TOOL 01

BEFORE WE SAY YES

The Reflective Pause

Practical exercises for exploring the gap between what we feel compelled to do and what a situation actually requires.

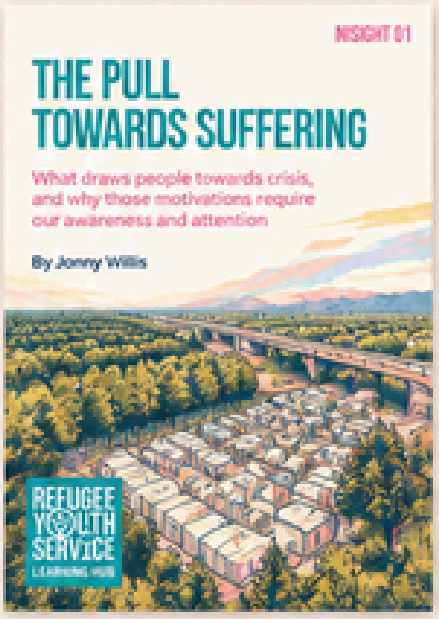


REFUGEE YOUTH SERVICE
LEARNING HUB

PART OF THE LEARNING HUB

This Tool is part of the Refugee Youth Service Learning Hub, which brings together Insights, Practice Guides and Tools built from ten years of working alongside displaced children and young people.

Our Tools draw on experiences from frontline practice. They help individuals and teams explore difficult questions, think through their responsibilities and make more considered decisions, particularly when there are no straightforward answers.



COMPANION READING · INSIGHT 01

The Pull Towards Suffering

We recommend first reading The Pull Towards Suffering. It explores what draws people towards crisis and suffering, how our personal motivations can influence the way we respond, and why reflection is essential to practising safely and responsibly.



ABOUT THIS TOOL

Creating space between the impulse to help and the decision to act.

Why do we need a reflective pause?

In caring work, we are constantly making decisions about when and how to respond. Sometimes we say yes because we recognise a genuine need. But our responses can also be shaped by anger, guilt, personal experiences, a desire to feel useful or a fear of letting someone down.

These motivations are not necessarily wrong. They are part of being human. But when we don't recognise them, they can influence our judgement in ways we may not notice.

Why use this tool?

Wanting to help is not the same as knowing how best to help. A reflective pause gives us an opportunity to consider both what is drawing us towards a situation and what the situation actually requires.

This Tool helps individuals and teams explore their motivations, recognise where personal feelings might be influencing decisions, and consider their knowledge, limitations and responsibilities before acting.

How to use it

The Tool includes a series of guided exercises that can be completed individually, in supervision or as part of a team discussion. They can be used when considering a new responsibility, responding to a difficult situation or reflecting on decisions already made. The exercises can be completed using the same situation throughout, or used separately to explore different experiences and decisions.

01

LOOK INWARD

What is drawing me to respond, and what might be influencing that impulse?



02

LOOK OUTWARD

What does this situation require, and what do I need to understand?



03

BRING THEM TOGETHER

Can I respond in a more considered and responsible way?



LOOK INWARD

What draws me to respond?

Our motivations for doing this work are rarely simple or entirely selfless. Caring work can offer us many different things, and these can change over time or depending on the situation. Here are five common motivations that can draw us towards caring work. You might recognise yourself in one or more of these. The aim isn't to judge our motivations, but to understand how they might shape our decisions.



Purpose

A sense of meaning or direction.



Usefulness

The satisfaction of being needed or making a difference.



Belonging

Connection to people, communities or a shared cause.



Identity

A sense of who we are and what matters to us.



Escape

Relief from difficulties, uncertainty or dissatisfaction elsewhere in life.

Looking a little deeper

1 Which motivations feel strongest for me, and why?

2 Do they influence the decisions I make or the responsibilities I take on?

3 Are there times when my own needs or motivations might get in the way of recognising what someone else actually needs?

WHAT IS BEING ACTIVATED IN ME?

A closer look.

Certain situations can stir strong feelings or bring our own experiences to the surface. Recognising these helps us understand our decisions without judging the feelings themselves. These five examples explore how they might shape our responses, and how we can respond more thoughtfully.

