying what is seen and even what is see-able. In a real sense, the effect of reflective supervision is that it nourishes "super vision"—the ability to see further, deeper and more (Shahmoon-Shanok, 2006, p. 343).*

**H**ow can something so "soft"—a relationship—penetrate so deeply? What happens between people when they earnestly communicate over time? How does one understand the process when one person is a learner and the other a nurturer? Between a daughter and her father? Between a supervisee and reflective supervisor?

In this article, we begin with relationships and then explore how individuals know another person and the nature of communication between people that nurtures the layered skills of social and emotional intelligence. At the root of these abilities is a central process called *mindsight*, which is how an individual sees the internal world of the mind (Siegel, 1999, 2010a). Mindsight is a fundamental skill that permits individuals to "see" the mental world within themselves and within others. Combining insight and empathy, mindsight also enables them to envision relationships as how two minds connect—and even to know how the brain of each person comes to resonate with the nervous system's signals from the other. While external behaviors are perceived by the eye, ear, or sense of touch and individuals' senses enable them to see, hear, and feel physical objects and their motion in the world, the internal life of the mind is perceived through a different set of neural circuits. These neural regions

of the brain are ready to grow with experience, shaping them from the earliest days of people's lives. Relationships with others that focus on the internal nature of mental experience promote these mindsight circuits to increase their connectivity and function. Whether an individual is sensing her own inner mental life or empathically attuning to the internal world of another person as a supervisor does in reflective supervision with individuals or small groups, mindsight sums up the capacity of peoples' brains to make the images that represent the world of mental activities, as well as the mental activities themselves. Just as the process called *metacognition* involves thinking about thinking, mindsight entails a form of metarepresentation in that it reveals how the mind sees itself. Beyond having a thought, mindsight permits one to see directly the qualities of thinking as a form of mental activity.

Mental activities include the familiar capacities of thought, feeling, intention,

and memory. They embrace the experience of hopes, dreams, attitudes, and desire. An individual's mental life also involves the experience of perception, recognition, understanding, knowing, and awareness. Although each individual may possess these mental elements as a familiar part of her life, the ability to perceive them as mental

### **Abstract**

This article integrates ideas about mindsight with the concepts of reflective supervision and practice in the birth-to-3 field. Mindsight is the ability to have insight and empathy for the mental experience of self and others, along with the ability to sense the patterns of shared communication of energy and information exchange within relationships. The authors explore how the flow of energy and information in the context of nurturing relationships through reflective supervision supports the capacity to develop mindsight. Mindsight also refers to the neural mechanisms beneath mental and relational life. Nurturing a resilient mind within reflective communication is both art and science. The authors propose that openness, objectivity, and observation create the ability to monitor and then modify mental life itself, an internal and interpersonal set of processes that promote healthy self-regulation and emotional balance.

activities—to know individuals are thinking or feeling and not just becoming lost in a train of thought or an emotional surge—is something that may require learning and can improve with practice. That is what reflective supervision is for, the development of mindsight as a skill of knowing about a provider's own—and her clients'—mind.

In the world of research and theory, terms such as intersubjectivity, mentalese, mentalization, mind-mindedness, reflective function, and theory of mind have been used, along with mindsight, to capture this notion that individuals can conceive of a mind—their own, as well as others—and not just have one. (See box Terms for the Ability to Conceive of Our Own and Others' Minds.)

These concepts have helped illuminate the nature of development, pointing to the importance of reflecting on the internal nature of mental life as a crucial component in secure parent-child attachment—in child, in parent, and in early relational development, as well (Fonagy & Target, 2005; Grienemberger, Slade, & Kelly, 2005; Siegel, 1999; Slade, 2005). In the attachment world, this capacity to mentalize as measured by reflective function has been proposed to be the crucial underlying mechanism of secure attachment (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002). As Arietta Slade has stated:

*Mentalization integrates ways of knowing that are at once cognitive and affective; it is, in effect, the capacity to think about feeling and to feel about thinking (M. Target, personal communication, December 11, 2003). Thus it refers, in part, to a cognitive process, namely an individual's understanding. In this sense, it is a metacognitive process akin to perspective-taking, and "metacognitive monitoring" (Main, 1991). In the language of psychoanalysis, it is somewhat like insight. At the same time, it refers to an emotional process, namely the capacity to hold, regulate, and fully experience emotion, in this sense akin to, but not the same as, empathy (which does not imply regulation). It refers to non-defensive willingness to engage emotionally, to make meaning of feelings and internal experiences without becoming overwhelmed or shutting down. The complex processing and integrating that is inherent in high reflective functioning bespeaks emotional richness and depth, and a capacity to appreciate and experience the dynamics of an internal and interpersonal emotional life (2005, p. 271).*

As readers may be aware, secure attachment in the very early years has been demonstrated to lead to far better child outcomes many years later (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Mindsight as a concept extends these helpful scientific views on



Secure attachment in the early years leads to far better child and parent outcomes many years later.

