

OTA 2026 • INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP (2-HOURS)

Ripple Effects

Using Reflective Practice to Enhance
Therapist Effectiveness and Well-Being

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Clinician • Educator • Mentor



ABOUT BONNIE

Your Presenter



Bonnie Boenig, MEd, OT/L, C/NDT

Pediatric occupational therapist
40+ years of clinical experience



NDTA™ instructor

National and international educator



Founder, Wavecrest Pediatric Therapy

Supporting children and families to reach their potential



Clinician • Educator • Mentor

Passionate about meaningful, functional outcomes
for children and their families



Today's Journey

Our learning objectives

- 1 Describe the role of reflective practice in therapist effectiveness and well-being.
- 2 Demonstrate a structured journaling and reflection technique.
- 3 Analyze how reflection influences emotional regulation and clinical decision-making.
- 4 Develop a personalized reflective practice plan for daily use.

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periences, and strengths
a therapist.

ion can build resilience,
in your therapeutic

ces that help transform
igful professional growth.

a renewed sense of purpose—
udents, families, and colleagues.



Before We Begin... ♡



Over the past two days you've probably filled pages of notes...

- New ideas
- New evidence
- New strategies
- New perspectives

Hopefully you're leaving excited to try something new.



For the next two hours...

Set your notebook aside.

Take a slow breath.

Allow this time to become something different.



This presentation isn't about another technique.

It's about the therapist who will be using all of those techniques.



Sometimes Life Invites Us to Pause...

*The moments that shape us most
are rarely the ones we planned.*



Sometimes our
greatest *Transitions*
Begin with a question.



Who were you before your calendar became full?



RIPPLE EFFECTS

What kind of therapist are you becoming?



Pause. Reflect. Begin.



Take a quiet moment to begin reflecting.

JOURNAL PROMPT

When was the last time you paused long enough to remember why you chose this profession?



What first inspired you to become an occupational therapist, physical therapist, or speech-language pathologist?



What did you hope to bring to the children and families you would one day serve?

*Allow yourself to simply write.
There are no right or wrong answers.*



There is no right answer. Simply notice what emerges.



Who
I Am

Purpose



What
I Do

When one changes...
what happens to the other?

Things Beyond My Control

- Administrative Decisions
- Caseload
- Documentation
- Scheduling
- Policy
- Limited Resources

Where I Choose to Invest My Energy



Where I Choose to Invest My Energy

- Curiosity
- Presence
- Compassion
- Reflection
- Growth
- Relationships
- Clinical Reasoning
- Attitude
- Purpose

As you reflect on
this past school year...

Where has most of your
energy been invested?



A Strength Can Become a Strain.



Dependable → Always available



Driven → Never finished



Empathic → Carrying everyone's emotions



Expert → Afraid to be uncertain



Where do your roles overlap?



What does your work give you?



What does it ask of you?



What is being protected—or neglected?



When the role changes, what remains?

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The role can end. The contribution, capabilities, and vision remain.



Professional Identity

JOURNAL PROMPT



What remains important when my role changes?

With

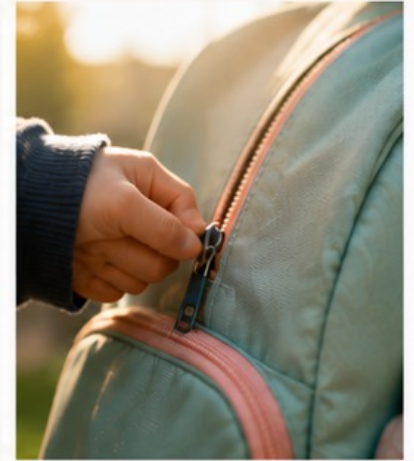
- What strengths and values have shaped the therapist I am today?
- Which expectations am I ready to reconsider?

Write privately. Share only what you choose.



♥ There is no right answer. Simply notice what emerges.

Purpose Lives in Small Moments



Finding small successes during the day
is where you find your why.

Purpose isn't usually rediscovered
in a dramatic moment.



