

# intentional **peersUPPORT** Co-Reflection Guide



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# CO-REFLECTION WITH IPS (FROM THE BOOK, *IPS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH*)

COVER DESIGN BY EM FILSON AT BETHFILSON@GMAIL.COM

## A Brief Overview Of Intentional Peer Support

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Intentional peer support (IPS) is a way of thinking about and being in purposeful relationships. In IPS, we use the relationship to look at things from new angles, develop a better awareness of personal and relational patterns, and to support and challenge each other in trying new things. IPS is different from traditional service relationships because it doesn't start with the assumption of "a problem." Instead, people are taught to listen for how and why each of us has learned to make sense of our experiences, then use the relationship to create new ways of seeing, thinking, and doing. At the end of the day, it is really about building stronger, healthier communities.

## How Is Co-Reflection Different From Traditional Supervision?

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Supervision to most of us is about oversight of our performance by a person with more experience or power. For many of us, it has not been a positive experience. We have felt judged, overly evaluated, and even perhaps, misunderstood. For others, it's been a wonderful process of mentoring and support. Either way, it has generally been about someone with expertise evaluating our work performance.

Supervision is considered essential in order to ensure quality, improve skills and to provide accountability. We also believe that this is important in peer support, and engaging in co-reflection can bring the best of these principles into our relationships in a way that models what we are trying to practice.

What has your experience been with getting supervision or mentoring?

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Describe the qualities of people who successfully guided your learning.

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Describe the qualities of people who weren't very helpful.

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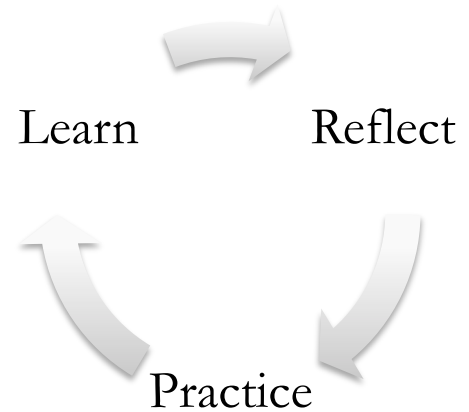
How might you fall into some of these traps?

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Co-reflection is a process that we can use to help each other reflect on our practice (how we're doing what we say we want to be doing). It is about **us** creating expertise together through a process of learn, practice, reflection. It is designed to model the peer support relationship so that we are practicing the principles at all levels of our relationships. If done well, it should lead to increased levels of personal development and to deepening relationships. Becoming an IPS supervisor or mentor means not only practicing these skills yourself, but using them in communication with others as they are learning.



### What Co-Reflection Is Not:

- A place to prove that you're right
- One person being the expert in judgment of the other
- A forum to talk about people behind their backs

- A time to be overly defensive
- Personal therapy
- Managerial and administrative admonishment

## Creating A Learning Environment

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To create an environment of learning it's important to make it positive, practical, and then figure out together what it is that you're interested in. For example, are you interested in understanding what it means to sit with discomfort, listen for someone's worldview, or negotiate power?

What are some of the things you'd like to work on?

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### **Example**

Alan had just been through the IPS training. Throughout the training, Alan had commented that he often found himself in the victim role when there was any kind of conflict. Fritz realized that he did some of that as well.

If Alan and Fritz were doing co-reflection, they might ask themselves (or each other) if the victim response was something that they wanted to change. They might explore why the victim response was so familiar to each of them and then consider times when they chose not to fall into the "victim" role.

### What Is It That We're Co-Reflecting?

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First, we need to make sure we understand that we're going to be working on IPS practices, not on individuals. In other words, keep the dialogue focused on specific interactions and not on the person themselves (e.g. "You really don't get peer support!").

Here are some ways you might reflect upon the four tasks in co-reflection:

## Task 1: Connection

- To be open, interested and curious
- To share relevant stories
- To be aware of when you disconnect
- To be aware of why you disconnected
- To be able to reconnect
- Helping others value self-reflection

Think of an example of when you've had a great connection with someone.

What were you feeling and thinking?

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How did you know that they felt the same connection?

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Think of an example where you've had a strong connection and something caused a disconnect.

What happened? How did you respond to it?

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If you were able to reconnect, how did you do it?

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Ezra had been working as a peer support worker for a few months. When he met Bob, he wondered why such a great guy wasn't doing more with his life. When he made suggestions however, Bob kind of blew him off. Ezra came to co-reflection frustrated because he thought he was trying to help Bob "move towards what he wanted."

How might Ezra use the idea of connection and disconnection to change the dynamic?

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## Task 2: Worldview

- Eliciting the other person's perspective on what's going well and why
- To be aware of your assumptions and how they might get in the way
- To consider how others see you (e.g. what role, etc.)
- To listen with curiosity and openness
- To listen for the "story behind the story" (e.g. How did this person learn to make sense of this experience?)
- To pay attention to judgments/power/privilege you have

Think of a time you had an uncomfortable but successful conversation.