### TERMS FOR THE ABILITY TO CONCEIVE OF OUR OWN AND OTHERS' MINDS

These are related theoretical constructs as well as observable, evidence-based capacities associated with the development of secure attachment in the first 2 or 3 years of life. Secure attachment is rooted in the quality of affective interchange initiated by the parent to support her child and the capacity to perceive and respond to the mental life of the child beneath outward behavior.

**Mentalese:**

Using words that reflect the mental activities beneath behavior, such as "feeling," "thinking," or "remembering" (Fodor, 1975).

**Mentalization:**

The ability to have a "theory of mind," to think in terms of the mental world that drives behaviors and is within the self and the other (Fonagy & Target, 1997). It is the "process by which we realize that having a mind mediates our experience of the world" (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002, p. 3).

**Mind-mindedness:**

Thinking in mental terms when considering the interactions of self and others (Meins et al., 2002).

**Mindsight:**

The ability not only to see the mind and have insight and empathy for the mental experience of self and others, but to sense the patterns of shared communication of energy and information exchange within relationships; simultaneously, it refers to the neural mechanisms beneath mental and relational life (Siegel, 1999).

**Reflective Function:**

The measureable functions that emerge with mentalization which describe the developmental achievement in which children acquire the capacity to mentalize the thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires of self and others (Fonagy, Target, Steele, & Steele, 1998). It is mentalization operationalized (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 3).

**Theory of Mind:**

The term used in developmental psychology for reflective function, it connotes the view that a child has a "theory" that others have an internal subjective life like the self (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982).



A relationship comprises the sharing of the flow of energy and information between two people.

reflective function and secure attachment, integrating what processes occur within the brain (and the distributed nervous system extending throughout the body) and those that occur within the experienced and non-conscious world of relationship.

Here we take the opportunity to explore nurturing relationships and how one individual can support the development of mindsight in another through reflective communication over time with a reliable, respectful partner. Such relationships include that between parent and child, teacher and student, therapist and client/patient, and between reflective supervisor and supervisee. Whichever nurturing relationship is in focus, mindsight is a central feature of how growth is promoted within these interpersonal learning experiences. It is not coincidental that the ripple feature of relationships, especially the hierarchical ones described here, called *parallel process*—that is, what happens in one set of relationships has an impact on the other key relationships each person in the first has—is a lively one.

### What Is a Relationship?

AS WE DIVE into our discussion, we begin by examining the title of our article, in reverse. What actually is a relationship? In the most basic analysis, a relationship comprises the sharing of something between two people. That something can be considered the flow of energy and information. Right now, between you the reader and us, the authors, we are sharing energy and information flow. Energy is the “capacity to do something” as physicists define it. Energy comes in the various forms recalled from basic science studies. The

energy of light, heat, motion, electricity, and chemical reactions is all part of a physicist’s toolbox. What, though, is the energy shared in a relationship? Just the same as in basic physics—you are taking in the photons of light to read these words—and then your brain is using electrical and chemical energy to move from photons on your eye’s retina to activation of neural circuits in your brain. A relationship can be defined in part by how individuals share or exchange flows of energy with one another. Yet relationships also involve the sharing of information.

### And what is information?

Information is something that symbolizes something other than itself. In other terms, a word is a set of squiggles on a page or sounds in the air (molecules moving through space) that stand for something other than those squiggles or sounds. The phrase *Golden Gate Bridge* is not the structure over San Francisco Bay, it is a packet of information that symbolizes the bridge. Certain patterns of energy flow, such as a word, carry symbolic meaning; those swirls of energy are called *information*.

Relationships are created by the sharing of energy and information flow. *Flow* means that something moves across time. So individuals create relationships with each other by way of how they exchange this stuff, patterns of energy, and their symbolic meaning. As energy and information are exchanged between two people over time, the patterns of these configurations of flow shape the quality of the relationship that is formed. As described shortly, the type of exchange varies greatly from relationship to relationship. Those exchanges that respect the internal world of each person

cultivate the ability to see the mind—to develop the reflective skill of mindsight.

### Nurturing: How a Person Promotes Another’s Growth

IF A NURTURING relationship is defined as one that helps the growth of one or more members of the relationship, then how is that achieved? What does it mean to nurture someone? How do providers help clients change and grow? How does someone grow to “become” something (Pine, 1985; Shahmoon-Shanok, 1990)?—a dancer?, a pilot?, a driver?, a social worker?, a physical therapist? A parent?

A reliable, responsive service provider—no matter the discipline—is able to be aware of self and other and is also able to promote regularity, reflectiveness, and relational capacities in another being (Shahmoon-Shanok, 1990, 1991, 1992, 2006, 2009; Shahmoon-Shanok, Gilkerson, Eggbeer, & Fenichel, 1995)?

