

# Scaffolding with Caregivers to Elevate Quality Series: Building Reflective Complexity

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When we coach caregivers, we ask reflective questions to engage them to brainstorm, problem-solve and plan. In this newsletter we highlight scaffolding, the approach of strategically asking questions to enhance caregivers' insights and learning. We partner with caregivers to build on their knowledge and previous successes to advance toward their goals. To begin scaffolding caregiver reflection, we focus on their stated priority and start with the end goal in mind – what they want to see, do or learn.



Build on functional priorities and authentic materials by asking reflective questions that grow in complexity and are responsive to the situation.

Think of each session as a building with an elevator. We enter the building on the *ground floor*, with questions focused on caregivers' awareness of their priority, what they already know and what they have tried. Once a shared understanding of the priority is established, think about the *next floor* to visit to **elevate** their reflection. Slowly incorporate higher-level questions to support caregivers to make comparisons, consider alternatives and plan for action. This scaffolding approach leads to the *top floor* for the ending joint plan.

In an elevator, we wouldn't stop at every floor in order—we would go **right** to the floor we need to visit. In the same way, we ask questions that make the most sense in the moment, are relative to the caregivers' priority and result in reflection that moves caregivers toward meeting their goal. There's no set hierarchy or order in which questions should be asked; question types often vary as the session unfolds. We build on caregivers' reflections with more complex questions to promote deeper discovery. Read on for examples of **awareness**, **analysis**, **alternative** and **action** type questions, excerpts of a sample conversation and videos that demonstrate how different question types can be used.

TYPE OF QUESTION	EXAMPLES
<p><b>Awareness</b> questions encourage caregivers to share what they already know, what they are doing and what they think. These tend to be the easiest type of question to answer and a logical place to start or circle back to if caregivers aren't sure how to answer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is most important for us to work on today?</li><li>• What are different things he climbs on during the day?</li><li>• What have you tried to get him to climb onto the couch?</li></ul>
<p><b>Analysis</b> questions request that caregivers make comparisons or determine how what is currently happening matches what they want to happen. These questions can be used to build on initial reflections.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You tried two positions—Once you held his waist and once you held his hands, which one worked better?</li><li>• How is the couch different than his highchair?</li><li>• What do you think helped him get up that time?</li></ul>
<p><b>Alternative</b> questions ask caregivers to consider new ideas or expand on current strategies to move toward their goal. These questions often work well after caregivers have first reflected on what's going well and what could improve.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I agree that the cushion is too slippery. What could we try that is more stable?</li><li>• You noted he would do better if he looked down at the stool. What could we do to get him to look down?</li><li>• What would be the next step toward him climbing onto the couch by himself?</li></ul>
<p><b>Action</b> questions support caregivers' planning and connection to other contexts. These questions help caregivers think about what they are going to do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you plan to do between visits?</li><li>• When during the day do you need him to climb up?</li><li>• When during the day will you practice having him climb up?</li></ul>

# Excerpts from a Session: Scaffolding Complex Reflection

## Beginning Joint Plan

Your goal between visits was to reduce frustration. How did offering two choices to figure out what he wanted work? **awareness**

*He chose snacks he wanted and picked out his clothes, but he got frustrated sometimes during play. He didn't want the animals I offered as a choice, so he knocked them out of my hand.*

What do you think was different about playtime? **analysis**

*He didn't want an animal; he wanted me to neigh like a horse. It's harder when he has something in mind that he can't tell me.*

Oh, that is tough. How did you figure out what he wanted? **awareness**

*I made animal noises to get him in a better mood—he always laughs when I do that.*

Nice work figuring out what he communicated! It sounds like redirection worked well too. What do you think overall about reducing his frustration since last visit? **awareness**

*We're getting there.*

Well, we had planned to work on choices today to see how that it might help reduce frustration, but we can target whatever you'd like. So, what's most important to work on today? **awareness/action**

*I still want to work on frustration if that's ok.*

We can certainly do that. You mentioned animals during play time, what other routines or activities does he get frustrated? **awareness**

*It really just depends. Sometimes he gets upset about TV. He asks for Cocomelon, but then cries once it's on and then gets really mad if I turn it off.*

So you're seeing the frustration at different times. To give us a focus, what do you hope we accomplish today? **analysis**

*I hope that I learn ways to help him when he's frustrated.*

Alright, what do you think about showing me what it looks like when he gets upset about watching Cocomelon, and then we can brainstorm about what to do when he's frustrated?