What were your assumptions about the other person before the conversation began?

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How might they have been seeing you?

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How did you set aside your own assumptions?

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What did you learn about the other person/people that wasn't necessarily spoken?

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Sandy was quite serious about practicing IPS, so when she met Grace at training, she thought they might really have a lot to learn from each other. The only thing was that Grace treated her like some kind of expert, even though Sandy kept saying that they were “equal” in their skills.

What are some of the worldview issues that Sandy might think about here (e.g. what is Grace's experience with people she's learned from)?

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What happens when we disagree with the other's perspective? Or, how do we give feedback based on how we see the situation when it's not their way of seeing?

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### Task 3: Mutuality

- Understanding worldview
- Sharing your own experience
- Making sure that both your needs are being met
- Hearing reflective feedback
- Giving critical feedback
- Helping others receive critical feedback
- Mutual responsibility for making sure the relationship works for all

Think of a time when you fell into the role of “helper.”

What felt good about it? Not so good? Why do you think that was?

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Now think of a challenging situation where you were able to respectfully negotiate both your needs and theirs.

How did you use the four tasks to do this?

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Karen is the kind of person that people are drawn to. She is a good listener and generally feels pretty good about it. However, she rarely talks about herself and her own needs.

What might happen to mutuality in this example?

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## Moving Towards

- Co-creating a vision of where you want to go
- Planning the steps to get there
- Learning and growing together
- Evaluating the supervision (both)...what worked?
- Helping set a “moving towards”
- Accountability measures

Re-play a conversation you’ve had where you were able to turn a **moving away** from into a **moving towards**.

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## Giving And Receiving Reflective Feedback

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Once we’ve been practicing IPS for a while, it’s useful for us to check in with one another about how we think we’re doing. Giving and receiving reflective feedback will be an important part of a successful co-reflection relationship. Learning how to give and receive reflective feedback using the tasks of IPS will enable continuous learning and growth, but neither is necessarily easy. So let’s start with giving feedback.

### Giving

*Ensure connection:* Make sure the feedback is given at a time when you have some kind of connection. Does it feel safe enough for both people? Are there things that might distract you?

*Ask permission:* Sometimes, it’s just not the right time to give people feedback. By asking if now might be a good time to talk about some things you’ve observed, you allow the other person to say yes or no (although this may also create some anxiety around the feedback).

*Strive for mutuality:* Even though you're making some observations, it is still about both people learning from each other. Ask if they'd be willing to share their observations of you.

*Focus on the positive:* Most people know about the sandwich idea of giving feedback. Start with something positive, put the more difficult message in the middle and end with something positive. This is not to say that the feedback in the middle has to be negative. No matter what you have to say, it's also important to remember that there really isn't a right or wrong way of doing IPS.

*Awareness of power:* When you go to share your thoughts with someone, it is always good to take a look at any power issues that might be there. For example, have you been doing this longer? Does the other person perceive you to have more education, etc? Ask yourself, "Is this a reflection of my privilege or bias?"

*Frame around observation rather than judgment:* We've worked on observation rather than evaluation in the section on mutual responsibility, but it is especially important here. For example, instead of saying, "When you laid into..." you might say, "When you said you were frustrated with..."

*Check it out:* Simply ask if the other person remembers the situation in this way.

*Consider both of your worldviews:* If your perception isn't the other person's, make room for both of your perspectives. For example you might say, "So you think that what you said fit well with IPS, and I'm seeing it differently, can you explain how it makes sense to you?"

*Move towards:* If you've gotten feedback about what didn't work so well, make sure you build some other possible ways of approaching the situation.

## **Receiving**

*Be aware of your defenses:* It's not so easy to hear feedback that you aren't expecting. This is where it is important to stay very focused on your own reactivity. What is your immediate response when someone gives you feedback you weren't expecting? Breathe, listen from a "position of not knowing," and allow your defenses to take a back seat for a few minutes.

*Remember there is a grain of truth in all reflective feedback:* Perhaps you are quite proud of an experience that someone else sees very differently. Both views are “truth.” It is in building a mutual understanding of the two perspectives that we begin to see things from other angles.

*Ask, “In light of this feedback, is there something for me to move towards?”:* Some of us have a natural tendency towards feeling like we’ve done something wrong when we get feedback. This can lead to secrecy, shame, and even retaliation. These are all *moving away* from strategies. Stay in the dialogue and see if there is something you’re willing to *move towards* that builds on your strengths.

## **Example**

Following are several scenarios to practice giving reflective feedback. Write down your thoughts about how you would approach this situation in co-reflection. Consider that everyone has their own “truth.”

You work with Joe on an ACT team. Last week you heard Joe say to one of the people he was working with, “You really should take your medication or you’ll end up in the hospital.”

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During your co-reflection meeting, Paula asks for some help on a problem she’s had in her work. Although you don’t work with Paula, you were in a similar situation yourself last week, and have some pretty strong feelings about it.