In the world of attachment research, mentalizing abilities are central to secure attachment and are revealed in measureable *reflective functions* that can be seen in how parents reflect on their own or their child’s internal world of mental experience (Fonagy & Target, 2005; Slade, 2005).

In terms of brain functions, when caregivers use these mindsight circuits to perceive and respond to this mental landscape of self and other, they likely induce the activity of similar mindsight regions in the child’s own brain. The study of neuroplasticity reveals how the activity in the brain can give rise to structural changes in the connections among the activated neural groups. In this way, relationships and the interpersonal communication they entail can produce changes in the activity and then in the physical networks in the brain. When these interactions are filled with mindsight, it is these mentalizing circuits that are stimulated to become active and grow. These circuits are generally the midline areas that rest beneath the forehead—a part of an interconnected circuitry located primarily in the prefrontal region of the brain. When putting all of these research findings into one perspective, it has been found that when communication promotes a perception of the mind, it strengthens these middle prefrontal areas. It is the functions of these middle prefrontal areas that are found as outcomes of secure parent-child attachment as well as in the practice of mindful awareness, which we discuss next. Being mindful, in brief, is a way of being fully present in life. In this receptive state, parents can attune to their children and create the compassionate connections that are at the heart of security (Siegel, 2010b). Simply put, when

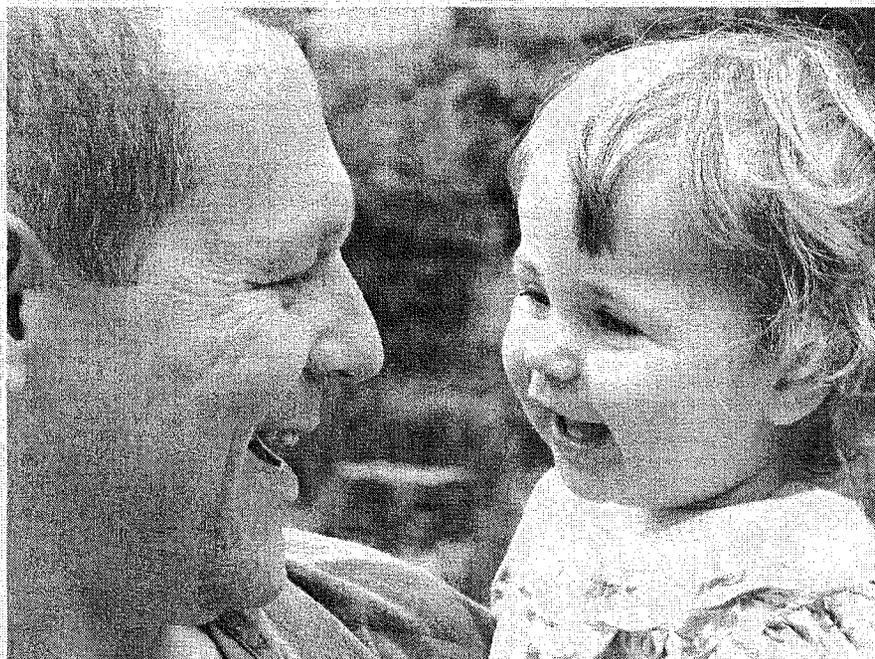
a parent sees the mind of the child and reveals this in the reflective communication in their relationship, the child will develop the neural circuitry enabling her to see her own mind and then to have the capacity to see the mind of others.

In reflective supervision, as in any teacher-student, parent-child, provider-client relationship, nurturing is done with purpose: to assist in the growth and sustenance of compassionate human beings. However, in the case of reflective supervisor-supervisee, specific teaching of the clinical process of helping others to develop their own mindsight skills can be taken even further. In that special relationship, whether the supervisee is an educator, an occupational therapist, physical therapist, or speech-language pathologist, a mental health or medical practitioner, an arts therapist, or a paraprofessional, these professionals are cultivating enhanced emotional intelligence as a precise set of skills to meld with a provider's disciplinary knowledge and dexterity. This increasing awareness and mounting social-emotional strength enables providers to sustain a kind of mellowness, a balanced sense that by practicing reflective thinking together, they will uncover the path of progress with and for their clients.

In reflective supervision, providers are not alone, nor should clients be left alone, even if the past has left them wounded enough not to trust or want them. Consider, for example, the parent who is mandated to get treatment for himself, or for the child, or for both. In meeting the needs of widely diverse children, parents, and coworkers, providers find many who challenge their skill set as these clients come their way, say, people who do not keep their appointments or others who make a provider feel like screaming, "I want out!" because the client has a foul odor or is repeatedly rude. The practice of reflecting with a more experienced teacher over time fosters a provider's ability both to connect with hard-to-reach clients and to maintain relationships for growth with them over the life of a particular clinical involvement.

