

Korina Barry ([00:01](#)):

Boozhoo>Hello everyone. Thank you for tuning into the CASCW podcast. I hope you are finding time to rest are staying hydrated and remembering to eat and nourish yourselves. We recorded today's episode with dr. Mary Harrison a couple of weeks ago, and at the time we were mainly focused on how reflective practice can be a resource to use during the pandemic. However, we hope that this information will feel just as helpful today as we watch and maybe even participate in an uprising that's taking place locally, nationally, and even globally during our conversation, Mary shares more about how reflective practice can help us check in with ourselves, both our minds and our bodies and how we can check in with others and how we show up for each other. Collectively. We hope you find this conversation helpful during this time. Please be well, please take care.

Korina Barry ([01:23](#)):

Thank you everyone for tuning into the CASCW podcast today, I'm talking with Mary Harrison. Mary, how are you doing?

Mary Harrison ([01:31](#)):

I'm great. Thank you. How are you?

Korina Barry ([01:32](#)):

You know, I'm hanging in there and that's it. It's a day by day. Yeah. Great. Is, uh, in maybe an air quotes, I don't know. Yes. Um, could you introduce yourself and just share a little bit more about yourself and your work?

Mary Harrison ([01:48](#)):

Sure. Um, thank you for having me. My name's Mary Harrison and I work at the University of Minnesota at the center for early education and development, which is part of the Institute of Child Development. So, um, what we do is take research and translate it for practitioners. Um, and with my focus being translating research on infant mental health and, uh, early social and emotional development for, uh, child welfare professionals. So I've been in this position for a number of years and, um, have a background in clinical social work, as well as, uh, infant mental health practice with children and families birth to eight. Part of that includes providing something called reflective supervision to practitioners who are working directly with families and also participating in my own reflective supervision, um, which is a form of professional development and support for anybody working with children and families birth to eight.

Korina Barry ([02:56](#)):

Awesome. Thank you. You know, and just a few ago you wrote what I would describe as a beautiful article about reflective practice. And you began with a quote that I think really stood out to myself and many I'm sure. Could you say that quote to the folks who are listening and maybe have not read the article yet, and just talk a little bit about why it's so important right now during this time.

Mary Harrison ([03:21](#)):

Yes. The quote is how you are, is as important as what you do. And it comes from a woman, Judy Paul, who has been part of who was part of the infant mental health field for a number of years, and is really an important person, an inspiration to people working in that field. There's such a focus in our culture

on, on doing, um, accomplishing, having a, to do list and checking things off. And sometimes we forget that who we are as a human and how we are in relationships with people is just as important as whatever it is we're trying to accomplish. And that if we're not mindful and careful and reflective about how we are, uh, we, we may not be able to accomplish things in the way that we hope. Why is that so important to remember right now? Well, it's something that I try to remind myself, um, because we're at a time when things are chaotic and unpredictable and unknown, and for many of us, the natural response to that is to want to grasp, um, harder on to things, um, grasp more tightly or, uh, try to control things, try to, um, be able to predict things.

Mary Harrison ([04:43](#)):

And that is that really calls for that doing part. And that often comes at the expense of the being part, how we are. And so, uh, in the article I wrote a little bit just about, well, how are we, um, how do we know how we are? How do I know how I am and how do I reflect on and think about how I am when I'm interacting with my children, when I'm interacting with my partner, when I'm interacting, um, over email with teachers and coworkers and whoever it is, um, I'm being with. And even when I'm interacting with myself, how is the voice in my own head and my kind and compassionate to myself during this time? Or am I putting pressure on myself because I feel so, uh, disempowered by everything that's going on. So really reflective practice of which reflective supervision is just a small part, but reflective practice is really about, um, I mean, exactly what it says, being reflective, thinking about how you feel, feeling things in response to what you're thinking and using that process to inform how you do your work and sort of how you carry yourself through the world.

