



EXPLORE:

Topics for reflection

As you begin to explore parenting and family experiences with the individual who is a parent, issues or themes may come up for you. Some practitioners think they are not well suited to working with parents because they are not parents themselves. However, you have parents or people who served as parents when you were growing up, and you have your own lived experience of family and daily life. It is important to understand how past and current circumstances and situations contribute to the work you do. You can draw from them to inform your work or recognize issues that come up that you may need to reflect on yourself, with the help of a peer, supervisor or counselor.

Reflect on your heritage.

What is your cultural/racial/ethnic heritage? Are your parents immigrants? Are you? Even if you and your parents were born in this country, traditions are passed down from generation to generation. And different regions of the USA have customs and traditions (e.g., North versus South, or East Coast versus the Mid-West in the USA). What are your family's expectations regarding family life? Do you spend holidays with your parents? What would happen if you didn't? Do you serve traditional foods on particular family occasions? Consider the ways in which your cultural/racial/ethnic heritage influences you in your family life and, possibly, your expectations for others.

How do you define yourself?

Your identity contributes to your behavior, the way you respond to others, and the ways others respond to you. Your identity may shape your priorities, values and attitudes. List the five identities most important to you, for example, as they relate to family roles, relationships, and work. For example, daughter, social worker, significant other, runner, etc. Would others define you in the same way? What do they see when they look at you. There may be things they can't see that really matter to you. Think about how you define the parents you work with. Think about how they define themselves.

Consider your 24-hour day.

Recognition of the complexity of daily life is helpful in understanding a parent's situation and the ways in which his or her behavioral health, family experiences and children interact. One strategy might be to begin a conversation with parents by asking them to describe a typical day. It may be helpful for you to understand the usefulness of this approach by mapping out your own typical day. Take 10 minutes and jot down all the things you do, or are supposed to do, from the time you wake up until you go to bed. (If you are the parent of a baby or young child, you may be up in the nighttime as well!) Hopefully, you will begin to appreciate the complexity of your own life, the contingencies that operate, and the skills it takes to get everything done. Using this approach with parents will help you gain an understanding of their life challenges and demands, as well as help identify the strengths and vulnerabilities they may bring to daily living.

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This is a numbered list:

1. Item 1
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