By its nature, reflective supervision is a process composed of several essential elements. First, it repeats with regularity over time. Like any practice, it builds upon itself. It could be described as an upward spiral of learning, doing, observing, and reflecting... learning, doing, observing, and reflecting... learning, doing, observing, reflecting, learning, doing. The spiral pattern repeats and is absorbed, then repeatedly reabsorbed within each partner.

Second, reflective supervision is a relationship based on respect. Although there are differences in developmental stage,



Being mindful is a way of being fully present in life.

authority, and power; and, in fact, the supervisor is usually in the position of giving a grade or an evaluation, that power is generously shared within reflective supervision (Gilkerson & Shahmoon-Shanok, 2000, p. 50; Shahmoon-Shanok, 1991, 2006, 2009). When supervision is unfolding as it should, the supervisor encourages the evolution of trust by the ways in which he manifests its democratic underpinnings. That can occur because the supervisor is identified with the supervisee's progress; with mindsight as guide, the supervisor fosters empathic collaboration, exploration, and understanding to reinforce the supervisee's strengths, mutually noting the supervisee's *growing edge*, those areas that are more difficult and that may require closer attention. Everyone's interests are served when the supervisee thrives. Thus, supervisors "do unto others as they would have them do unto others" (Pawl & St. John, 1998, p. 7) as they role model how to be with others.

Third, reflective supervision develops the arts of remembering and reconsidering. "Without recollection, there can be no reflection" (Shahmoon-Shanok & Geller, 2009, p. 610). In order for reflective supervision to work, the supervisee has to recall to mind what he observed. He has to remember. This kind of memory is a skill that becomes sharper with repetition. Different disciplines encourage different forms of remembering and reporting, but all require reviewing complex recollected material (cf. Shahmoon-Shanok & Geller, 2009).

Finally, given space limits, let us pause to appreciate the particular significance

of exercising the mindsight skill in work with very young children and their key caregiver(s). Even though it is an exaggeration to say that the extent of what transpires nonverbally increases as the age of the child decreases, there is something about the special challenges—and exceptional potential—of working with babies and children so young that they are appropriately only conceived of as existing in the circle of their parent's care (cf. Winnicott, 1975). So much of what providers perceive in work with young children and their parent(s) is nonverbal and exists within and between each member of the dyad or triad: that is, reflexes, skin tone, movement, pace, eye contact, rhythm, and sounds—to name the barest few. Profound parallels emerge and persist, which are, for the most part, nonverbal, often hovering on the periphery of consciousness: the parent with her baby (baby with parent); the parent with her remembered past caregiver(s) (baby with an accumulating array of different impressions of parent); the parent with her actual parent(s) (new grandparent, with her child as parent, revival of her own memories of her child's babyhood and of what she knows of her own); parent with provider-supervisee (provider-supervisee with parent); provider-supervisee with reflective supervisor (reflective supervisor with supervisee and remembered past supervisees and supervisors). Each is finding her way into new roles within these dawning, new relationships. These functions lie in the realm of mindsight, often unspoken, lingering

or lurking at the outer fringes of awareness; they are modified through the reflective, regulating process of the supervisory relationship that mediates awareness and understanding for both partners, especially for the provider-supervisee. (See Figure 1.)

Everything providers do with people, every response and feeling they have about them, is determined by what is in their minds. Because the mind determines behavior, it is the mind that teachers, providers, parents, and reflective supervisors are or can be trying to nurture. *Psyche* means soul, intellect and mind. In the field of interpersonal neurobiology, a core aspect of the mind is defined as an “embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information.” At the core of people’s mental lives is the internal texture called *subjective experience*, sometimes experienced within consciousness. Yet seeing the mind as also possessing a central regulatory aspect enables providers to make a working proposal of what a strong and healthy mind would be. If nurturing relationships promote such qualities of mind, then that is a good place for us to turn next.

### Cultivating Mindsight Through Relationship

**M**INDSIGHT IS THE ability to know that individuals have a mind, not just simply have one. This ability, which

includes flexible perspective taking (one can stand in another’s shoes), enables individuals to sense the inner world of themselves and of others. Beyond just having this important set of insight and empathy skills, though, *mindsight* enables people to take a step outside their automatic reactions and emotions so that they can actually reflect on them. Indeed, *mindsight* permits a regulatory function, with its two central features. Think of when you drive a car. To regulate the car you must not only determine its direction and speed (with the steering wheel, accelerator, and brakes), you must also perceive where you are going (keeping your eyes and ears attentive). The motion of the car—the flow of your auto—is shaped by how you monitor and then modify that flow.

So, too, it is with the regulatory role of the mind. When individuals cannot clearly monitor the internal flow of energy and information, what they perceive is jumpy and unclear. Imagine holding a video camera on a trampoline as you jump up and down. The recording you make would be fuzzy and without clear details. Now if you stabilize the camera, putting it on a tripod off the trampoline, for example, you are able to make a recording that reveals more depth and clarity, rich with detail.

