

A read-along guide for: *'Stories of Psychological Practice from Neonatal Care'*

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Introduction: using the guide

Throughout history, sharing stories has been an effective way to learn and explore complex and nuanced ideas together. That is the idea behind *'Stories of Psychological Practice from Neonatal Care'*. The stories in this book leave questions unanswered, give voice to complex ethical and clinical dilemmas, and invite you to empathise with people who have equally valid and – at times – completely opposing viewpoints.

Different people will have very different experiences of reading this collection. As you read the book, you might feel all manner of things along the way. That might include discomfort at times. In our view, that discomfort, while it is not a nice feeling, can be a fantastic tool. When met with curiosity and compassion, discomfort presents an opportunity to learn: about ourselves, others, and the world we live in. We have therefore created this read-along guide to support your thinking, reflection and learning.

The read-along guide contains activities and questions to prompt reflection and discussion about the stories in the main book. Our hope is that the guide might:

- Support your individual exploring of the text, inviting you to reflect on the experiences of the characters in the stories and on your responses to them.
- Give you some ideas for sharing these stories with others, as a route to finding shared understanding
- Provide suggestions for sharing the stories as part of a teaching session with other professionals.

While we offer ideas for how you might use this read-along guide, there is no 'correct' way to approach the activities and questions, nor a fixed order in which to do so. You might find that your reflections stray from the prompts and take you in different directions. We really encourage any exploration that deepens your learning.

For people who would like to explore the themes in the book in more depth, there are also separate 'Topic Explorers' included in the extra resources. These are like expansion packs to this read-along guide, and provide further prompts focused on specific topics, with pointers to the book chapters that we feel are most relevant.

We would love to hear from you about how you find the book and these extra resources. You can email us to share your feedback and ideas, or with any questions at

hello@therelationalpractice.co.uk



Ideas for individuals

Reflection involves a back and forth process of a) noticing and b) making sense. Stepping back to notice your own thoughts, feelings, reactions to a situation, and then getting curious and trying to understand what these responses mean and where they come from. And then stepping back again and noticing what comes up. If it feels possible, this reflective process can lead on to more considered action.

When considering the prompts, stop and think about the question. Pause and ask yourself why this is being asked. Notice your first response, and any second response that arises as a reaction to your initial thoughts and feelings. If you notice a question makes you feel uncomfortable, pause and wonder why this might be.

Individual journaling

Journaling is one way to support individual reflection, helping you to observe your own thoughts. To get started with journalling, take the following steps:

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted for around 30 minutes.
2. Read the story and identify your chosen question prompt from this guide or one of the Topic Explorers.
3. Write whatever comes to mind in response (your 'stream of consciousness').
4. If you run out of things to write in the time, and your mind goes blank, read back what you have written and then start writing again in response to this.

At the end of the time, read what you have written and think about what comes up:

- How does it feel to have written this? What does it tell you about where you are at the moment?
- Is there anything surprising, or even uncomfortable?
- What do you want to take away from this or think more about another time?
- Who might you want to share these reflections with?

Discussing with supervisor, coach, mentor, therapist

If you are fortunate to have a supervisor, coach, mentor or therapist, perhaps you could consider structuring a session around some of these topics. You might also want to speak to someone to explore what came up in your individual journalling session. You can explore options for such support at www.therelationalpractice.co.uk.



Ideas for groups

Group discussions

If you are reading *Stories of Psychological Practice from Neonatal Care* alongside friends or colleagues, you might want to explore some of the themes as a group. This might be a bit like a journal club – learning together by engaging with new ideas:

- Choose one or two of the prompts to focus on
- Make sure you have enough time for people to engage with the topic and sit with any feelings that come up.
- Think carefully together in advance about how you will manage differences of opinion, or distress that might come up in the group. These are often signs of meaningful discussion, but everyone needs to feel safe in the group to learn.
- Try hard to listen to each other with the intention of understanding different perspectives, rather than listening in order to prepare your own response.