WHAT MIGHT BE ACTIVATED?	MIGHT LEAD ME TO ...	WHAT MIGHT HELP?
 **Anger at injustice**	• React quickly or push for immediate change without fully thinking things through • Take on more than I can manage	• Pause and notice what I'm feeling • Consider what is realistic and sustainable
 **Guilt about privilege**	• Take responsibility that isn't mine • Focus on relieving my own discomfort rather than what is actually helpful	• Recognise what I can and cannot do • Focus on actions that are genuinely helpful
 **A difficult past experience**	• Feel a strong personal connection or become overly involved • Assume that someone else's experience is similar to my own	• Notice when my own experiences are being activated • Seek another perspective
 **Need for belonging or identity**	• Take on certain roles or avoid disagreement • Prioritise being needed and accepted over my own wellbeing	• Consider what the work offers me personally • Notice when that influences my decisions
 **Fear of letting someone down**	• Say yes when I want to say no • Take on too much or find it difficult to step back even when I'm struggling	• Recognise that having limits is part of responsible care • See that saying no or involving others can be the better response

FROM REACTION TO REFLECTION

Understanding what shapes our responses.

Think of a recent situation where you felt particularly compelled to act. Use the examples on the previous page to explore what was happening for you, how it may have influenced your response, and what you might learn from it.

1 What happened?

Briefly describe the situation.

2 What was being activated?

Feelings, motivations, past experiences or personal needs

3 How might this have shaped your judgement?

In any way, big or small

4 What might you approach differently?

Seek advice, involve someone else, set clearer boundaries or take more time



LOOK OUTWARD

What does this situation actually require?

Wanting to help is not the same as knowing how best to help. When we encounter someone in difficulty, urgency can make it tempting to act before understanding their needs, circumstances or risks. Looking outward means shifting our attention from what we feel compelled to do towards what the situation requires. Start by considering the four areas below, then use the two reflection questions that follow to bring your thoughts together.

01



The person's needs and wishes

What does the person actually need or want?

02



The wider context

What do I need to understand about their circumstances?

03



My knowledge and limitations

Do I have the skills and information to respond safely?

04



Risks and responsibilities

What could go wrong, and what safeguards are needed?

What might I be missing or misunderstanding?

What assumptions might I have made about the person's needs or wishes? What else do I need to understand about their circumstances?

What do I need to respond safely and responsibly?

Where might I be out of my depth? What risks should I consider, and what support, expertise or safeguards might be needed?

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

From reflection to a more considered response.

We've explored what draws us to respond and what the situation itself requires. Bringing these together can enable a more considered response. We may find greater conviction in what we are already doing, or we may discover we need to slow down, seek support, or reconsider our approach.

Return to the situation you explored earlier, or choose one you are currently facing. Drawing on what you've learned about your motivations and what the situation requires, use the questions below to decide what to do next.

1 What have I learned from reflecting?

What have I noticed about my own motivations, and how do these compare with what the situation actually requires?



2 What are my options?

What could I do differently? Could I wait, seek advice, involve others or take a different approach?



3 What might influence my decision?

Am I being guided by what is needed, or by my own feelings, assumptions or sense of responsibility?



4 What is my next step?

Having considered all of this, what is the most appropriate and responsible next step?



MAKING THE PAUSE POSSIBLE

Creating the conditions for a more considered response.

Reflecting on our own motivations and limitations is an important first step, but it is only the beginning. The culture of our teams and organisations also shapes how we respond to the work: whether we feel able to speak honestly, question decisions, recognise our limits and seek support. In environments where urgency, enthusiasm and availability are valued more highly than careful judgement, it can become difficult to slow down, acknowledge uncertainty or make more considered decisions. As a team it can be helpful to consider the following four questions.

1

Can we talk honestly about our motivations?

Do we explore what draws people to the work during induction and supervision? Can people acknowledge personal needs or emotions without fear of judgement?



2

Do we distinguish willingness from readiness?

Are we recognising when commitment and enthusiasm need to be matched by knowledge, skills and support?



3

Can we slow down when the answer feels obvious?

Do we create regular opportunities to reflect, question assumptions and seek advice, particularly when there is pressure to act quickly?



4

What do we reward and recognise?

Do we value thoughtful boundaries and sound judgement as much as availability and willingness to take on more?



TURNING REFLECTION INTO PRACTICE

What is one change we could make to our induction, supervision, team discussions or decision-making processes to make reflection a more routine part of our work?

THE REFLECTIVE PAUSE

A quick reference.

Throughout this Tool, we've explored how our motivations and experiences shape our responses, and why understanding what a situation actually requires matters. The reflective pause brings these perspectives together, helping us recognise when to act, reconsider our approach or involve others.

Keep these questions to hand when considering a new responsibility or responding to a difficult situation:

What is this work stirring in me?

Notice the feelings, motivations and personal needs that may be influencing your response.

What does this situation require?

Consider the person's wishes, the wider context, your limitations and the responsibilities involved.

What is the best next step?

Decide whether to act, adapt, seek support, involve others or take a different approach.



A reminder

The reflective pause is not something we do once, before taking on a new responsibility. It is something we return to as situations change, relationships develop and our understanding grows.

THANK YOU FOR READING

Continue exploring

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