By helping providers learn how to regulate their reactions and emotions in the process

of learning to witness—becoming aware of themselves, nurturing relationships enable them to see more clearly. What they are seeing is the internal world of their thoughts, feelings, memories, intentions, perceptions, dreams, attitudes, hopes, and expectations. In short, nurturing relationships help providers develop a stabilized *mindsight* lens. With this calmer window into the world of the mind, they can invest in understanding themselves and others with more clarity. Providers can see themselves, their emotions, past, and present and how they relate to their clients—as individuals, dyads, or families—with richer and deeper dimensions and with more empathic clarity. With this enabled self-awareness, providers can better use their own internal life as a bridge linking themselves to others and as an instrument of growth.

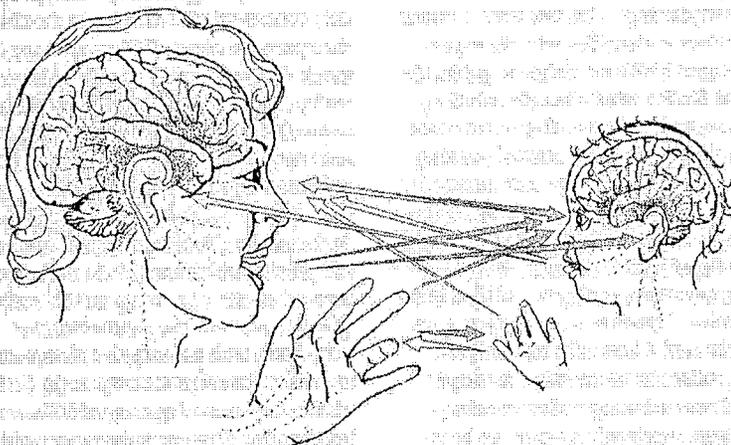
Beyond monitoring more clearly, *mindsight* also helps providers to modify the flow of energy and information toward health. To understand what this really means, the next logical step should be taken, which is answering the following question, “What is a healthy mind?”

### Defining Health as Integration

**T**HE INTERDISCIPLINARY FIELD of interpersonal neurobiology offers a working definition of the mind and of mental health. It is consistent with the ZERO TO THREE description of the factors associated with *infant mental health*, a summarizing term for social-emotional wellness. Through the synthesis of a wide range of sciences, from anthropology to neuroscience, health can be seen as having the fundamental mechanism of the movement of a system that is the most flexible and adaptive. This state is achieved by a certain process called *integration*. *Integration* is the linkage of different elements into a functional whole. Consider a choir singing *Amazing Grace*. Each member of the choir finds her or his own intervals yet joins with the others to achieve a flowing state of harmony. This is how each member becomes differentiated while being linked. The science of integration reveals that when linkage of differentiated elements does not occur, the system moves to either chaos or rigidity. With integration, harmony is achieved.

With a stabilized *mindsight* lens, providers can see clearly into their own or other’s mental flow of energy and information. They can then use this monitoring clarity to detect when chaos or rigidity is present. With this enhanced perspective, providers know what to do at these moments—they can look for how aspects of their inner life are not differentiated or evolved and then promote their specialized growth. They can then nurture their linkage. Consider a toddler with his mom in the supermarket. If the mom gives

Figure 1.



Relationships are created by the sharing of energy and information flow. Encapsulating what is coming to be widely known as interpersonal neurobiology, this figure appeared in a 1989 article by Colwyn Trevarthen at virtually the same time that ideas about reflective supervision were taking shape. Entitled “The modalities of mother-infant bidirectional exchange” in a chapter called the “Development of Early Social Interactions and the Affective Regulation of Brain Growth”, the drawing suggests the lively engagement of all sensory-perceptual domains in and by both parties. The impact upon brain development is suggested, particularly in the younger, more vulnerable partner. Each prompts an effect upon the other, whether the dyad includes parent and child, as suggested in this drawing, or two adults including, for example, a reflective supervisor and supervisee.

Source: C. Trevarthen (1989). The modalities of mother-infant bidirectional exchange. In Curt von Euler, Hans Forssberg and Hugo Lagercrantz, *Neurobiology of Early Infant Behaviour*, published 1989, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

an abrupt “No!” to his request for candy, the interaction may soon fall apart, with the child collapsing into a tantrum. The mom is not honoring their differences or her son’s volition—he is tempted by seeing the candy. If interactions like that happen repeatedly, their relationship will soon become rigid or chaotic. Harmony will be absent because the integration that could have occurred through mindsight is missing.