It's rediscovered in tiny moments.

A child ties a shoe. Makes eye contact.
Writes their name. Looks proud. Laughs.
A parent smiles. A teacher notices.

That's where purpose lives.

Reflection vs. Reflective Practice

Reflection

- ✓ A moment of looking back.
- ✓ Happens occasionally.
- ✓ Asks, "What happened?"
- ✓ Helps us notice.
- ✓ Creates awareness.
- ✓ An event.

vs.

Reflective Practice

- ✓ An intentional habit of learning.
- ✓ Happens intentionally and consistently.
- ✓ Asks, "What can I learn?"
- ✓ Helps us grow.
- ✓ Creates growth and improvement.
- ✓ A professional habit.



Clinical Pearl

Reflection helps us understand an experience.
Reflective practice helps transform future practice.



RIPPLE EFFECTS

A pebble. A ripple. A widening circle.

What happens within the therapist
influences what happens around
the therapist.

Reflection

A Professional Superpower



- **Reflection isn't the destination.**
It is the beginning of transformation.



- **It is the beginning**
of transformation.



- **Reflection is a professional competency**
that strengthens therapeutic
use of self over the course
of a career.



When we
reflect,
we
grow.
When we
grow,
our impact
expands.



Reflective Practice Changes More Than Your Therapy

When we intentionally reflect on our experiences, we don't just become better clinicians—we become different people.

Meaningful Impact



Children



Families



Colleagues



Future Therapists



Therapeutic Use of Self

- Presence
- Empathy
- Authentic relationships



Professional Growth

- Clinical reasoning
- Lifelong learning
- Seeking feedback



Personal Growth

- Balance
- Confidence
- Gratitude
- Purpose



Self-Awareness

- Greater insight
- Emotional awareness
- Recognizing patterns



Resilience

- Recovering from difficult days
- Perspective
- Adaptability

Reflective Practice



The most powerful clinical tool we carry into every treatment session is ourselves.

What lies beneath what we are seeing?



The question we ask of clients
can also be asked of ourselves.

Observation is not interpretation.



What happened?



What did I assume?



What else might explain it?



Two Kinds of Why. One Deeper Understanding.

Asking "why" helps us move beyond the surface to the depth of what matters most.



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

asks:

- ? Why am I thinking this?
- ? Why did that interaction affect me?
- ? Why am I feeling burned out?
- ? Why did that moment bring me joy?
- ? Why do I keep coming back to this profession?

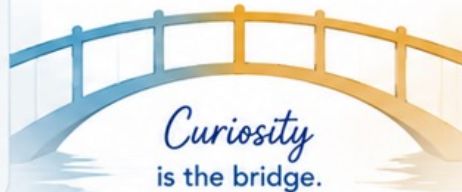
 It deepens self-understanding.



Different focus.
Same curiosity.
Deeper understanding.
Better outcomes.



Curiosity
is the bridge.



CLINICAL REASONING

asks:

- ? Why is this child using that movement pattern?
- ? Why isn't this intervention working?
- ? Why is participation breaking down?
- ? Why is this family struggling?
- ? What underlying systems are contributing?

 It deepens clinical understanding.



When we ask better questions, we gain deeper understanding.

Deeper understanding changes everything that follows.



A story from practice

When a confident clinical explanation meets an unexpected response.



What did you notice?

Which assumption would you have made? What additional information would you seek?

Reflection is not rumination.

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Reflection opens possibilities.
Rumination can keep us circling
the same distress.

Reflection → Recognition → Reframing → Renewal

The Reflective Growth Cycle ♡



1. Reflect
"What happened?"



2. Recognize
"What patterns am I noticing?"



3. Reframe
"What is this experience teaching me?"



4. Respond
"How do I want to show up differently?"



5. Repeat
Each cycle builds a stronger therapist. ♡



*Pause.
Reflect.
Grow.*

For yourself.
For your clients.
For the future.



Pause. Notice. Name. Choose.

A brief structure for reflection during a demanding day.

Try it with a real moment.



