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Adult Social Care & Commissioning Reflective Supervision Toolkit

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Introduction

This tool kit comprises a suite of tools designed to help adult social care practice supervisors and supervisees develop and consolidate reflective supervision. The aim of the tool kit is to support supervisors and supervisees to move towards a more reflective style of supervision.

Supervision: A brief overview

‘Effective supervision is the cornerstone of safe social work practice. There is no substitute for it.’ (Laming, 2003)

High-quality supervision has long been viewed as a fundamental cornerstone and an integral element of social work practice.

The definition most widely used definition of supervision in social work practice is Tony Morrison’s: ***‘A process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another in order to meet certain organisational professional and personal objectives which together promote the best outcomes for service users.’*** (Morrison, 2005)

Morrison’s four functions of supervision

1. **Management** - ensuring competent/accountable practice and performance.
2. **Development** - facilitating continuous professional development.
3. **Support** – providing personal and emotional support to workers.
4. **Mediation** – engaging the individual with the organisation.

Morrison

In practice, the quality and consistency of supervision varies. In ‘good’ supervision, the process flows between Morrison’s four functions. However, delivery of supervision is frequently challenged by resource pressures and practitioners’ support and development needs can be overshadowed by performance measurement and management oversight.

Benefits of supervision

Benefits for supervisees

- ✓ Supervision is associated with increased job satisfaction.
- ✓ Staff feel that supervision improves their practice and helps them prioritise and manage their workload.
- ✓ Supervision can affect the extent to which employees believe an organisation values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing.

- ✓ Good supervision is associated with lower levels of practitioner stress, burn-out and greater staff wellbeing.
- ✓ An empowering supervisory approach helps practitioners feel empowered and increases their ability to make decisions.
- ✓ Supervision is particularly important for workers in the early stages of their career (NQSWs who had infrequent supervision were less likely to feel that they had a manageable workload, less likely to be engaged with the job and more likely to describe working conditions as poor).

Benefits for organisations

- ✓ Supervision is associated with improved job performance and improvement in workers' perceptions of their own levels of critical thinking in case analysis and planning.
- ✓ Supervision is associated with practitioners' commitment to an organisation and intention to stay.
- ✓ The quality of supervision and the supervisory relationship are often highlighted as important factors in promoting staff retention; supervision may be especially important for retaining workers with low self-efficacy.

Benefits for individuals and families who receive social care support

- ✓ There is some evidence that supervision can promote individual empowerment and participation, reduce complaints, and increase positive feedback.
- ✓ Reflective supervision helps support safe and proportionate decision-making and keep staff well. It is reasonable to hypothesise an impact on practitioners' ability to develop and sustain relationships of trust with service users and that better outcomes will follow.



Types of supervision

One-to-one supervision

Who's involved and who's accountable?

One-to-one supervision involves two people and is usually conducted face to face (but can be by video call). The supervisor is usually the supervisee's line manager but may be a senior practitioner or professional from another team. What's covered? There is an expectation that all employees will come with a prepared agenda to ensure that supervision is a two-way process. The Supervision Agenda includes the following areas for discussion:

- Wellbeing
- Review of actions and matters arising from previous supervision
- Performance
- Casework discussion
- Reflective case discussion
- Safeguarding/Complaints/Risks
- Learning and Development

What's needed?

Sessions should be pre-arranged, regular and take place in a confidential space. They must be prioritised; they should be moved or cancelled only in exceptional circumstances.

Agreed use of tools can support reflection.

Benefits

- Good one-to-one supervision:
- Provides consistency.
- Facilitates the development of a positive supervisor/supervisee relationship.
- Is the primary opportunity to review cases, practice issues and developmental needs.
- Is an opportunity to thank, praise and motivate staff.
-

Pitfalls

- One-to-one supervision can suffer from irregularity (through failure to prioritise) and lack of continuity (because of management changes or poorly outlined roles).
- There is often a preoccupation with process and performance (the management function), at the expense of reflective supervision.

Group Supervision

Group Supervision is the use of a group to implement part or all the responsibilities of supervision. This is what distinguishes it from other group activities such as team meetings. It can be used to complement one-to-one supervision or on its own. It is important to recognise that individual and group supervision are complementary practices; one should not take place at the expense of the other. Who's involved and who's accountable? Group supervision can be supervisor or peer led. Make-up of the group depends on the goals of supervision, but it can be used with a team (including very effectively with multiagency teams) or a group of peers (e.g., NQSWs or service managers). What's covered? Group supervision can be used for case discussion and planning or exploring team dynamics or a theme. Typically, groups may agree to supplement the professional development, support and mediation functions of supervision but keep the accountability (management) function within one-to-one supervision. Although many people are supported by group supervision, it may not be suitable for intentionally exploring personal and emotional issues.

