

Reflective Practice Guide

Mind-Life reflective practice is a process for people who are providing help to others.

It is a process that allows help providers to pause and think about their offering and how well they are upholding the Mind-Life mindsets.

When we engage in Mind-Life reflective practice we recognise that there are several pitfalls in helping others. These pitfalls can entrap and further entrench a person in their experience of being “othered” or different and make things like “psychosocial disability” worse.

To recognise and avoid these pitfalls, we need to pause and think in a deliberate way. If we want to offer something different, we need to think different and we can only do this by regularly pausing and reflecting on some of the things we have always taken for granted.

This is where a Mind-Life reflective practice group can help!

When you regularly meet with a small group of like-minded people and review your helping efforts against the Mind-Life mindsets, you will help to keep each other on track. These groups can also become a welcome support network for you as a help provider, reducing burnout, stress, and worry.

Mind-Life Reflective Practice is about the help provider and their efforts NOT the help seeker. So, when you share a story in a reflective practice session, the focus is on what you did, what values and beliefs led you to do that, and which Mind-Life mindsets are relevant to that help offering. You can also talk about how you could stretch your practice and if you are finding it hard to uphold a particular mindset in this instance.

Because the stories you share are not about the help seeker, they don't need to cover complete, detailed, and accurate information about the help seeker. You can share and discuss a real story, mashups of several stories or other people's stories (like the Mind-Life stories). The story itself is only the inspiration. The real magic is in the process of questioning, re-framing and deliberately trying out different perspectives. The example questions in this guide with help you get started.



What makes a good Reflective Practice Group?

When you join or create a Mind-Life reflective practice group, you will need to ask yourself a few questions:



Do my colleagues/fellow help providers also believe in the Mind-Life mindsets and have a genuine desire to uphold them (even if they sometimes fail)?



Can I share my stories of how I am offering help to people without fear of judgement?



Do I feel confident enough to question, challenge or disagree with my fellow help providers in a respectful way?

If you can all answer **YES** to those three questions, then you probably have the basis for a great Reflective Practice group



How do I share my story of offering help in a Mind-Life way?

When you use a real story during a reflective practice session it's very important to remember that the focus is on your efforts offer help, not the help seeker (or what's best for them). You may share some details about the help seeker to give context, but it's very important that you are not trying to fix or change them.

The focus needs to always be “how could I improve my offer of help so that the person can exercise their natural ability to thrive?” It is also important that the group doesn't get sucked into making plans or setting goals for the person. Of course, that conversation must be with the person.

The facilitator needs to keep this integrity during sessions and ensure the focus remains on the support.

When a new group first starts to undertake Mind-Life reflective practice it may be easier and less confronting for everyone to start of using other people's stories to reflect upon. This will help build up the collective competence around reflective practice without anyone's personal helping efforts being critiqued. This can be especially important with a group of people who are not used to reflective practice.

What are the rules for Reflective Practice sessions?

Each group will need to establish a set of rules. Some of those rules will be specific to your group, but some Mind-Life specific rules are:

- Courage and humility are valued here. Those who share vulnerable stories will be supported not judged
- We may not always agree. The value is in the act of pausing, suspending our judgement and stretching our thinking
- All discussions will remain focused on how the help provider can better uphold the Mind-Life mindsets and identifying and avoiding the pitfalls of support.
- This group cannot decide what is best for a help seeker. We can only stretch a help provider's thinking about their offer of support and how they deliver it.
- Any suggestions or ideas that come from these discussions are only ideas- they need to be checked with the help seeker before being enacted.



What rules would you like to add?



Step by step guide to a Reflective Practice Session

You can run your group's session however works for you. There are lots of creative ways to run a reflective practice session. However, if you're new to facilitating this kind of thing, here is a suggestion of how to run a basic session.



Step 1

As the facilitator, decide if the session is going to be focused on one shared story or if everyone can bring their own example or problem to the session for reflection.



Step 2

Welcome the group and acknowledge the traditional owners of the land. Also acknowledge the help seekers that we work with and learn from and acknowledge their wisdom and ownership of their life and story.



Step 3

Remind the group of the rules. In the first few sessions you may want to open up a discussion about this to ensure thorough understanding.