## Observation

(observation of Cocomelon on TV) I see what you mean—he's upset. What do you think was the difference between the first song and the second one? **analysis**

*Hmm, the first one had cats, and he loves our cat. Otherwise, I'm not sure...*

Well, it seems like he might have favorite songs, like the cat one. How can we figure out which song he wants? **alternative**

*Lots of the videos have stuff that's like his toys, like animals and cars. I could show him a toy cat and hold it near one video and a bus with the other. We could find videos that match to our stuff.*

Oh, great idea—let's try! What could we use for the next few videos on the screen? **alternative**

*We could do a bus and this stuffed owl. I'll make sounds for both of them since I know he likes that.*

## Guided Practice

**(Caregiver practices) How did offering that choice work? awareness**

*He didn't cry and he held the bus, so pretty good! I probably have enough toys and little figurines around here that I can find things for most videos.*

**I love it! By showing him the objects and naming them you're also teaching him new words and that he can show what he wants, which will help with frustration.**

## Ending Joint Plan

**What will you focus on between now and our next session? action**

*I still want to work on frustration, by teaching him to show or ask for things he wants. We'll keep doing the choices. I'm going to find toys I can match up to those things I know he likes so I can offer those as choices and teach him those words.*

**Great idea to pay attention to what he likes and use that as motivation and a learning opportunity. What are some routines or activities you could practice when he gets frustrated? awareness**

*TV shows and Cocomelon, maybe playtime. I also want to practice when he's happy, so he understands that it's fun to choose or show me what he wants. We could use bath toys, or even actions in the bath, like water on or off. And keep doing snacks because he loves to eat.*

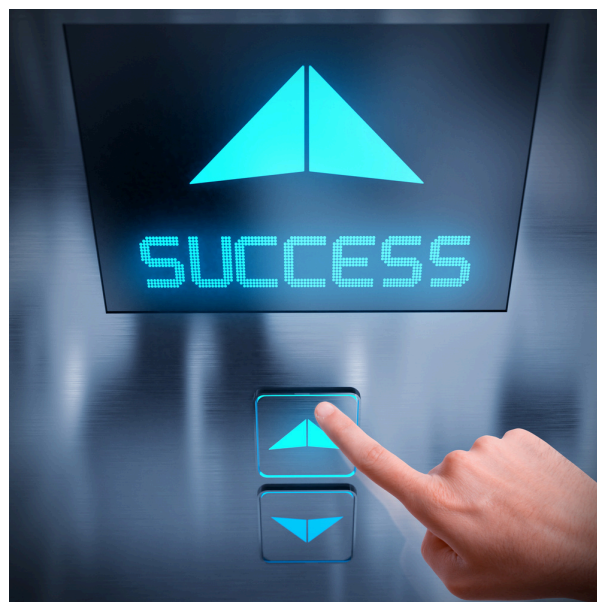
**Good idea to think about those activities that happen every day. What do you hope he does between now and next visit? awareness**

*I hope I can figure out what he wants when he's upset, and then teach some way to ask for it. Whether that's by making a choice, pointing, or showing me something.*

**Great goals, and you have a good plan to get there. Thinking ahead to our next visit, what would you like us to focus on when I come back? action**

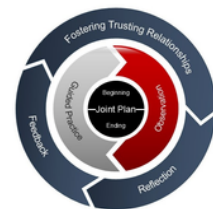
*We've been struggling to get him to come back inside after playing outside. He gets so upset. Maybe we could practice getting him to come inside without getting so upset.*

**Absolutely. Let's look at our calendars and find a time that would work well for going outside.**



# Building Reflective Complexity: Take the Elevator to Success

Engage caregivers to brainstorm, problem-solve and plan using scaffolding; the approach of strategically asking questions building on their knowledge and previous successes to move toward their goals. To begin scaffolding caregiver reflection, we focus on their stated priority and start with the end goal in mind – what they want to see, do or learn.



