



SELF-REFLECTION EXERCISE: THE RIVER JOURNEY INSTRUCTION



Breaking Barriers



Making Connections



Building Confidence



INTRODUCTION

This self-reflection is designed to help parents, carers, families and kin of children and young people experiencing significant distress and crisis, reflect on their family's collective journey, using the metaphor of navigating a river together. It was developed based on the challenges families shared about their own journeys of supporting a child/young person through distress and crisis.

This exercise can be used to explore the journey from multiple perspectives within the family and the co-existence of different 'stories' about their shared experience. It can also help you explore the influence of external individuals (teachers, health professionals, friends, extended family) on this journey, acknowledging both support and potential challenges (e.g., judgment). This exercise also identifies the family's collective and individual strengths and resources used in navigating challenges and potential pathways for 'recovery' and future navigation for the family unit.

This exercise is designed to be used individually, or in a small group of parents, carers, families and kin supporting each other. It is also an exercise that is used in the RiR Setting Out workshop.

* The word "family" is used throughout and we appreciate that you will have your own definition/idea about what family is for you.

Purpose

The Navigating Your River exercise aims to:

- Explore the experience of your child/young person's distress and crisis and associated experiences (navigating school challenges, service and systems responses and community attitudes) from different perspectives within the family.
- Identify your family's collective and individual strengths and resources used in navigating challenges.
- Consider the perspectives or interpretations of others (teachers, professionals, extended family) and the ways they may be helpful or otherwise.
- Ultimately, help you to identify potential pathways for recovery and future navigation for the family unit.

Value

This exercise is based on the following values. We encourage you to draw on these values as you progress through the reflection exercise.

- Strengths-Based: Identifying the family's collective 'paddling skills' (strengths, wisdom, skills) 'compasses' (values, goals) and 'supplies' (resources) that could, or are already, supporting navigation.
- Supportive: A safe, non-judgmental, and empathic process that recognises the challenges of navigating complex experiences in an imperfect world.
- Hopeful: Looking towards 'open waters' and building skills for future navigation.





This self-reflection exercise

Self-reflection is a process of communicating with yourself internally to gain new perspectives or insights about your experiences, actions and needs.

Some people like to self-reflect through journalling or talking about their experiences with others. It's really up to you to decide what works best. After the instructions there is a worksheet to help guide you through this exercise, but you can do it in any way that works for you.

This exercise is not to imply that you haven't already thought deeply about the multiple perspectives and experiences within your family and how to navigate this journey together – it's just a framework for intentionally working through those reflections and potentially discovering further insights.

Supports

Sometimes self-reflection can be hard, as we have unexpected realisations about painful experiences, unmet needs or misunderstandings. You may want to think about who you can go to for support if this happens for you, or you experience distress – a trusted friend or support person, or phone-based support (see links in the resources section).

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Mapping your family's journey

Visualising your family's river: Take a moment to visualise your family's river journey. Where did this particular stretch of the river begin for your family – perhaps when the crisis became apparent or a significant challenge emerged? Where are you now?

Mapping key moments: As you look from your family's boat at the river behind you, what have been the key features?

- Rapids and obstacles: What were the most challenging 'rapids', 'rocks', or 'storms' your family encountered together? (diagnosis, school challenges, intense emotional experiences, seeking help).
- Calm waters: Were there any 'calm stretches' or moments of peace and stability for your family?
- Forks in the river: What were some significant 'forks in the river' where your family had to make difficult decisions or felt unsure of the path?



REFLECTION PROMPTS

In the family boat

Even though your family is in one boat, each family member might experience the journey differently. All these experiences are valid 'truths'. It can be helpful to explore these different understandings and experiences.

- From your child/young person's perspective, how might the rapids or calm stretches have felt to them? What might be their 'truth' about these moments?
- From other family members' perspectives within this family boat, how might the rapids or calm stretches have felt to them? What might be their 'truth' about these moments?
- From your perspective within this family boat, what are your stories during these moments – fears, hopes, or feelings?

It can be powerful to see that different perspectives – both within your family and from outside – can coexist, and understanding this can bring new insights and clarity when navigating towards your collective and individual goals.



REFLECTION PROMPTS

Other vessels and shoreline observers

Beyond your family's boat, there are other vessels on the river, or people observing from the shoreline. These might be services and community agencies, teachers, doctors, health professionals, friends, and extended family.

- How have these 'other vessels' or 'shoreline observers' impacted your family's journey?
- Have they provided 'tugs' of support, offered a 'safe harbor,' or shared helpful 'maps'?
- Or, at times, have they felt like 'crosscurrents' or 'judgmental stares' from the shore, perhaps adding to feelings of shame or misunderstanding?

What are you going to look out for more or include more on your river journey? Who could join your crew? Who could be that voice of encouragement from the shore?

Identifying strengths and resources

Even in the most challenging waters, your family uses its strengths and resources.

- Your family's compass and paddling skills: What collective 'compass' (shared values, wisdom, goals) or 'paddling skills' (strengths, skills, practices) did your family use to navigate these rapids?
- Individual strengths: What specific 'paddling skills' or 'inner compass' did you or your child/young person bring to the journey? What about other family members?
- Supplies and crew: What 'supplies' (resources, information) or 'crew members' (support from within the family or from helpful external sources) have you already found along the way that is helping your family?

SUMMING UP



Remember, every family's river is unique, and you and your family are the experts in your journey, even if it may not always feel that way – your family has navigated challenging waters, and you possess incredible 'paddling skills' and 'compasses'.

Recovery is a continuous journey, not a destination, so your family is always navigating towards new, perhaps calmer waters, employing collective and individual strengths and resources which will continue to develop along the way.

You don't need to do this alone.

Check out the [resources section](#) of this website to find support groups, helplines, online resources, or professional services.

Navigating your river:

Thinking about the journey so far

Take a moment to think about your family's journey so far. This particular stretch may be when a significant challenge emerged, or a crisis became apparent.

What might be the views of the journey so far from other positions in the family boat? What about the people on other vessels, or observers on the riverbank?



Notes:

What have been the most challenging 'rapids', 'rocks', or 'storms' your family encountered together?

What about 'calm stretches' or 'easier sailing'?

Were there any significant 'forks in the river' when your family had to make difficult decisions or felt unsure of the path?

What might have been the experience of these moments for different family members? How were these moments for you?

What about other 'boats on the river' or people on the shoreline? Have they offered 'safe harbour' or have they worked at 'cross currents'?

Who could join your crew or be a voice of encouragement from the shore?

Navigating your river:

Thinking about the journey ahead

What are the things that make up your family's collective 'compass' (shared values, wisdom, goals) that you will use to navigate the uncertain waters ahead?

What are the 'boating skills' (strengths, skills, knowledge, resources) that your family already has?



Notes:

Even in the most challenging waters your family uses its strengths and resources.

What were the strengths and skills your family brought to navigating the rapids?

What specific 'paddling skills' or 'inner compass' did you or your child bring to the journey?

What 'supplies' (resources, information) or 'crew' (support from within the family or from others) have you already found that is helping your family?

What other supplies might you need?

Who else do you need to join your crew or to provide helpful navigational tools and other resources?