

Kari Robideau: While we know that incorporating reflection into our youth development programs is important for high quality experiences, how often do you bring reflection into your professional day? This is Kari Robideau and I'm an extension educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. And this is the Center for Youth Development podcast series. In this series I'm joined by Karyn Santl. Once again, she's a regular on this podcast series, and she's going to share ideas about how to implement reflective practices into your work as an adult, which I think is perfect for starting off the new year with that reflective practice lens. So thank you for being a part of the podcast series again, Karyn.

Karyn Santl: Thanks for having me back, Kari, I'm excited to talk about reflection. It's been a big part of my life.

Kari Robideau: You are definitely someone who I look to for a lot of high quality practices. Reflection is one of them. I did want to mention as well that you've done podcasts with me on resilience, on empathy. I'm excited for this conversation for us to be able to talk about us as youth workers, adults, and that importance of using some of the practices that we use with young people with ourselves and in our own work.

Karyn Santl: Yes. Yes. And I think the more we use it with ourselves, the more it becomes just part of our practice with our youth. And we both benefit us as adults, as well as the youth in our programs.

Kari Robideau: Yeah. So that brings us right into, I think the why, why should youth workers practice reflection themselves, not just in the work we do with young people?

Karyn Santl: Yeah. A couple things come to my mind Kari, as you ask me that. I think, I go back to the experiential learning cycle, which we here in 4-H youth development we're grounded in that. Kids, we have them do something, they reflect and then they apply it to another situation. And I think that is just so important for us to do that as well. When we have a program we're doing, we reflect upon it also and make it for program improvement. I also think it just helps us have better mental wellbeing within our work. If we do it on a daily or a weekly and practice also. It helps us keep organized, helps us keep focused on what we are working on, on what the mission of our organization is. I think focus is another reason we need to do reflection.

Kari Robideau: Well, I know you as a supervisor, as well as in your own practice have developed strategies that you use to implement reflection, not only for yourself, but things that you encourage of others. And so would you share those with us?

Karyn Santl: Yeah, sure. The first strategy is just to dedicate the time to do it, to find the time in the schedule and then to actually follow through. And a simple thing that I just started in this past year is the last Friday of every month or the last day of

every month, I take some time and I reflect, kind of look over my calendar, what happened and do some journal entry on what I learned through those processes, with the outcomes, what I'm working on and where then I want to take it next. I would like to really to do this on a weekly basis. And I do not dedicate as much time. As I've done research on this, I think there's kind of an organizational skill, but I also think it's about reflection.

At the end of every day, what did you do? Take notes and plan the next day. Or on Fridays or whenever the end of your work week is, do it then. And then you help plan for the following week. But I think we know in youth work, we always want to reflect with our youth during our program, but it's the first thing that gets chopped up because we run out of time. So I think that's probably the first strategy, is just make it a priority and then figure out when it works for you. I type on a Google doc. I know you can journal, you can draw. I mean, there's just lots of different ways to reflect.

Kari Robideau: I really like that idea of putting it in your calendar as a held meeting spot, but it's a meeting with yourself.

Karyn Santl: It is. Along with that time, yes, you can reflect on your own. You can also have like a reflection buddy, where you, if you like to talk through things, then you find that, kind of that accountability buddy, and that you can talk through questions or that you say, you know what? I want to take this time to reflect on this and this. So thinking about an accountability buddy, and that's my really, my second point is if you need to visit with someone or that's one of your styles of reflection, find somebody who's reliable, somebody that you feel that you can trust and they trust you back to have those genuine conversations and those trustworthy conversations. And you can be open about how things went and that you're also open to get some feedback as well. It might be a colleague and it might be because they might know your work or it might be a personal friend who doesn't have any idea about your work, but they are reliable and they're trustworthy and they're genuine and they can give you the feedback or just the listening ear that you need.

Which that brings me to my third strategy, is if you're that accountability person or you are reflecting with somebody, is sometimes you just need to listen and don't focus on providing the answer or being a problem solver. And that's one of the things that I, as a supervisor have learned, because it's kind of my natural tendency, is to help problem solve right away. When I have a staff member come to me and it's like, okay, what are we going to do? And so I've had to step back and just listen and sometimes ask, are you just reflecting, venting? Or do you want me to help problem solve? But sometimes with reflection you just need to reflect and the answer comes as you do reflect. It helps with critical thinking. It also helps you think about if your kind of stuck, that this is the only way something can be done. I think as you reflect, you might figure out other ways that this can happen.