Write privately. Share only what feels appropriate.

Our nervous system comes into the room with us.

Stress can narrow attention, alter interpretation, and shape our interactions.

Ripples travel in both directions.

We affect the emotional climate—and are affected by it.

Empathy does not require absorption.



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Notice the emotion. Understand its context. Choose your response. Maintain your boundaries.





Emotional Awareness

JOURNAL PROMPT



What am I carrying into my professional interactions?

With

- What emotions or expectations might be influencing my response?
- What belongs to me—and what belongs to someone else?

Notice without judgment before choosing a response.



♥ There is no right answer. Simply notice what emerges.

Therapeutic presence is an active clinical resource.



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How we respond can change the conditions for participation.

If we work on ourselves, we show up *differently*. -

*"When we
change within,
we change
everything
around us."*



- **our presence changes.**



- Children notice.



- Families notice.



- Colleagues notice.



- Our clinical reasoning changes.



- Our patience changes.



- Our listening changes.



- Even our interventions change
because we have changed.



Experience becomes learning through reflection.



What did this person teach me that I did not know before?



Clinical Reflection

JOURNAL PROMPT



When did an encounter challenge what I expected?

With

- What did I observe, and what did I initially assume?
- What new information might change my understanding?



An unexpected response can become an opportunity to learn.



♥ There is no right answer. Simply notice what emerges.

Three applications of journaling

Different purposes. One reflective practice.



DISCOVER

Exploratory journaling
Values • identity • patterns



UNDERSTAND

Clinical reflective journaling
Assumptions • responses • learning



ACT

Intentional journaling
Choices • next steps • growth



Free Intent Journaling

Begin without a prescribed question. Let meaning emerge.



PAUSE

Begin with quiet, stillness,
or a moment of forward
planning



BEGIN

A word stone may invite
reflection, but does not
prescribe the topic



DISCOVER

Write freely; the direction
and meaning may emerge
as you go

The Word Stone: An Invitation to Reflect

A word can offer a starting point—not a prediction or instruction.



SELECT

Choose a word stone without trying to find the “right” one.



NOTICE

Read the word. Notice your first response without judging it.



ALLOW

Let the word lead somewhere—or let your writing take another direction.

Free Intent Journaling: begin with openness; allow meaning to emerge.

Sometimes one word is enough to begin.