**Top floor=Mix and Match** keeping these strategies in mind:

- Start with awareness-type questions
- Use different reflective question types throughout sessions to build on caregivers' insights and past successes
- Scaffold questions to move the session toward caregivers' end goal
- Wrap up sessions with questions that facilitate caregiver-driven ending joint plans

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**Third floor=Action:** Ask questions to support caregivers to make connections to other contexts and plan for future actions.

Example: When in your day could you offer choices?

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**Second floor=Alternative:** Build on previous successes and insights by asking questions to seek caregivers' creative ideas.

Example: Knowing that visual attention is key, what else can we do to get him to look up?

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**First floor=Analysis:** Use questions that support caregivers to make comparisons and evaluate progress toward goals.

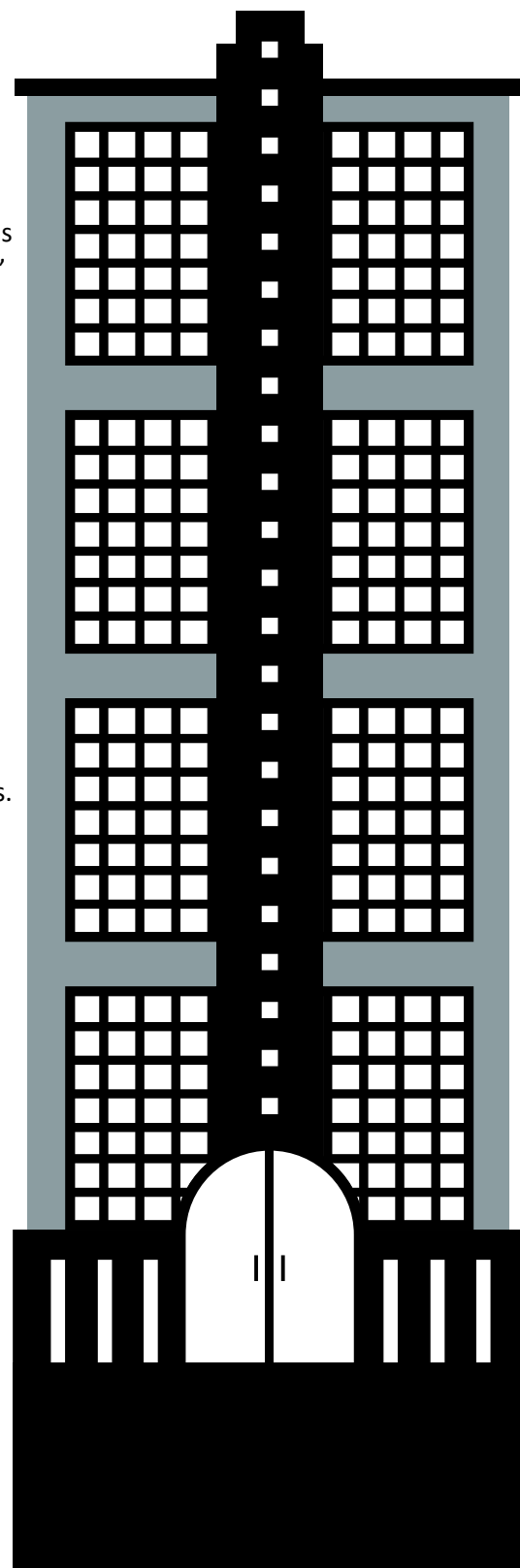
Example: How did that match up to your goal for him to pull up to standing by himself?