Step 4

Either read the shared story or ask everyone to think about their own example that they would like to reflect upon.
Invite the group to discuss and ask questions for clarity. For bigger groups you may want to break into pairs or smaller groups to do this.



Step 5

Identify the pitfalls that are relevant. What is the problem or what is at risk here? Is it the help provider, the help seeker or both who are experiencing a pitfall?
If it's a good news story, what pitfalls did you avoid and how?



Step 6

Review the mindsets and think about how they might be relevant to the story and the pitfalls.
Is there a mindset that really sits comfortably in this story or one that is difficult to uphold? Why is that?
Either discuss as a group or in pairs.



Step 7:

Using the Mindset Questions in this guide, invite the group to pose questions to each other that will help them pause, reflect, or stretch their thinking.



Step 8:

Commitments - give everyone some time to reflect on their learnings for today. For larger groups you might break into pairs. Then share one commitment from each person. How are you going to stretch or improve your offer of help between now and next session?

Mindsets on Community:

Psychosocial Disability is not something that will be resolved with a medical response; therefore, we believe that it is not the person who needs to change, but our whole community and access to the opportunities it provides.

People thrive when they can realise their full citizenship within their natural community.

Questions on community:

- What would the community need to do to allow for this person to be accepted just as they are right now?
- How could we offer help in a way that created a bridge to the person's natural community, rather than simply referring them to another disability/mental health specific group or service?
- What resources would someone who did not have a psychosocial disability or mental illness access in this situation? (What resources would you use to solve this problem in your own life). How could the person link to and access these resources?
- What does "full Citizenship" mean to you in your life? Does the help seeker feel that in their life? If not, what's missing?
- What are the barriers to accessibility for this help seeker in the community? What stops them from being able to access all areas in their community? How could that resource change so that the person could easily access, join, and contribute?

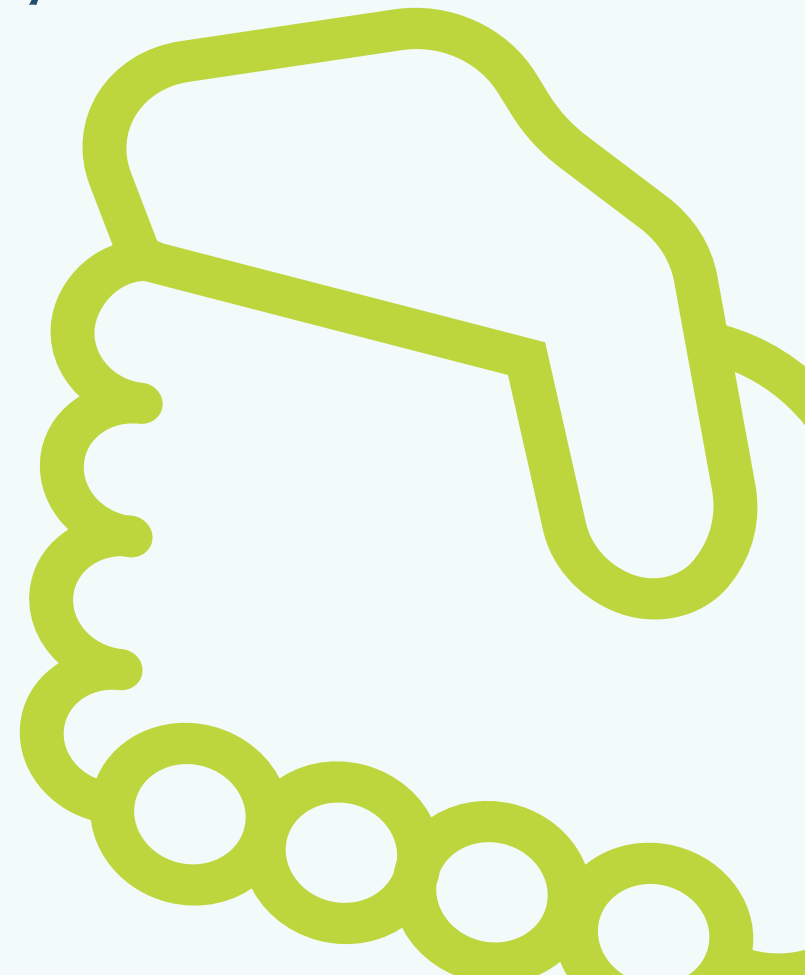


Mindsets on Psychosocial Disability:

- Psychosocial disability is one construction of human distress, not necessarily permanent nor a truth.
- Psychosocial disability is not a symptom of mental illness, it is a negative side effect of lost opportunities.
- Psychosocial disability is not a symptom of mental illness but a symptom of unmet need.