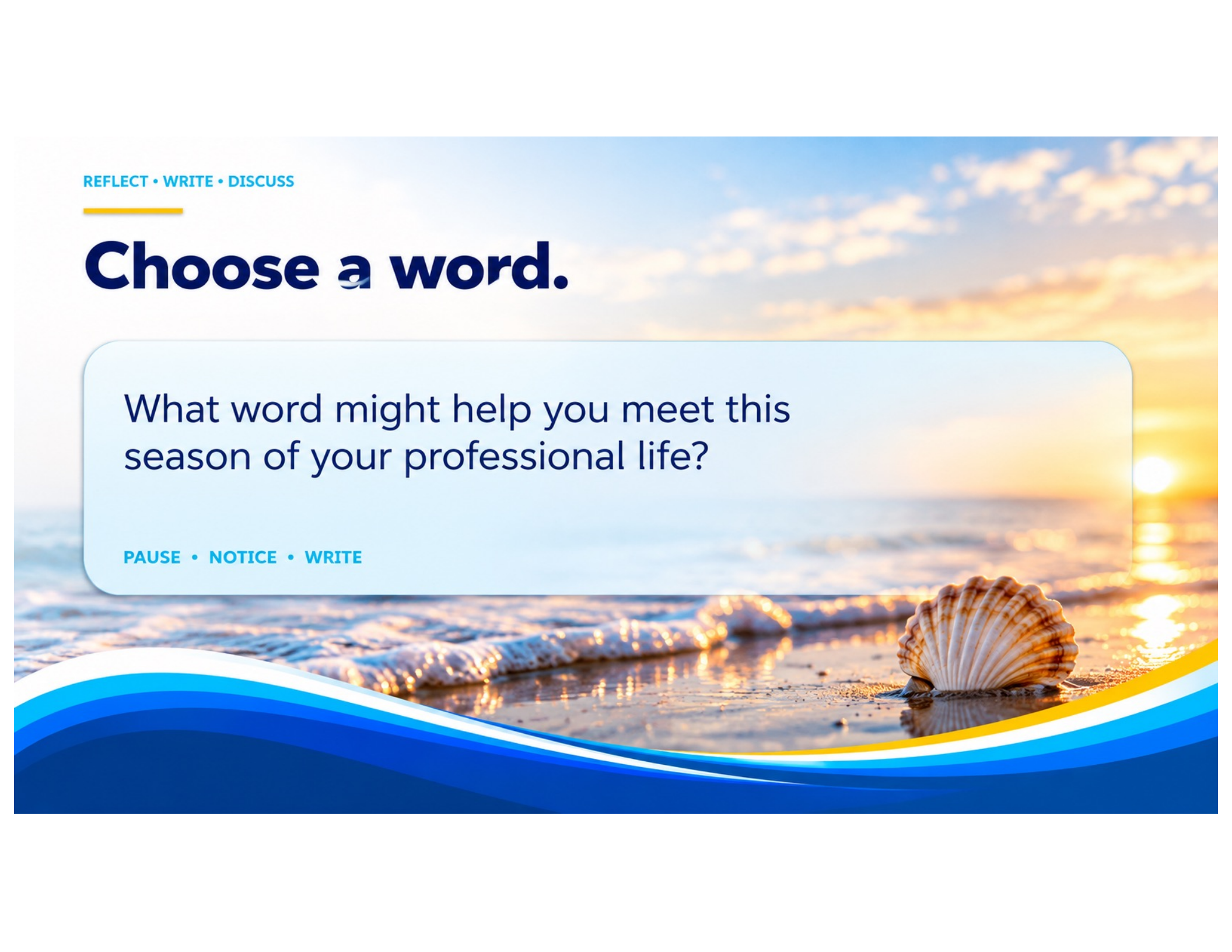


REFLECT • WRITE • DISCUSS

Choose a word.

What word might help you meet this season of your professional life?

PAUSE • NOTICE • WRITE



Free Intent Journaling Experience

No prescribed question. No need to know where the writing will go.



PAUSE

Take a few quiet breaths or consider the day ahead.



BEGIN

Look at your word if helpful.
Start writing whatever comes.



FOLLOW

Allow ideas, memories, questions, or intentions to unfold.

Your journal is private. There is no correct response and no obligation to share.

What does your word uncover?



What are you carrying?



What are you ready to nourish?



What might you release?



What Emerged?

A brief reflection on the experience—not an analysis of the writing.



NOTICE

Did your writing follow the word or move elsewhere?



COMPARE

How did this differ from journaling with a specific question?



CARRY

Is there an insight or intention you want to remember?

Optional sharing: speak about the process, not the private details.