When healthy parent-child relationships are examined, the process of integration is found at their core. Parents who honor their child’s unique characteristics and do not try to constrain a child to be only what they expect of the child will likely be fostering secure attachment. Honoring differences yet cultivating compassionate communication is the essence of healthy nurturing relationships. From the beginning of new life, such parents are mostly able to use their mindsight capacities to respect their child as a separate, full-fledged human being, and, although it may at times be difficult for them, they are gradually, over the years, able to transfer their guidance, which gradually evolves to trusting their child as a capable individual on her own.

In teacher-student relationships as well, the younger person’s own special talents and interests need to be honored and explored for that relationship to thrive. In a similar way, meta-analyses of many studies of psychotherapy reveal that the most robust predictor of a successful outcome is the therapist’s own open presence. This presence is revealed in an empathic ability to sense the internal world of the client and to actively seek and openly respond to feedback on how the therapy is going (Norcross, 2002).

Nurturing a healthy relationship at its most fundamental level means cultivating integration within and between two people. What occurs within generative reflective supervisory relationships becomes transferred via parallel process into the relationship between provider and parent that, in turn, nurtures the growth of mindsight on the part of the key people caring for a child. When the capacity to sense the mind is awakened, it exerts a positive influence on others. In the section that follows, we explore an aspect of parallel process called *reflective communication*.

### Reflective Communication

**T**O CULTIVATE the ability to monitor and modify the flow of energy and information toward health—toward integration—people employ, foster, and practice reflective communication. This is essentially how the connection between two people uses mindsight to promote a strong, resilient, and healthy mind in each person.

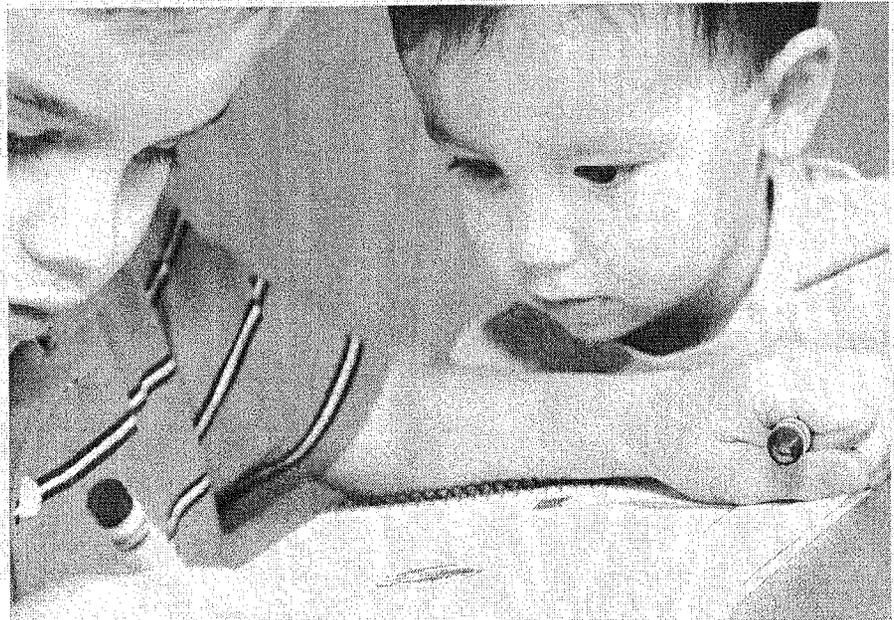
For many providers reflection is natural: They focus on the internal nature of mental life, not just on the externally observable feature of behaviors. Mindsight permits them to sense the mind and emotions behind action. Now you can tell that we are asking you to think a bit outside of the box in this article. We could have just written, “To develop emotional and social intelligence, one needs to know about thoughts and feelings.” Although this would be true, presenting our approach in this way would not allow us to do a number of crucial things. We would not be in a position to define the mind itself. In addition, we then would not be in a position to offer a scientifically based view that goes further: This is a view that enables one to understand how to nurture a healthy mind—in herself or in others—and to understand how this process is interwoven with the brain and interpersonal relationships at several levels of function simultaneously.

So, as a start, we can say that nurturing relationships will be most effective if they help the learner to reflect on the important skills involved in monitoring the flow of the mind and modifying that flow toward integration. This is how mindsight skills within reflective communication is taught. Thus, when a reflective supervisor murmurs out loud, “Wow, I wonder how it is for that Hispanic mom when she takes her speech-delayed 3-½-year-old to the playground in her all-White neighborhood” to her supervisee, she is inviting her to imagine the feeling mental world of the quiet, reserved mother, someone who may feel isolated, but who

may not previously conceive of mentioning her isolation to the White speech-language pathologist trying to reach her. In the caring to comprehend, this example allows one to glimpse how reflective communication with an aware, egalitarian partner supports the effort toward cross-cultural competence. When providers acknowledge and respect differences and promote linkages, they are promoting an integrative form of awareness.