What's needed?

Establishing a clear structure to ensure delivery of the different supervision functions and agreeing ground rules about behaviour at the start of each session are key to realising the full potential of group supervision. Contributory factors to successful group supervision include:

- A mutually agreed contract including purpose, focus and structure.
- Trusting relationships between participants and facilitator.
- Time to build relationships (particularly when working with temporary staff).
- Clear articulation of the presenting problem.
- Strong facilitation.
- Participants' commitment to the process.
- An emphasis on the quality of group supervision.

Benefits

Potential benefits of group supervision include the opportunity to:

- Reflect in depth on complex problems.
- Pool and apply knowledge and skills.
- Challenge individual perspectives (a group's diversity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and experience will provide different perspectives).
- Explore the skills, processes and dynamics needed in work with individuals and families.
- Provide a safe space to share feelings.
- Build relationships and reduce isolation.
- Develop a shared language, values and culture.
- Develops participants' understanding of themselves and the people they work with, increased staff confidence, energised practice and reduced dependence on the supervisor.

Pitfalls

- Without confident facilitation, groups can lose focus and lack challenge (e.g., lapsing into 'group think') or be dominated by a few loud voices.
- Groups can amplify dysfunctional team processes – such as anxiety about speaking out – and confuse boundaries of responsibility and structures. And time for individual needs or cases to be explored will be limited.

Ad hoc Supervision

Reflection happens all the time – in the car, at lunch, over the photocopier. It's about recognising that. Working with individuals and families involves dealing with unpredictable situations and there will be times when an issue needs to be discussed before a scheduled session. Supervisor availability to ensuring staff feel supported is essential and evidence shows how valued informal opportunities for reflection are. Supervisors and supervisees may discuss and make important decisions that impact on a case over lunch or on a shared journey, for example.

Benefits

The potential benefits of ad hoc supervision include that it is responsive and flexible and helps the supervisee feel supported.

Pitfalls

Potential dangers include developing actions without adequate reflection and analysis and challenges in how to record discussion and actions, with repercussions for worker development and decision-making. Also, being too available to supervisees can create dependency. Making best use of ad hoc conversations If an ad hoc conversation has been requested, supervisees can be encouraged to think through their concerns by first taking five minutes to consider the questions in Supervision Preparation Tool. This can also form the basis of the record. Sometimes this will be enough to help the supervisee resolve the issue on their own or hold on to it until their next planned supervision, promoting independent decision making and reducing supervisor dependency. If an ad hoc session is still required supervisees should try to identify the issue they would like support with.

Ad hoc supervision should also be recorded in the Case Supervision case notes, by the supervisee. Supervisors should carry out checks to ensure the content and accuracy of these notes.

What is reflective supervision?

'We need to foster resilience by providing staff with the scaffolding they need to get out there, work with the most vulnerable members of our society with the emotional intelligence and compassion that will make a difference. Relationships are at the heart of good practice and relationships must be at the heart of the way we supervise and manage as well'. (Wonnacott, 2013)

Return of the 'reflective practitioner'.

Evidence shows that social work practice over recent years has been dominated by a technical, rational approach to practice with the development and introduction of procedures, checklists and processes as a way of managing the increasing volume and complexity of the work. Because of this, the most common supervisory approach has been an instrumental one in which supervision focuses primarily on administrative/case management functions.

In recent years, there has been a resurgent understanding of the fundamental importance of relationships and strengths-based practice and in this context 'the reflective practitioner' has emerged as an alternative model of expertise' (Gibbs et al, 2014: 11).

Supporting reflective practitioners requires a different kind of supervision, which can provide:

- ✓ A space in which practitioners can build their capacity to think about and analyse complex situations.
- ✓ Containment for practitioners' emotional responses to their work.
- ✓ A means for practitioners to make use of their own experience and develop awareness of how their experience informs their practice.



Defining reflective supervision

Reflective supervision is above all a learning process in which the supervisor engages with the supervisee to:

- Explore a supervisee's practice and factors influencing their practice responses (including emotions, assumptions, power relations and the wider social context)
- Develop a shared understanding of the knowledge base informing their analysis and the limitations of their thinking, and
- Use this understanding to inform next steps.

There is no simple or magic formula for this complex task, what is important is that:




- Reflective supervision is driven by experiences of the learner.
- The supervisor provides the space and context for learning.
- The supervisor takes the role of facilitator rather than that of 'expert', thereby promoting ownership of decisions by the supervisee.
- Supervision is seen as part of an ongoing learning process.

