

NEVER STOP LEARNING: MY JOURNEY AS A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

**WRITTEN BY KIM BARNETSON,
CHILDMINDER PARTNER,
REACHOUT STRONGER PRACTICE
HUB**



Kim Barnetson is a Registered Childminder, Childminder Partner for the Reachout Stronger Hub, Tutor and Assessor for Essex County Council, proud grandma and cycle campaigner.

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO BE A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER?

What does it really mean to be a reflective practitioner? In early years, reflection isn't just something we might like to do, every change impacts on learning and development and it is something that can transform outcomes for children. My journey in childminding and beyond has shown me that learning and reflection go hand in hand.

I didn't set out to work in the early years sector. I loved history and books and worked in a bookshop in my twenties. But after starting my family, I found myself surrounded by children; my own and the constant stream of friends who came to play. That's when I had a realisation - perhaps I could turn this into something more? and I registered as a childminder.

At first, it was simply a way to work from home while raising my family. However, my curiosity quickly grew. I became fascinated by child development, what influences it, how children learn, and how I could best support them. I began completing training offered by my local authority and achieved a Level 3 qualification in child development.

This was just the beginning. I wanted to understand the "why" behind practice. Why do we use a key person approach? Why do some strategies work better than others? This led me to study child psychology and, later, complete a degree with the Open University. As a mature student, it was challenging, but it deepened my understanding and helped me think more critically about practice.

Through my studies, I realised how important it is to base our work on evidence. Our understanding of child development is constantly evolving, shaped by research and changing perspectives. This became central to my reflective practice, questioning what I do, why I do it, and how it impacts children.



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One change that significantly influenced my practice was becoming a Curiosity Approach accredited setting, this is a child-led pedagogy drawing on several development theories that emphasises enabling environments and child agency. Exploring this approach encouraged me to rethink my setting and shift further away from adult-led practice, putting children's interests and independence at the centre.

I also completed Elklan training, an evidence-based programme focused on speech and language development. This had an immediate impact on my day-to-day practice, helping me better support children's communication and understanding. It reinforced for me how powerful evidence informed approaches can be when applied thoughtfully.

As Essex lead for the Childminders Covid Recovery Plan, I had the opportunity to work more widely with other childminders across Essex. Supporting colleagues, many of whom faced significant challenges, showed me the importance of listening, understanding individual contexts, and working collaboratively to improve practice. It reminded me that reflective practice is not something we do alone; it is strengthened through shared learning.



Today, I continue to balance roles as a childminder, Childminder Partner for the Reachout Stronger Practice Hub, and early years tutor and assessor for Essex County Council. Each role feeds into my own reflection. Delivering training, facilitating networks, and supporting others all require me to stay informed, engage with evidence such as the Early Years Evidence Store, and continually develop my understanding.

Looking ahead, I am starting a teaching qualification and hope to continue studying. For me, learning has become a lifelong journey one that constantly shapes my practice.

So, what have I learned? Reflective practitioners are never "finished." Across the early years sector, I have met countless dedicated professionals who invest time and energy into improving what they do. Reflection requires honesty, curiosity, and a willingness to adapt. It also requires support.

Improving outcomes for children starts with supporting practitioners. Whether through professional development, engaging with evidence, or simply taking time to reflect on your day, each small step matters.

If you are at the start of your reflective journey, begin by asking: Why do I do it this way and is there a better way to support children's development? From there, explore the evidence, connect with others, and don't be afraid to challenge your thinking. Reflection isn't about getting everything right; it's about constantly evolving and always placing the children at the heart of the changes.