The following format is one option if you want more structure in your group discussions¹:

1. Decide on your question prompt from the read-along guide, and the order in which your group will take turns. If someone wishes to pass, that is totally fine.
2. There are three rounds:
 - a. Round One: In turn, each person has two minutes to give a free response to the chosen question prompt.
 - b. Round Two: In the same order, each person has two minutes to reflect (out loud) on what they have heard from the group in Round One.
 - c. Round Three: In the same order, each person has two minutes to speak about how their thinking and/or feeling has changed during the discussion.
3. Whilst each person speaks, everyone else silently listens. If someone runs out of things to say within two minutes, they may pass to the next person or wait quietly for the remainder of the time, whatever feels most comfortable.

¹ This structure is based on the “20 Minute Care Space” developed by Charlie Jones, Benna Waites and Makita Werrett.



As a teaching resource

These stories could be used in lots of different ways within teaching:

- Within induction, to give new team members an insight into some of the joys and challenges that are so central to this work.
- As 'case studies' for MDT training, to illustrate the psychological aspects of a particular aspect of neonatal care.
- As a focus for a session on ethical dilemmas, to explore different perspectives.
- As a background to a role play or skills session – what do you pick up from the richness of these stories that can act as a place to 'jump off from' in practicing how to communicate with parents or colleagues?
- As a tool to explore self-care for all neonatal professionals– why it's needed, and what it might look like.
- To illustrate psychological theory with real-world examples.



General prompts to explore the stories

The following questions are general and can apply to any of the chapters in '*Stories of Psychological Practice from Neonatal Care*'. In reflecting on these prompts, you might want to consider an individual story, or several stories together. For questions that have numbered sub-questions, we suggest you focus on each one in turn.

1. Depending on who is in the story:
 - a. How do you imagine the narrator feeling?
 - b. How do you imagine the baby feeling?
 - c. How do you imagine the parent(s) or family feeling?
 - d. How do you imagine the staff members feeling?
 - e. What is it like empathising with each character?
2. How are you responding as you read this story?
 - a. What feelings does it bring up for you personally?
 - b. Do any images come to mind when you read?
 - c. What in particular in the story has prompted those feelings or images?
 - d. How is your perspective similar or different to the story's characters?
3. How has your perspective been shaped by:
 - Previous experiences (both in your work and in your broader life)?
 - Experiences of privilege or marginalisation?
 - Other people?
4. What ethical, moral, clinical or practical dilemmas do these stories pose?
5. What new understanding are you taking from the stories here?
6. Have the stories prompted you to take any action, individually or collectively?
7. Are there topics that you want to learn more about, or questions you'd like to explore?



Prompts to explore discomfort

The following prompts are intended to help you reflect on any discomfort that arose while reading the book. After all, there are uncomfortable truths within these stories. If you find yourself outside of your comfort zone, it is normal to want to return to its security: to find reassurance in ideas and positions that feel familiar. But before doing so we invite you to pause for a moment and bring curiosity to what you have read and your responses to it.

The following prompts are designed to be considered in the suggested order. There is a lot to unpack here, so consider how much time you have available, and think about whether you need to break into smaller groups to work through the three parts in one session.

1. Turning towards your reaction

First, notice your first reaction. Whilst reading, you may have felt sad, shocked, worried, indignant, disbelieving, angry, guilty, or ashamed.

- What are you feeling that is uncomfortable?
- What is it that you care about, that is challenged or thwarted here? How did you come to care about this?

2. How are you responding?

Next, how are you responding to these uncomfortable feelings? Are you doing things to move away from the discomfort? Common reactions to avoid discomfort are to dismiss, intellectualise, reassure, distract, or rebut.

- How have you responded to any uncomfortable feelings whilst reading?
- What is the impact of those responses?
- If you could pause before responding in this way, what might you learn about yourself and/or others?

3. What next?

Now, having noticed and named your response:

- How might you offer compassion to yourself, or to others involved in the story?
- What is going to be the most helpful way forward? For your learning, and that of others?