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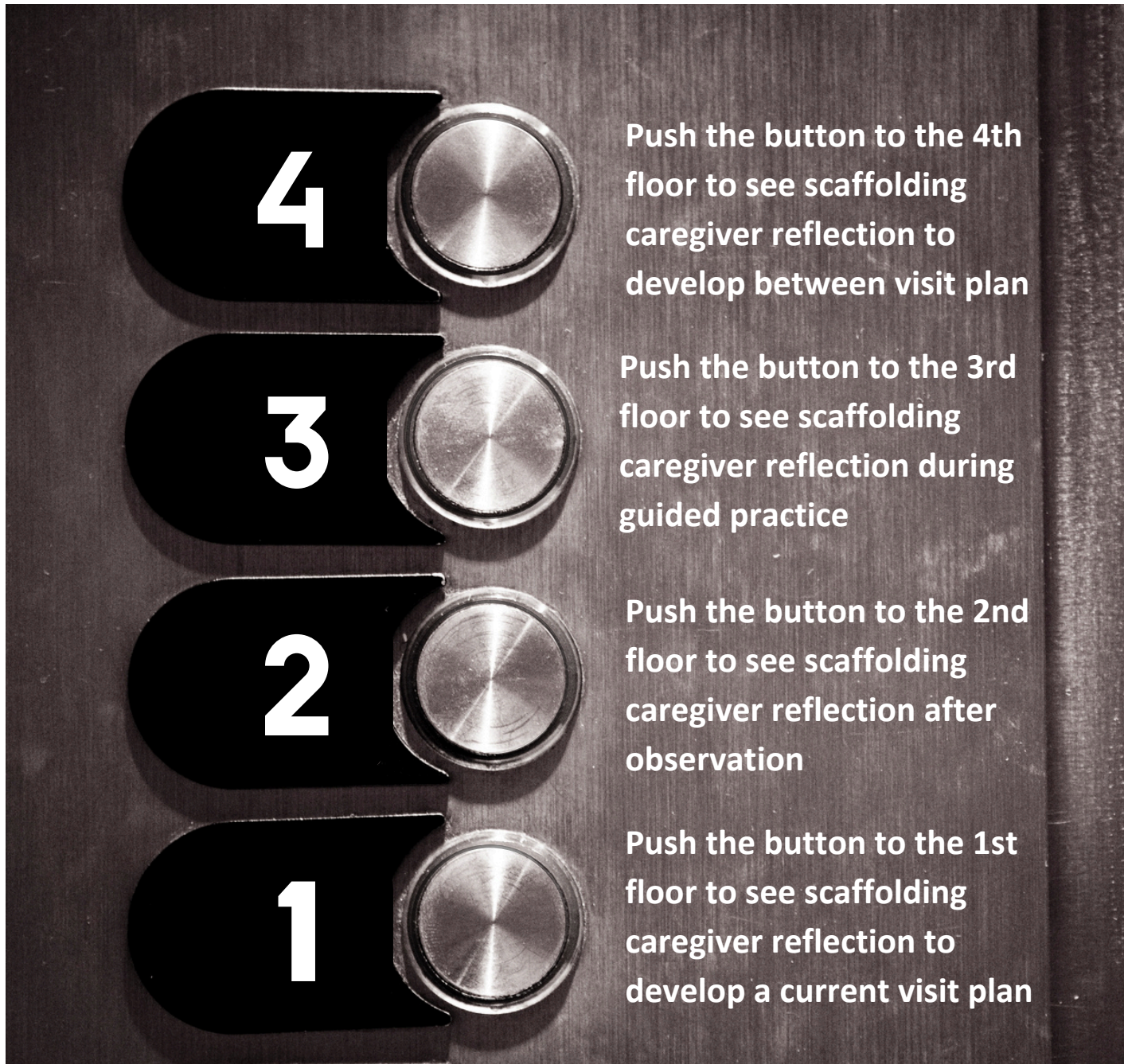
**Ground floor=Awareness:** Pose simple reflective questions to discover the caregiver's priority, what they know and have tried.

Examples: What's most important for you to work on today? How has that been going?

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# Visit each floor to see examples of Kentucky providers asking varied reflective question types that build on caregivers' insights and successes



For further reading on this topic, please see the following links:

- [Types of Reflective Questions](#)
- [5 At-a-Glance Reflective Questions](#)
- [A Framework for Relective Questioning](#)
- [Reflection: Buckets](#)