

# Using a framework for reflection: Gibbs' reflective cycle

- Graham Gibbs (1988) adapted the experiential learning cycle to acknowledge the importance of feelings and emotion in learning:

*It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations or concepts that allow new situations to be tackled effectively. (Gibbs 1988 p. 9)*

He also emphasises the importance of being able to generalise, to transfer knowledge and insights gained from one situation to another. As a result, this framework is frequently used in developing practitioner courses (such as Healthcare and Business).

# The reflective cycle



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## Reflect on an incident that occurred in your workplace/placement.

This sort of task is often set as a reflective assignment. This section tracks the development of a piece of reflective writing using the Gibbs framework, in three steps:

- 1 An extract from notes briefly describing **the experience**
- 2 An analysis of the experience using **Gibbs' model**
- 3 A short **reflective report**, ready to hand in.

### 1 The experience: a student nurse at work

Lin is a student nurse, working alongside Ana, a school nurse. They have arranged to meet Deepa and Chris, who have recently received a letter raising concerns that their daughter Maya is clinically obese. They would like to discuss this with Ana.

## Extracts from Lin's notes

3 March Ana and I met Deepa and Chris at the clinic. They were angry and upset about Maya being described as 'obese'. Ana discussed strategies for Maya to regain a healthy weight.

Plan: Deepa and Chris to keep a food diary for the family and to build in more exercise each week. Ana to meet with them to review progress in 6 weeks.

2 April Deepa called Ana - the family has struggled to make changes and would like more advice - meet in a week's time. Ana suggested they jot down ideas about why this happened.

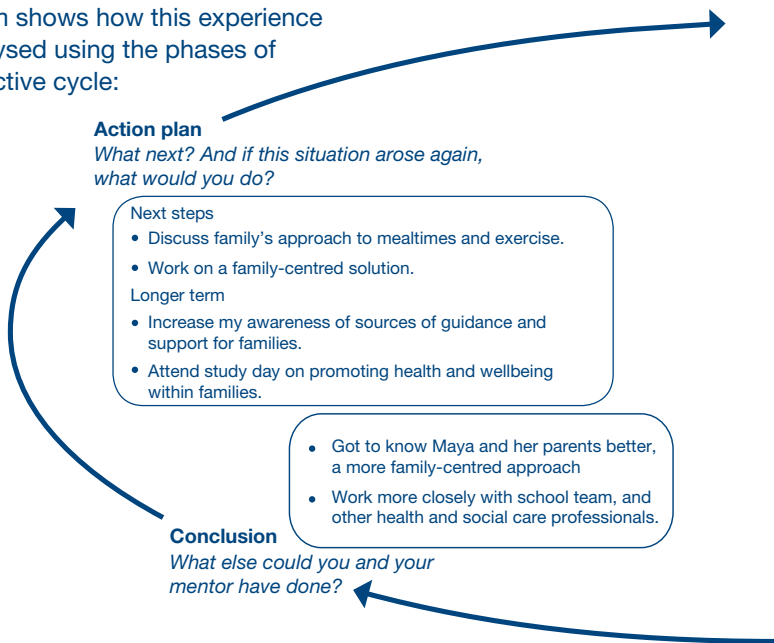
Ana suggested I read more about current policies, guidelines and research articles on childhood obesity before the meeting. Saw an interesting TV programme about how hard it is for many families to change their diet and exercise habits.

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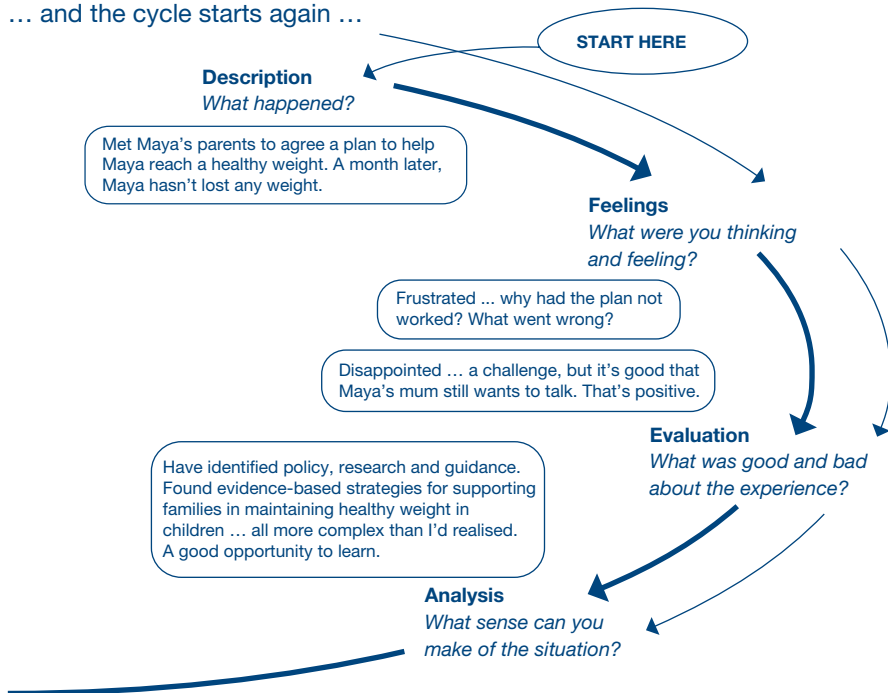
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## 2 The model: analysis using Gibbs' reflective cycle

This diagram shows how this experience can be analysed using the phases of Gibbs' reflective cycle:



... and the cycle starts again ...