In attachment relationships, communication is seen in the reflective dialogues in which a parent encourages a child or teenager to see the feelings that propelled her behavior. The question, “What was going on in you when you decided to go downtown by subway after 11 PM?” asked with empathic evenhandedness, will help a youngster remember and review her actions. The parent is stating that she knows there is a mental life beneath behaviors. Learning how emotions shape thinking, perceptions, and actions is an important component of what parents teach children as in “Joey, did you see Maleeka’s face when you grabbed her truck?” Such learning happens in bits and pieces, accruing over time, and when practiced becomes the basis of emotional intelligence.

As a reflective lull before moving further along in this article, the reader may want to gaze once more at the animated, brain-to-brain communication drawn into Figure 1; it becomes possible to visualize the “circles of communication” of which the late Stanley Greenspan often wrote and spoke (1992, pp. 229–230), which exert an impact upon the central nervous systems of each partner,



Mental activities include the familiar capacities of thought, feeling, intention, and memory.

whether they be parent and child as suggested in the sketch, therapist and client, teacher and student, or peer and peer.

When a child also learns from his parents or other nurturing people in his life how social interactions are influenced not only by feelings, but also by expectations, perceptions, and memory, the art of empathic understanding is further developed. Your perception of something is different from another's—and each may have elements of the truth. This is a form of *metacognition* in which the nature of thinking itself is thought about. When two people do it together, regularly cultivating their shared attention as happens in the practice of reflective supervision, asking each other questions about motives, emotions, intentions, actions, and more—those of the client, those of the supervisee, and sometimes those of the supervisor—it is likely that each will add to what can be seen, and then to what can be planned as a helpful next step. Implicit in these processes is the evolution both of good judgment and the solid ethical foundations of the infant-early childhood field as a whole, across the many disciplines that make it up.

Studies of deaf children who are raised by sophisticated sign-language parents reveal that if communication includes “words” about the internal world, children will develop these metacognitive skills well (Peterson & Siegal, 1999). However, if deaf children are raised by parents who cannot “articulate” the inner nature of the mind—using mentalese words referring to *thoughts, feelings, attitudes, expectations, perceptions, and memories*—then those children will not develop these important skills they need to understand the inner world of self and other. As Helen Keller (Keller, Sullivan, & Macy, 1903) wrote in her autobiography, her mind was born when she first shared a common word with Anne Sullivan as she learned the word *water*: With one hand held gently by her teacher in the flow of liquid from the pump, the other hand enfolded her teacher's fingers that stroked “w-a-t-e-r” on her palm. Within that insight flash, Helen realized that she had a mind and that her teacher did as well. With

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THE COMPASSIONATE MIND  
P. Gilbert (2010)  
Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Press

Anne's mind and her own dawning one, they could share the physical perception “water.” “That living word awakened my soul” (Eakin, 1999, pp. 66–67 referring to Hellen Keller's autobiography, as quoted in Siegel & Hartzell, 2003, p. 53).

Reflective communication stirs the mind to come alive with novel, vivid insights, questions, and ideas. When people learn to share this invisible but absolutely real subjective nature of their mental lives with one another, a whole new dimension of being alive—a going further and deeper into more places—emerges in each person's life. This becomes the important perceptual ability of learning to monitor the internal stuff of one's subjective life with more stability and depth as it springs up and is recognized and nurtured in reflective supervision.

We can propose that reflective communication also strengthens the mind by enhancing the ability to modify energy and information flow toward integration. Let us further consider the setting of a reflective supervisor-supervisee relationship. If the supervisee is learning or continuing to work in the field of mental health or any of the allied professions who work with the pregnancy through 5 years age range, such as working with high-risk families filled with stress and vulnerability, then the supervisor will have a few elements of challenge that may be illuminated with the mindsight approach we are suggesting here.

As the supervisee and reflective supervisor become involved with one another and the work, the relationship between them can serve as a mirror of the process being explored in the high-risk family. In other words, the supervisee can use the connection with her supervisor to explore his own inner world without judgment. Another aspect of parallel process, this open, receptive setting invites supervisee and guide to participate in a living exploration of what is happening right there in the room together. With supervisees who are already trusting, the potential of this process can be articulated directly by the reflective supervisor early in their work with one another, otherwise it might have to wait until trust emerges.

A mindsight approach encourages the supervisor-supervisee pair to address the question, “Where is the mind?” in order to render the mind of the supervisee—and ultimately of the people in the families with whom she is working—healthier, stronger, and more resilient. When returning to the working definition of the mind as “an embodied and relational process,” one realizes that the regulatory aspect of the mind dwells in both the nervous system of each person and in the connections between one another. The reflective supervisor can encourage each

of them, both supervisor and supervisee, to bring reflection to the nature of how the sharing of energy and information flow (relationship) and the neural mechanism of that flow (the embodied brain) can be strengthened by moving these toward integration, toward health. This requires openness to whatever arises within and between two people so that the shared mental-emotional experience can create the proper sense of safety and respect that deep reflection and growth require.