Mary Harrison ([06:01](#)):

It's, it's sort of like mindfulness, um, in action. So the reflective practice, uh, process involves checking in with your own body, with your own thoughts to see where you holding your stress, what kinds of things are you thinking about? And then also, uh, very purposely are the reflective supervision or consultation part, um, invites people to sort of purposefully, uh, engage in compassionate conversations with others, so that you have an opportunity to really slow down and notice what's happening and therefore have a little bit more, um, influence over how you are, how you are in response to others and how you are, um, in response to, you know, things, you read things, you see all of that. Um, it's really just inviting us to slow down and realize that we have, we do have choices in what we expose ourselves to, and we have choices in how we respond to things and that taking time to think about and feel things and taking time to connect with others and compassionate conversations, um, is a really, uh, healthy and helpful part of, of being in the world.

Korina Barry ([07:22](#)):

Absolutely. And in thinking about parents and caregivers, or just other folks who are home and are supporting young ones right now and, and, and the little people of our lives, do you, is there any advice you would share or are there things that your doing as a parent yourself to kind of reflect and model behaviors to your kiddos during this time that you think would be helpful for folks to know and remember?

Mary Harrison ([07:49](#)):

You know, overall, if reflective practice is inviting us to pay attention to how we are, that's what I am trying to do. And I will say that there's not a finish line or a day when you think, Oh, I've really got it down. Now I know how to be patient and kind and compassionate with my children. Um, instead every,

you know, minute, five minutes, 10 minutes hour is, um, presents new opportunities to try to take a deep breath and, um, be present and take the perspective of your child or your partner or whomever, um, and really be intentional about how you are. So for me working, I have children in school, um, we're trying to do homeschool. And, but I, and I imagine, you know, if I had babies or toddlers, I mean, it's, you're in a house 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mary Harrison ([08:51](#)):

It's a lot of stimulation. It's a lot of sounds and sights and being pulled in many directions. It can feel very, um, overstimulating and chaotic. You can feel trapped, you can feel, um, helpless, hopeless, depending. So for people who've experienced trauma, this can, this can be very triggering for them because they, there are a lot of things beyond their control. And, um, it can be really helpful to remind yourself and even to set up times in the day, um, or, and even specific people with whom you can, uh, connect to ground you to, um, bring you back to that reflective self compassionate place so that when you are, when your toddler climbs on your lap or your baby's crying overnight, or your, you know, um, kids can't figure out their homeschool things, or your teenagers screaming at you or someone in your family is ill, or just anything, even the happy things.

Mary Harrison ([09:56](#)):

Um, you have sort of more bandwidth as people are talking about these days, you have a little bit more, uh, emotional and even physiological energy to bring to those interactions. And you can be a little bit more intentional and responsive rather than reactive. And so that's, that's always, my personal goal is to try to, um, pause and respond, um, to whatever my children are asking of me or partner or what I'm asking of myself, um, rather than being reactive in a, in a self critical way or in a critical way of, you know, with children. Um, and it's very real to feel that I think I would, I'd love to meet the parent who never reacts to their, to their children in a way with, you know, a strong, strong words, or just a lot of ways that we can overreact. Um, but the more we can center ourselves and find ways to be responsive, which really takes them into account.

Mary Harrison ([11:03](#)):

You know, you're responding to something that they're showing you, something that they're asking you, and that requires a little bit of calmness somewhere in you. And when you run out of calmness and kindness, it's time to find a way to replenish yourself. Um, a lot of our culture focuses on self care in forms of, um, you know, uh, things that make you feel good. Um, and that is great, but there's something really valuable about, uh, having a reflective conversation with a trusted colleague or friend where they just can let you help you find the self compassion, help you help let you be human and imperfect and struggling. And so what I'm doing is really trying to intentionally, um, notice when I'm, you know, getting this. Sometimes people talk about like that green, yellow, red, when I'm getting yellow or red in my, um, reactions, um, or physiology or feelings, if I'm irritated, if I'm tired, if I'm hungry, all of that and figuring out, um, some systematic ways, I guess, now that we're several weeks into that to reset.

Mary Harrison ([12:22](#)):

So there are a couple of times in the day that I purposely do, um, actually a meditation that I that's free to people I'm guessing we can include the link or something on insight timer, which is an app it's specifically about, you know, times of uncertainty and it's about nine minutes long. And I just do that, um, every day, at least once a day, sometimes twice a day to just try to reset myself. But then I also

engage in these, um, reflective conversations with colleagues, um, or friends, I should say, um, who colleagues who are friends who can help me, um, slow down, who can help me, uh, help remind me of what is it that children really need? Um, what do I need? They need me to put my own oxygen mask on first. They need me to be emotionally present for them. Um, if I have overreacted, they need me to come back around and repair my relationship with them. And, you know, I just, I find it helpful to have that reflected back to me in conversation. Um, because then I may better able to bring a more patient kinder, compassionate self to parenting, which is frankly the hardest thing I've ever done. And for many people, the hardest thing we'll ever do, um, day in and day out parenting.