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Note some key points about the Gibbs' framework:

- ▶ **Acknowledging FEELINGS:** If you are explicitly invited to write about feelings, you are more likely to do so. In many situations, acknowledging your feelings is key to being able to move on, especially after a setback.
- ▶ **The EVALUATION phase:** It is so easy to overlook the positive when you are disappointed that things didn't work out as you hoped. Being prompted to add a reflection on 'evaluation' ensures you include the positives as well as the negatives.
- ▶ **The importance of ANALYSIS:** Where you draw in all the additional sources of ideas and information in seeking solutions or strategies for your problem.

### 3 The reflective report

In the final write-up, you can see the full version of Lin's thoughts and actions, the 'value added' of her reading and discussions, and the power of reflection at every stage of the cycle.

## A reflective report on working with a family

### Description ◀

Deepa and Chris, parents of 10-year-old Maya, asked to meet my mentor, Ana, a school nurse, after receiving a letter saying that Maya had been found to be clinically obese. Ana suggested some strategies for working together as a whole family, with a focus on changes to their diet and building in more exercise to their daily lives. Four weeks later, however, Deepa rang Ana for further advice as they were struggling to make changes to their family's lifestyle and routines.

*This section should be brief, but should set out the key points of the incident or issue you want to reflect on.*

### Feelings ◀

I was disappointed that Deepa, Chris and Maya had struggled to make these simple changes. I hoped Ana would find a way to help the family so that Maya could regain a healthy weight and lifestyle.

*Again, this section should generally be brief.*

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## Evaluation ◀

This was a challenging experience. I had limited knowledge about childhood obesity, and did not know how to react. However, I was pleased that through a second discussion with Chris and Deepa, Ana was able to assess their needs more fully, and help them find a more individualised and realistic plan to suit them as a family.

*This section should provide a balanced appraisal of the situation.*

## Analysis ◀

Over 20 per cent of children in year 6 of primary schools in England in 2017–18 were overweight or obese. It has been increasingly recognised that the causes of this are complex and multifactorial, including environmental, genetic, socioeconomic and cultural factors (HM Government 2016). A sensitive and family-centred approach must be taken when children are found to be overweight or obese (Brown et al. 2013) in order to support both children and their families to make positive changes to their health and lifestyle. It is increasingly acknowledged

*This should generally be the most detailed section of your work, in which you link to relevant theory/policy/literature to help you make sense of your experiences and of your feelings. In an academic piece, this is likely to be longer and more detailed than this, linking to a wide range of sources to help you build your discussion and arguments.*

that a range of professionals, bodies and businesses have a part to play both in ensuring that childhood obesity is prevented and in optimising children's health locally, nationally and globally (World Health Organization 2016).

### Conclusion

After discussing this incident with Ana, and reflecting on my research on this topic, I realise that tackling childhood obesity is a complex issue. Looking back, I can now see the importance of a family-centred approach rather than 'one size fits all' when supporting families like Maya and her parents. I am also more aware of how the marketing, advertising and packaging of food impacts on children's health and the need for interdisciplinary and community-wide approaches in promoting the health of families. ◀

*This section indicates that Lin has learnt from her research and her reflections, and that her knowledge and perspectives have changed. She will be able to apply this to develop her practice in the future.*

## Action plan

After reflecting on this incident, I will be able to draw on a wider range of strategies to support children and their families. I will continue to explore issues related to child health in the remainder of my studies to help me develop my skills and knowledge. I have booked a study day on child health in three months' time to extend my knowledge in this area. ◀

## References ◀

Brown R, Willis T, Aspinall N, Hunt C, George J and Rudolf M (2013) Preventing child obesity: A long-term evaluation of the HENRY approach. *Community Practitioner*, 8(7): 23–7.

HM Government (2016) *Childhood obesity: A plan for action*. Available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action) (accessed 02/11/2019).

World Health Organization (2016) *Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

*Here, Lin sums up, giving a clear plan for how she will develop her knowledge and change her practice in the short and long term as a result of what she has learnt from her reflections.*

*Lin's references show the sources that have informed her reflections, so the reader can find them too.*

**THE END** ... or is it? This may be the conclusion of your reflections on a single learning experience, but it lies at the heart of your development as a professional. What happens next time you are in a similar situation? You can continue to use Gibbs' reflective cycle to chart your ongoing learning and development.

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The use of a framework for reflection helps the writer to focus on the change and development needed to become a more effective practitioner in just about any work setting. Writing of this sort is often used as part of a work placement portfolio, where the focus on outcomes is a useful rehearsal for the next stage – taking the step into the world of employment.

Part 6 considers the importance of reflection in this next step.