Kari Robideau: I really like that. I'm going to repeat what you said, ask someone if they're reflecting, venting, or want you to problem solve. And I bet most of the time that person will say, I just need to reflect and I need someone to listen.

Karyn Santl: Yes.

Kari Robideau: And that can be such a challenge because we all want to help somebody. We want to make the situation better. And this reflection practice I think, really helps get you into that mindset of being a good listener as well, because you've practiced that reflection yourself.

Karyn Santl: And I think, you know what I would challenge people, and probably that's been my challenge to myself with reflective practice is I like to verbalize. So I know I have those colleagues or the friends I can call and say, Hey, do you have a few minutes? And they probably, they kind of know, I just need to like spit it out. And then they know if they want me to problem solve or whatever it might be. But I think then by me this past year, going into a writing journal has forced me to even think differently. And as I look back in this past year on what I did, I need to become more of a writer. Like I kind of made out this laundry list. So now my goal for me this year is to write more in a reflective way. And so I guess that's kind of my challenge is, if you're a verbal person, I challenge you to write. And if you're a writer, I challenge you to seek out a colleague or a friend to reflect verbally with.

Kari Robideau: I am also a verbal reflector. And so I accept your challenge. I love that idea of whether it is every day on your calendar, at the end of the week, or if it's more manageable at the end of the month, reflecting on what happened, what I did, what I want to improve, all of those things. And whether it is talking it through with someone or journaling, I do like that idea. I think it can be so helpful. So your three strategies are creating that time that I was just referencing, to having that reliable, trustworthy person who holds you accountable to it. And finally that piece about focusing on listening and not problem solving. As we've talked through all of that, I'm wondering, do you have a favorite reflective practice that then also parallels good youth work practice? So something that you do yourself that would be helpful for people to also do with youth.

Karyn Santl: Well, I would say in my role as a supervisor with youth workers, I have incorporated reflection and oh, probably over the years, a little more intentional. When I know I have a staff member that's working on a program, when I check in with them, I purposely ask reflective questions or something is finished or if I know they're struggling with a youth, or a volunteer, or even when things are I ask reflective questions. Think the thing going back to these relationships with the staff I supervise. So I know what type of reflector they are and what questions get them thinking. Then I hope that practice is then parallels to those youth workers that then use it with youth.

And I think, I also think about as program improvement as well when we reflect, rather we're improving personally or we're improving our program as well. Over just the last couple of years as I said earlier, I'm a verbal reflector. I have seen the power of journaling and writing things down. And that's just a great tool for us to emulate to the youth we work with. And whether it's with a pen and paper, or it's typing on your keyboard, or on your iPad, or your phone, just to take that time to reflect is so important.

Kari Robideau: I love that idea, modeling reflection. So it just becomes common practice. It becomes a natural part of your experience and your doing,

Karyn Santl: Yes.

Kari Robideau: And then we reflect on it.

Karyn Santl: Yes, very true.

Kari Robideau: Well, Karyn, I thank you for having this conversation with us about reflective practice. I think it's a wonderful way to start the podcast series off in the new year where we are able to take some time for ourselves to practice that reflection in our lives. Put that in your calendar. I appreciate your challenge of either finding someone you can talk it out with or starting a journal for the year. And I'm sure you would love to hear someone's ideas. You can comment on this podcast and let us know if this is a helpful practice to you too. But again, thank you so much for being a part of the podcast series and visiting with us about reflection.

Karyn Santl: Thanks for having me Kari.

Kari Robideau: Now, as we conclude this podcast, I would invite the listeners to head over to [www.extension.umn.edu/youth](http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth), where you'll find resources and information about upcoming trainings on many topics related to youth development programs. And if you aren't already a part of our Minnesota 4-H program, you will find more information there about that. Also, I mentioned commenting on this podcast, but you can go over to Karyn's blog in the youth development insight blog that is called a reflective practice and start the conversation with her there. Thanks again for joining me Karyn. This is Kari Robideau from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. Please tune in again soon.