Korina Barry ([13:54](#)):

and, you know, with everything, with all of the sort of abrupt changes without, you know, everyone shifting to working from home and social distancing and some of our restrictions in, in your work or with reflective supervision and consultation. Have you seen any changes to that work so far? Um, you know, since the pandemic has started as far as how that work continues or what that looks like currently.

Mary Harrison ([14:21](#)):

Sure. Um, okay. So if I'm thinking about what's different now, versus when I was providing reflective consultation before the lockdown in the pandemic time, um, we're all bringing less to the interaction. Everybody that I've interacted with is preoccupied to some degree or another, with concerns of safety, um, for themselves, for their loved ones for their community. Um, there's sort of a, a low level. And then for some people, a mid level and high level of anxiety, and there's also levels of grief. People are, are separated from each other. People have anticipatory grief where they're concerned about, um, losing someone there's, there are just a lot of heavy feelings and heavy physiological experiences that people are bringing to their work, which makes it that much harder to focus. It makes it harder to be present for others. And then as I have reflective conversations with people, um, I'm noticing that people are just in general, they're more emotionally fatigued, but then there's also this, this computer fatigue, there's, there's, uh, a real, um, difficulty with how, with the fact that we don't have the nonverbal cues that we're used to, we're having to try to connect emotionally with people and coworkers, um, over a computer screen.

Mary Harrison ([16:00](#)):

And, and, and it just, it doesn't feed our soul in the way that it might, that we needed to, and it, and we may not feel as effective, uh, in our work as we would want to. And so, you know, the, I just keep thinking the Apple cart is turned upside down. Nothing quite feels the same. And as how can we, um, how can we acknowledge that? Um, and then see, so then what do we do in the meantime, you know, how can we, uh, try to find some peace inside ourselves, try to find ways to feel connected, even though we're looking at computer screens. And even though we're holding all of these wineries, and, um, even though we don't, we don't know what's going to happen, we don't have control. Um, it sort of invites us to, um, you know, really in real time in every conversation and every thing that we're doing to, uh, practice our own sort of self regulation or co-regulation practice asking others to help us, um, find a way to be calm or centered or help us grieve. Um, it really calls to our very basic functions as humans, um, in a, in a way that's, that can be empowering if we can tap into it.

Korina Barry ([17:28](#)):

Yeah. You know, and, and this is making me think too, one thing in conversations we've had related to the work you do, and in our partnership is, and we, in thinking of our child welfare workforce,

sometimes it's just so helpful to know the words and to help in getting help and like formulating like, but how do I take this concept? Like, what does that look like? In words, like, how do I say that? And then that matched with me thinking of our frontline workers, maybe for example, who are still doing this important and challenging work in a pandemic also potentially have kids in a family at home. And so they're managing multiple levels of this. And I'm just wondering if you have any advice then for them, how do they even begin to have the words to like, communicate that to others?

Mary Harrison ([18:20](#)):

Whatever word makes most sense to them. I keep hearing people use the, the idea of bandwidth. You know, I don't have any more sort of like I'm at capacity or my, I don't have any more space or whatever. Um, I do think that because some of these experiences are more universal, um, people are, I've found, people are more open to, uh, being compassionate and understanding when people are reaching their limit, they have more grace to offer more, um, space to offer. And so, uh, finding a way to just ask for that or say, I need space. I need time. I'm at my limit. I need to take some deep breaths, um, sort of empowering yourself for giving yourself that permission and then giving yourself an incredible amount of grace and, um, compassion for the fact that there are so few things that are within your control.

