# Building feedback resilience to support reflective practice

Family and domestic violence work requires reflective practice to be an essential component of professional and sometimes personal growth. At Pandora Projects, our extensive experience in our work with practitioners across Australia recognise that one of the most challenging, yet transformative elements of reflection is in the provision of **feedback**—both giving it and receiving it.

However, for feedback to truly fuel growth, practitioners must develop **feedback resilience**, a key attribute that allows us to embrace constructive criticism and use it as a tool for self-improvement rather than viewing it as a threat to our competence or value.

**What is Feedback Resilience?**

Feedback resilience is the capacity to be open to feedback—whether positive or critical—navigating our emotional reactions as we receive feedback. To meaningfully build feedback resilience, we must begin by recognising the barriers we experience in our conscious and unconscious bias.

**Practical approaches to recognising our bias:**

1. **Notice** your initial reactions: When receiving feedback, our natural response might be to feel defensive, hurt and vulnerable. The first step in resilience is **noticing** these emotions as they emerge in our bodily and intellectual awareness. This awareness requires time. Time to pause, acknowledge your emotional response, and notice any immediate **reactivity**. It is important to understand the difference between **discomfort** and **not feeling safe**.
2. **Name** the emotions and thoughts triggered by feedback: By naming what you're feeling (e.g., "I'm feeling defensive" or "I feel misunderstood"), you externalise the emotion. This simple step creates space between the feedback and your reaction, making it easier to engage with the feedback thoughtfully rather than emotionally.
3. **Navigate** through this process by focusing on what is the learning: Once you've noticed and named your reactions, the final step is navigating toward growth. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from this feedback?" and "How can this information support my professional development?" This mindset shift turns feedback into a valuable tool for improvement.

**The challenge of experiencing resistance and defensiveness**

When engaging with feedback, especially in high-stakes or emotionally charged work like family and domestic violence, it's common to encounter **resistance** and **defensiveness**—both in ourselves and others. These reactions often act as barriers to growth, as they can prevent us from fully accepting and reflecting on feedback.

Here's how using the **3N approach** can help address these challenges:

- **Notice** the onset of defensiveness: Resistance often shows up as an automatic defensive reaction, where we mentally or verbally push back against feedback. By noticing these thoughts ("This isn't fair," or "They don't understand the full picture," even "what would ***they*** know, they've never done the real work!"), we can catch ourselves in the moment and notice our reactionary response. Remember these responses are not right or wrong – they are simply ***there***.

- **Name** the underlying feelings: Defensiveness often arises from a sense of being criticised, a fear of being judged or perceived as incompetent. Naming these feelings, such as "I feel attacked" or "I'm afraid this makes me look incompetent," helps us recognise the root cause and separate it from the content of the feedback. We can go deeper as we process these feelings and recognise ***themes*** that resonate with us across our personal and professional 'triggers.' Naming these feelings assists to identify the 'echo' or residual feelings that may not be about the current situation or may raise our vulnerability.
- **Navigate** through the discomfort: Once we've acknowledged this resistance, noticing and naming the ***discomfort***, we can navigate toward a more constructive engagement with the feedback. This might involve using Active Listening to ask clarifying questions, exploring how the feedback fits in with our goals, or taking the time to reflect on how we can apply the feedback to continuously improve.

**What is Reflective Practice?**

**Reflective practice** is the process of intentionally examining our thoughts, actions, and experiences to learn from them and improve future performance. Donald Schön, a key figure in this area, described it as **"the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning"** (Schön, 1983).

Using the **Notice, Name, and Navigate** approach in reflective practice allows practitioners to actively engage with their own experiences, identify areas of growth, and create actionable pathways for improvement.

For example:

- **Notice** the moments in your practice where challenges or missteps occur. Notice the context, your communication style and your triggers.
- **Name** the reaction you may experience. These are the specific behaviours, assumptions, or emotional responses that appear after being triggered. This is the reactionary element of this process and is very important to process otherwise, our professional decisions will be influenced by a reaction rather than a professionally considered and calm approach.
- **Navigate** a way forward by considering and developing a range of strategies to address these challenges in future work. You could use a supervision reflective tool like Gibbs Reflective Practice to assist you in trying a new action and reflecting on what works, what didn't land well and what you could try again.

Embedding the 3N approach into reflective practice, encourages deeper, more intentional reflection, which leads to more meaningful learning and growth.

**Feedback as a tool for reflective practice**

Feedback is an essential part of reflective practice, offering an outside perspective to help you recognize blind spots and refine your approach. When listening to feedback, use the **3N Approach** to stay open, grounded, and **growth-oriented**:

1. **Notice** the feedback given—what resonates with you, and what challenges you?
2. **Name** any discomfort or emotional responses that arise, without judgment. Remember it will feel uncomfortable – this does NOT mean you are unsafe.

3. **Navigate** through this information by asking how you can apply it to improve your practice.

By combining feedback resilience with reflective practice, you get to create a continuous loop of learning. This approach helps you integrate external perspectives into your personal growth, leading to improved client outcomes and stronger professional relationships. Getting this right also helps you to become better at ***giving feedback***.

**Overcoming the Resistance to Feedback**

Resistance and defensiveness are natural responses, particularly when feedback touches on areas that challenge our self-perception or our professional values. In family violence work, these reactions can also emerge as a response to the emotional toll of the work itself. Here's how you can use the **3N Approach** to overcome these barriers:

- **Notice** when you're feeling resistant or defensive, and ask yourself what the resistance might be protecting. Is it fear of failure? Fear of judgment? Frustration with the work environment?
- **Name** the emotional triggers behind your resistance—this helps to defuse their intensity. Perhaps it's frustration, exhaustion, or vulnerability.
- **Navigate** by focusing on what's within your control—how can you move forward with the feedback in a way that supports your growth, rather than letting defensiveness halt your progress?

**The benefits of feedback resilience in family violence work**

In the field of family and domestic violence, practitioners regularly encounter complex, emotionally charged situations which can occur in our work with clients, work with colleagues and our relationships with management. Building feedback resilience through a reflective approach can help us navigate these challenges more effectively:

- **Improved client outcomes**: Reflective practice supported by feedback allows us to continuously refine our approach, ensuring that we meet the needs of our clients with greater insight and sensitivity.
- **Stronger professional relationships**: Engaging in open, respectful dialogue around feedback fosters trust, collaboration, and growth within teams.
- **Personal growth and well-being**: By navigating feedback in a constructive way, we reduce the stress associated with criticism and foster a strong growth mindset, protecting ourselves from burnout and emotional fatigue.

**Using the 3N approach effectively**

At Pandora Projects, we encourage all practitioners to embrace the **Notice, Name, and Navigate** approach to feedback resilience. By doing so, you build a stronger foundation for reflective practice, enabling you to continuously evolve in your work. In the demanding environment of family violence work, staying open to learning, self-awareness, and self-improvement is crucial for both professional effectiveness and personal well-being.

Together, let's create a culture of continuous learning that builds our professional and personal resilience and adds knowledge and skills to our professional identity as well as empowers us to be transparent, open and accountable team members.

**References:**


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