RIPPLE EFFECTS

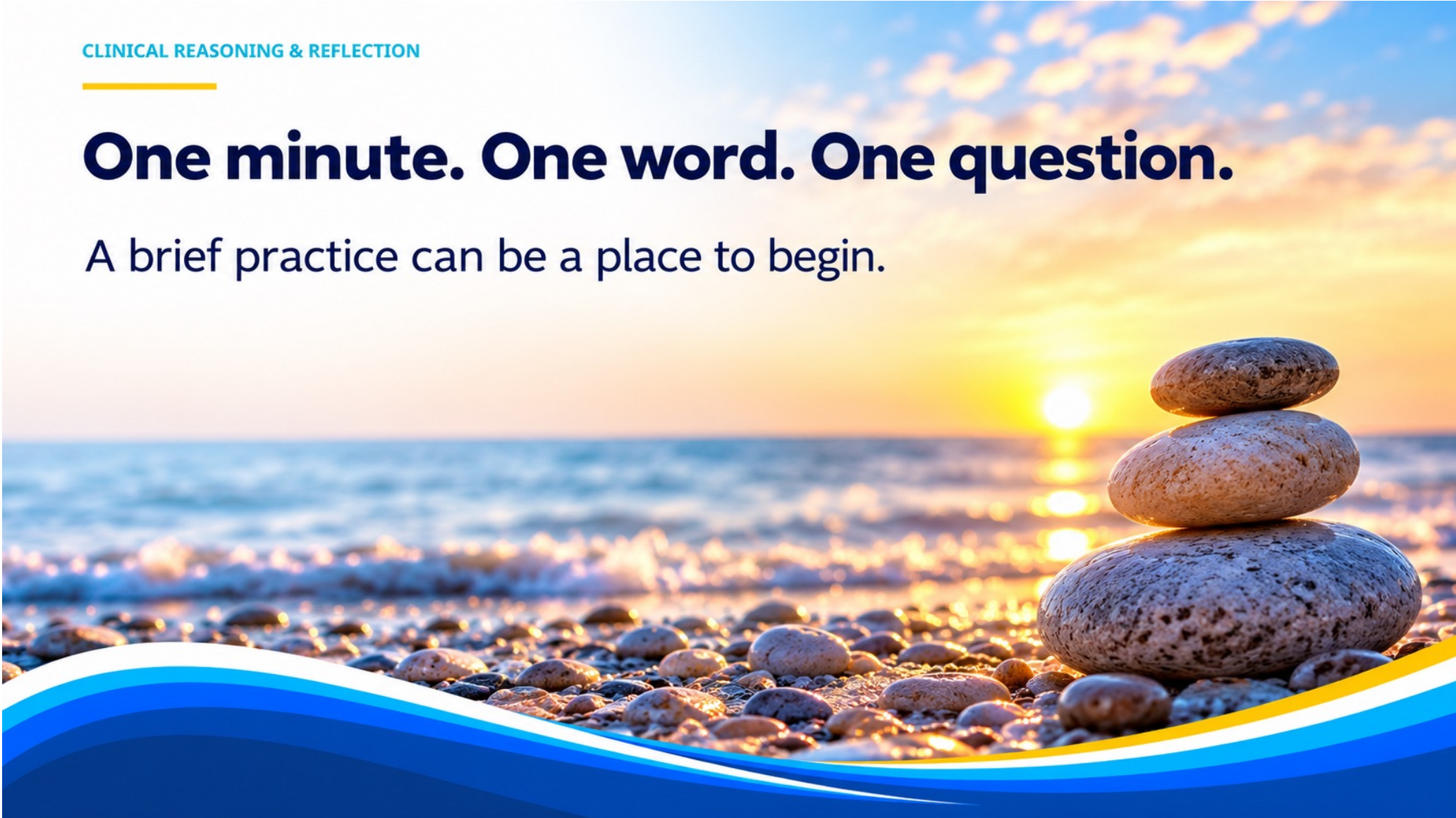
Reflection is not another demand on your calendar.

A sustainable practice must fit the life you actually live.



One minute. One word. One question.

A brief practice can be a place to begin.





Intentional Reflection

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What will I carry forward from today?

- What is one pattern I want to approach differently?
- When and how will I make space to reflect this week?

One small intention can begin a meaningful ripple.



Reflection
Creates
Purpose



Pause.

♥ There is no right answer. Simply notice what emerges.

Design your reflection ritual.



WHEN

What existing routine can hold it?



HOW

Stone, journal, voice note, or quiet pause?



WHAT

Which question will guide you?

When reflection is not enough



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Well-being also depends on workload, resources, culture, support, and systemic conditions.



Continue the ripple.



One insight to remember.



One action to try.



One question to carry forward.

REFLECT

WRITE

DISCUSS

WAVECREST INSTITUTE

Continue the Conversation.

Connecting Systems. Supporting Participation.

wavecrestpediatrictherapy.com



Clinical education



Mentorship



Reflective practice

Connect at the OOTA conference and explore future Wavecrest Institute offerings.