Mary Harrison ([19:26](#)):

Really what you're able to control is your own breath, your own ability to try to be present for a family, your own ability to try to get done what you're able to get done, and then finding a visual way to let it go. Whether it's balloons of, you know, I used to have the image of balloons with each one of them with like the things I just wasn't. I wish I could have done that day and I wasn't able to do, but, um, you know, finding a way to, to create a meaningful story for yourself about what your mind and your body go through, um, when you're doing your work. And then, um, sharing that, sharing that with colleagues or supervisors, and, and I'm guessing people will resonate. This is a it's, you know, stress management quote, unquote self-regulation co-regulation, meaning somebody helping you manage your stress.

Mary Harrison ([20:26](#)):

These are universal human experiences. And, um, the more we can get descriptive about what we're experiencing, the more we invite others to wonder about themselves and then join us in that, you know, uh, I think, um, I can't, if it was a previous podcast or another thing that I heard, um, Dr. Anne Gearrity talk about, but she talked about that. We need people that keep us company, um, that's kind of what we're doing when we tell people how we're feeling, um, with stress, when we tell them I'm at my limit, um, we're inviting them to keep us company, as we're figuring out how to manage all of the things being asked of us. And it turns out we're wired to ask for and accept, help from others. You know, we're in a culture that really values individualism and doing it yourself and not needing anybody and yet physiologically and biologically we're wired to need others and to, um, be able to ask for an, a neck and accept help from others, even when that help looks like a listening ear or validation that we're doing the best we can. And so the more we can weave that into our every day work, our everyday family life, our everyday existence, the healthier many people will feel.

Korina Barry ([21:53](#)):

Yeah. And we, we had a conversation with, um, Dr. Anne Gearrity recently. And, uh, so I love that you mentioned that, cause we, we talked about some of this as well around, um, collective healing and support and how important it is more than ever right now to check in with each other, to be vulnerable, to say, like you said, once we open up and we kind of get past maybe the uncomfortable being

vulnerable and sharing, like I'm having a really hard time today. And, and once we're able to do that, that it does create a safe space. You know, it kind of opens that up, um, with others then to be like, you know what, me too, or at least maybe if I'm not ready to share that, now you've done it. And maybe the next time we connect, I'll feel a little more comfortable and ready to be a little bit more open as well. Um, and so we're just seeing a lot more between colleagues or friends or family of just check-ins like, how are you doing, what can I do? What support do you need wherever you're at? That's okay. If you don't need anything, I'll keep checking in, you know?

Mary Harrison ([22:58](#)):

Yeah. I think it's, I'm so glad to hear that and I've noticed it too, and it's really bringing us back to some of our, you know, human roots of that. We are, we need each other, um, and that that's okay. And that we, that there's can be incredible healing power in, um, very simple interactions and feeling like you're part of a community and feeling that collective, um, effort and collective healing process and collective grieving, and, and, and knowing that you belong, that you belong to somebody and that you're important to somebody. Um, I think those are our very basic needs and this really inviting us to get back in touch with those and also to offer that kind of support to others.

Korina Barry ([23:52](#)):

And I wonder if you, would you like to share just a little about some of the, like you've been working hard on some really great, uh, training resources this year that are really bringing and introducing reflective supervision and consultation more to the field of child welfare. And so, I don't know if you just want to, you know, you'd have to go super in depth, but just kind of like, what have you been working on this year and that folks can be keeping an eye out in the coming weeks and that'll be available through cashew and, um, through our website. And we'll share more about that too.

Mary Harrison ([24:26](#)):

Yes. Yes. It's been a great year. Um, we, uh, in the past I have provided reflective consultation actually over this year as well, reflective consultation to, uh, child welfare professionals, working with children in, um, or at risk of, out of home placement. And I've done that for a number of years and have taken that experienced, um, and how, let it help inform the creation of two videos that will be available soon. One of them is, uh, is actually an animated video, really just describing what is reflective supervision or reflective consultation, um, especially, especially within a child welfare professional context. Uh, the reason we liked the idea of the, of animation is because we wanted to be able to portray, uh, workers and, um, families without having to use, uh, real people or real situations. We wanted something, um, that would invite people to consider the process without focusing on any specific, um, story of a specific family.