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During your co-reflection meeting, you hear others talking about their “difficult clients.”

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Last week at work you heard two of your peer colleagues talking about someone their mental health center served. You gathered that they both had known this person before...neither one had liked him.

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## The Process Of Co-Reflection

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There are many ways to develop a co-reflection relationship. Co-reflection can be done in pairs or in small groups. The important thing is to build in a structure that is basically the same every time. Here are some suggestions:

*Use or create a discomfort agreement:* A discomfort agreement is a way to see that being uncomfortable can be a natural part of learning. In this process, participants create a list of all the qualities they need from a group in order to stick with it even if it gets a bit uncomfortable. It is important to talk about how issues will be discussed in a way that respects confidentiality, and how to talk about it when this isn't working.

*Generate a list of the values and principles of Intentional Peer Support:* What is it (beyond the four tasks) that guide how you want to evaluate what you're doing? Make a list and then have people give examples of what each looks like.

*Go over the process of giving and receiving critical feedback:* Go through the skills and give a couple of practice examples of using critical feedback.

*Make sure all participants come in prepared to share examples of their own use and perhaps misuse of Intentional Peer Support:* This means people need to think through the interactions they've had since the last co-reflection or training, and be able to describe some scenarios in relation to the four tasks. This gets away from feeling like there's a right and wrong way and helps create a community that is invested in principled practice.

## Building In Evaluation

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Evaluation has multiple purposes. It can be used to improve our skills by helping us become more self-aware, it can be used to establish credibility in the field (larger scale evaluation), or it can be done to help us narrow down and become more articulate about the practices that work...learn–practice–reflect–learn, etc.

There are many kinds of evaluation we can do. The co-reflection model is one way to hold ourselves accountable, but we can look at changes in our assumptions, in our conversations, and in organizational culture. We can also use evaluation to cull out what happens when IPS is practiced.

Although this document doesn't specifically focus on evaluation, I will give you some descriptions so that if you're interested, you can find out more.

*Narrative inquiry:* Narrative inquiry is the study of stories. We all tell a number of stories that define who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we want others to see us. IPS focuses on how these stories change over time. It is a particularly useful tool that can be used with the process of interview, journaling, or other written documents.

*Appreciative Inquiry:* Appreciative Inquiry is a process for bringing out the best in people, organizations, and larger social systems. Rather than focusing on problem-solving, appreciative inquiry helps people build on their visions, their hopes, and a positive future.

*Ethnography:* Ethnography is a broad category for understanding different cultures. We may look at organizations, different countries, even our own personal culture (auto-ethnography). Ethnography assumes that people are not separate from their environments and seeks to study the beliefs, rituals, and dynamics of systems.

For more information on evaluation and research you might try the following web sites:

<http://www.narrativetherapylibrary.com/img/ps/Co-research.pdf>

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/anthro/CPIA/methods.html>

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

While there are many websites, there are countless books on qualitative and quantitative evaluation and research. The easiest way to get familiar with all the different methods is to pick out a book that describes all different kinds of research. Here are a couple:

Patton, Michael Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage Publications, (edition 3). Thousand Oaks CA.

Denzin, Norman K., Lincoln, Yvonna S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (second edition). Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

## Learning objective questions

1. How would you reflect on your ability to do Intentional Peer Support?
2. What are some of the skills for giving and receiving critical feedback? What are the ones you'll need to work on the most?
3. Why is evaluating important?

## Summary

### What Do We Mean By Co-Reflection?

- It's about both of us learning and growing
- It's about the skills of learning, practicing, reflecting, and learning
- It's about creating a learning environment

### What Is It That We're Co-Reflecting?

- Our ability to practice:
  - Connection
  - Understanding worldview
  - Mutuality and mutual responsibility
  - Moving towards rather than away from

## Giving And Receiving Critical Feedback

- Giving
  - Ensure connection
  - Ask permission
  - Strive for mutuality
  - Focus on the positive
  - Awareness of power
  - Frame around observation rather than judgment
  - Check it out
  - Consider both of your worldviews
  - Move towards...
  
- Receiving
  - Be aware of your defenses
  - Remember there is a grain of truth in all critical feedback
  - Ask, “In the light of this feedback, is there something for me to move towards?”

## The Process Of Co-Reflection

- Use or create a discomfort agreement
- Generate a list of values and principles of IPS
- Go over process of giving and receiving critical feedback
- Make sure participants come in prepared to share examples of their own use and perhaps misuse of IPS
- Have participants give examples of IPS they’ve observed

## Evaluation

- There are many types of evaluation
- Some of these include narrative, Appreciative Inquiry, and ethnography

Some questions for consideration and discussion:

What do I need to do to support others in self-reflection?

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What happens when we disagree with what we hear?

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How do we give feedback based on how we see the situation when it's not their way of seeing?

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How do we give hard messages when someone doesn't want to hear what we have to say?

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What do we do when we hear stories about someone's performance from others (e.g. talking about people behind their backs)?

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