Knowing about the brain and how it develops in response to experience offers a constructive way to see more clearly one part of what shapes the mind. For both teacher-student and parent-child relationships, a direct discussion of the brain can be extremely helpful. When a parent “flips his lid” in rage, for example (Siegel, 1999; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003), taking the essential step toward repair and reconnection with the child may be facilitated by understanding how the higher prefrontal cortex of the brain temporarily loses its coordinating role in balancing the lower brainstem and limbic regions where reactivity emerges. This “low-road” state of brain function is an example of impaired integration in that the differentiated upper and lower areas are no longer in communication. Now there is separation without connection. To make a repair (cf. Shahmoon-Shanok, 2000), integration within the parent and then with the child must be facilitated. Repair is healing in that it makes the connection whole in the linkage of differentiated parts as they move toward a more integrated state.

As the reflective supervisor and supervisee move forward in their work together, and thus in their relationship, it becomes possible to reflect on the deep nature of mental development from a new vantage point. The supervisee can bring in observations of the many signals within family interactions that can then be examined through this lens of integration as health. Once the supervisee has the basics of mindsight within his own growing set of capacities, new understandings of the clinical work with families becomes possible. What before may have felt like a blur of confusing or emotionally volatile interactions can now be seen with greater clarity and steadiness.

Although we do not have room here to review all of the steps of mindsight's stabilizing, regulating lens, three elements of its sturdy tripod can help one see more clearly into the internal world: openness, objectivity, and observation.

*Openness* is the way a person lets go of judgments and prior expectations and lets themselves just see and sense things as they are, even when they feel uncomfortable. Say, for example, a supervisee feels attracted to the

good-looking parent of a child she home visits; the desire could become an impediment to the treatment. In reflective supervision, the supervisor manifests this open spirit and has described the importance of frankness. As the supervisee comes to trust that inherent invitation to note and describe even something that feels is embarrassing or humiliating, she becomes able, through their relationship, to face and accept it. This is how an individual creates a state of receptivity to what is, rather than distorting what she sees by the active filtering of what she thinks should be going on. An intense sense of "should" can distort the ability to see and accept what is.

*Objectivity* is the ability to sense that a thought, feeling, or memory is simply an activity of the mind, not the totality of who a person is. Being objective enables one to know that a feeling is not a fact, that a thought comes and goes, that a memory is coming from the past and does not have to imprison a person in the present or the future. Thus, in the example just above, with the greater insight and acceptance promoted in reflective supervision, the initial attraction and simultaneous mortification are likely to lose their powerful grip, shift, and become a vehicle for insight.

*Observation*, the third leg of the mindsight tripod, enables one to see clearly by building the narrator function of his mind. He can sense his self sensing, observe himself observing. When harnessed in an appropriate way, observation can decouple an individual from the automatic pilot of habits and recurrent obsessions. Observation naturally has the risk of making one feel distant from the richness of his directly experienced life. So learning to use this facet well means not running from feeling feelings fully. This is what unfolds within the stabilizing relationship for learning what is called

reflective supervision. Two minds collaborate together with openness, efforts at objectivity, and observation focused on coming to know others deeply for the purpose of assisting them develop their own mindsight and cultivate a health-promoting reflective stance.

Taken as a whole, openness, objectivity, and observation create a stabilized ability to monitor and then modify mental life itself, an internal and interpersonal set of processes that promote healthy self-regulation and emotional balance. In general discussions about reflective supervision these topics are sometimes referred to as "self and other regulation" and "awareness of self and other". Traditional mindful awareness practices can serve as a gateway to achieving these abilities.

An individual can move more fully into the integrative, regulating functions of mindsight by learning about the many important ways in which generative, developing relationships and the embodied brain contribute to the differentiation and linkages at the core of health. One such integrative practice is called the "wheel of awareness" (Siegel, 2010b, pp. 93-98), and this can be taught within various teacher-student relationships. (See the Learn More sidebar for this and additional resources.) A visual metaphor for how an individual can become more fully aware and integrate—differentiate and link—elements in her inner or outer worlds, the wheel integrates mindful practices from the East with the theories and performance of Western therapies.

Nurturing a resilient mind within reflective communication is both art and science. Starting with a person's own abilities as providers and reflective supervisors, and then helping others develop the mindsight skills of attuned understanding and responsiveness, she is ready to define—and cultivate—a healthy mind in another. Together, patiently,

they exercise the muscles of reflective communication to transform and grow the mind, cultivating nurturing relationships bit by bit, repeating themes and variations over time. In a real sense then, the relationship for learning called reflective supervision utilizes the power, practice, and parallels of reflective communication to nurture mindsight, the aptitude to see further, deeper, and more clearly as individuals cultivate integration in their internal and interpersonal lives. §

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