Mary Harrison ([25:39](#)):

Um, just to sort of keep it at a very, uh, high level, just dipping, dipping our toe into what is this. And then a more in depth, um, video that we have completed, um, includes interviews with people in the child welfare field, um, either providing reflective consultation to child welfare professionals or doing the direct practice work, um, with family, children, and families, to talk about, uh, their experience having participated in, or providing reflective consultation within this particular work context and how it's been beneficial for them in their own words. And so we're excited about the fact that it's almost like we're flushing it out. Um, it's, you know, these are buzzwords, these are things people have heard

about. There might be some folks in a County here or there who have had the opportunity to participate, but it's, it's not really a, um, a universally understood, uh, model yet.

Mary Harrison ([26:43](#)):

And by creating these videos, we're able to kind of paint a picture of what, what might it, what is it, what could it be? What could it look like for folks and what has it looked like for people who have been able to participate? So we're excited to be flushing that out, um, a little bit, and then we're in the process of creating a longer training video, um, to go more in depth, sort of, and then along with it, some materials that will be available to be downloaded and read, you know, short one page type things all the way up to a little bit more in depth, um, guidelines for best practices and things like that. So that people who are really interested in, um, exploring and possibly embedding this into their teams and to their counties and to their work, um, we'll have a lot of, uh, resources to consider.

Korina Barry ([27:32](#)):

Yeah, and we will, for folks listening as those videos and new training products come available in the coming weeks, we'll share them on our CASCW website and folks can subscribe to our email updates we're in, on our website. So they get it as soon as they come out. And we're really excited about those. I'm really excited about the animated video and just kind of, it's almost great to have this information in different formats and, um, just to have a variety in our, and through our partnership, we've been able to do so much of that. And it's been really great.

Mary Harrison ([28:02](#)):

Well, I know I'm my infant mental health colleagues, and I are incredibly grateful for the support of cashew, uh, in creating these because it's something that we've needed, uh, in order to sort of get everybody on the same page. It's, it's a hard model to describe. It's a hard concept to explain, and it's, it's so lovely now to be able to have some visual, um, and sort of mixed media ways of engaging in what is this and what can it be because those of us who have participated in it, either receiving reflective consultation, our supervision, or providing, um, have seen some really incredible results, uh, as far as reducing, um, people's feelings of burnout and compassion, fatigue, and increasing their feelings of being effective in their work. And that's so exciting, it, it would be great to be able to offer it to more folks in child welfare. So, uh, we really appreciate the ability to create these videos and the support that we've received.

Korina Barry ([29:07](#)):

You know, you've been navigating so much change in your home with your kiddos and you're working and many days things can feel heavy, but I'm wondering if you could share kind of what is bringing you hope right now?

Mary Harrison ([29:20](#)):

It's interesting. I am finding myself turning to nature, uh, in a way that I hadn't been intentionally doing before. Um, before this pandemic, I, you know, I try to get outside each day because otherwise we're trapped inside 24 hours a day. And when I'm outside, I'm noticing, you know, it's spring. Um, even on the days that it's raining or a few weeks ago when it was hailing and sleeping and snowing, um, the, the presence of plants and trees and the evolution of buds into leaves and into flowers. And I'm finding myself having to focus on those very micro level changes and micro level creations of beauty. And interestingly in just a recent reflective consultation, I provided with a person we talked about just the

word of possibilities. Um, she has a new garden, uh, in a new place that she's living, and she is curious what will come up.

Mary Harrison ([30:28](#)):

Um, what perennials will come up that she didn't know were even there. And we talked about how, as hard as it is to hold in our minds and our hearts, the struggle that we see many children and families experiencing, we can also hold a small space for the possibility of connection and growth and change. Um, and we can hold in ourselves and intention of noticing, uh, growth and change wherever it might be if it's, you know, in the tree, outside our window, if it's in the, in our yard, if it's something even on line, um, what, what are some possibilities of beauty that we can see?

Korina Barry ([31:13](#)):

Yeah, that's beautiful. Thank you, Mary so much for taking time to chat with me today and share a little bit more about reflective practice and your work with reflective supervision and consultation, and some of the kind of exciting upcoming projects. Folks can keep an eye out for. Thank you so much for having me. It was a pleasure.

Korina Barry ([31:36](#)):

This podcast was brought to you by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. This podcast was produced by Korina Barry. Our series editors were Denise Cooper and Cliff Dahlberg, music was composed by Big Cats. And this podcast was supported in part by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division. For more information, please visit the CASCW website at cascw.umn.edu. Thank you for listening and stay well, everyone.