Questions on Psychosocial Disability:

- Does the help seeker in question see their distress/difficulty as an illness or disability?
How can we meet the help seeker at their own understanding of the world and help them from there?
- How has being seen and treated as different or “unwell” led this person to miss out on opportunities in their life?
- How have services and the systems of care in this person’s life contributed to a loss of opportunities or ability to meet their own needs in a way that makes sense to them?
- What need is this person trying to meet through their choices and actions? Do they have other strategies for meeting that need? Do those strategies make sense to the help seeker? Or just to the other help providers?



Mindsets on the Role of Others:

We cannot empower or motivate others, but we can easily disempower or demotivate others in the way we offer help.

Helpers can help. And helpers can harm or get in the way. We all have to be ever mindful of this. People add value based on their actions not their role or title.

Questions on the Role of Others:

- Who would the help seeker name as the biggest cheerleader in their life? What is it about that person that is so helpful and supportive?
- All offers of help bring a certain level of risk to the person. How do you understand the risk that you pose and how are you mitigating that risk in the way that you offer help?
- How does this help seeker understand the risks posed by potential new programs, services, or providers? Do they need help understanding how a help provider can inadvertently get in the way of them re-claiming and leading their life?
- What could be demotivating or disempowering about the way you (or someone else) are offering help to this person?
- What deeds, actions or behaviors would this person name as most helpful. Are they the same ones you value?
- If you cannot empower or motivate the help seeker, what is your role in their life? How do you do that?



Mindsets on Human Rights:

Being able to live work love and play within our natural community, NOT within services is a basic human right.

Maintaining our “personal sovereignty” is a basic human right. Psychosocial disability is primarily caused by a loss of personal sovereignty. People’s right to self-determination should never be removed or denied. For people who experience mental distress this right must be intentionally protected.

Questions on the Role of Others:

Is this offer of help likely to increase the person’s sense of citizenship or is it simply community participation or service-oriented support?
How has this person’s sense of personal sovereignty been invaded?

- Do they have full authorship of their story?
- Do they make all the decisions in their life?
- Are they asked permission before someone does something to them or “treats” them in anyway? Do they have the right to refuse?

If not, how could your support help them to reclaim their personal sovereignty?

In your work with this help seeker, how can you work together to protect their right to self-determination, especially when they are experiencing acute distress.

Are there programs, services and activities in this help seeker’s life that mimic natural resources but are actually illness saturated? (e.g. a bowling group for people with mental illness or yoga that is only open to people who have a certain diagnosis) What stops the person from accessing opportunities like this in their natural community?

Does this person have the ability to exercise their right to say no without fear of coercion or retribution? Is this true even when they are in distress?



Mindsets on Personal Capacity:

- People have an innate ability to overcome adversity
- People know what's best for them and are the only ones who can truly determine this
- All people are initiating beings. Every action is an attempt to meet a need
- People are creative and resourceful problem solvers. This ability can become atrophied when too many or inappropriate supports get in the way.

Questions on Personal Capacity:

- How could you/we as help providers acknowledge the person's efforts to meet their needs - even if their strategies are flawed or they got a bad outcome?
- If we accept that all people have an innate ability and desire to overcome, what is getting in this person's way?
- Has this person's natural problem-solving muscle become atrophied in this situation? If so, how could your offer of help assist them to get strong again?
- Is this kind of help relevant to the person's request? Is it time to review?
- How do you bring a learning and growth focus to the help you provide to this person? Do they understand it the same way?
- How would the help seeker in this situation describe what you do in their life? Would they name you as the change agent or themselves?