Six principles of reflective supervision

1. To deepen and broaden workers' knowledge and critical analysis skills.
2. To enable confident, competent, creative and independent decision-making.
3. To help workers build clear plans that seek to enable positive change for individuals and families.
4. To develop a relationship that helps staff feel valued, supported and motivated.
5. To support the development of workers' emotional resilience and self-awareness.
6. To promote the development of a learning culture within the organisation.

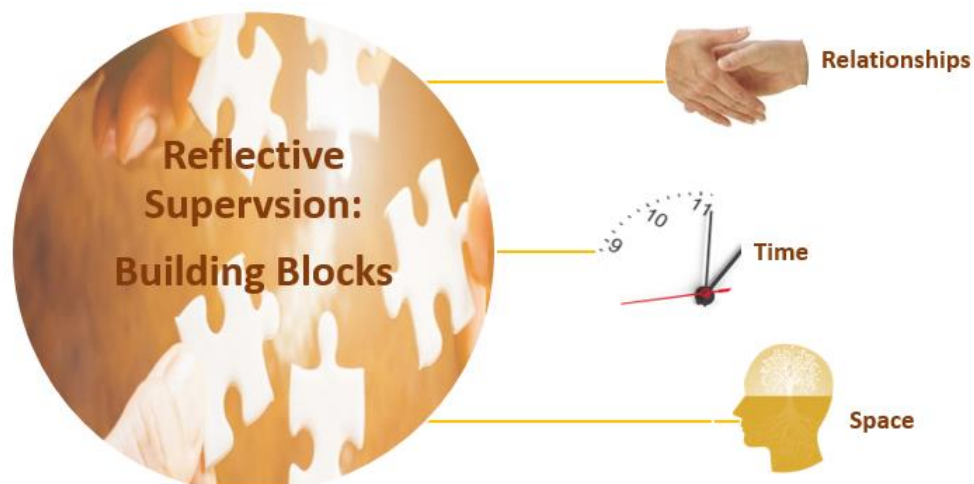
Asking effective questions and listening deeply

A supervisor's ability to ask questions that promote critical reflection and ownership of decision-making is essential for reflective supervision. Effective questions might be:

 Curious	 Strengths-based	 Solution-focused
Helps to avoid assumptions by trying to understand how the supervisee arrived at their point of view, even if we do not necessarily agree with it. Asking why a practitioner has chosen a course of action, or why a particular event occurred. Asking 'what else could this be?'	Asking how problems have been overcome previously and encouraging these 'solutions' to be done more.	Listening deeply to responses to such questions, both to what is and is not being said and to the emotion being expressed, is at the heart of both reflective practice and supervision.

Reflective supervision: The building blocks

Relationship



Critical reflection demands a supervisor-supervisee relationship that is trusting and challenging. Learning and change are facilitated by the support of people we trust in a safe environment where we can practise a new skill in psychological safety. To build a safe environment for learning, a supervisor needs to demonstrate genuine concern, empathy and respect, a willingness to suspend judgment, and to be comfortable with a practitioner's ambiguity.

What supervisees want from their supervisor:

- ✓ Good working professional knowledge of the field.
- ✓ Skills in coordinating work.
- ✓ Setting limits and manageable goals.
- ✓ Monitoring progress for frontline workers Creating a climate of belief and trust.

This relationship exists as part of a continuum of relationships between individual, family, practitioner, team and organisation. *'Front-line practitioners learn more about practice ... from the way their supervisor works with them than from discussions with their supervisor or formal training' (Hallberg and Dill, 2011).*

Time

Supervisors consistently raise the issue of pressure on time for supervision and critical reflection.

The following strategy can be used to maximise the use of supervision time:

- **Proportionate case discussion**

The Supervision Policy states that each supervision session should include discussion of all open cases with an appropriate amount of detail to ensure defensible decision making. To help with this, practitioners can be asked to 'RAG rate' their cases (rating cases red, amber or green, with red indicating priority cases) to prioritise full case discussion.

It is the responsibility of the supervisee to provide accurate and up-to-date information and for the supervisor to enquire and challenge so that appropriate actions can be agreed.

- **Preparation**

Asking supervisees to prepare for the session by using the **Supervision Preparation Tool** will also help and promote the supervisee's responsibility for their learning and can form the basis of the record.

Space

Creating a 'safe space' for learning needs to be:

- Psychologically safe: A relationship in which it is okay to experiment, be uncertain, unknowing and express emotions, where anxieties are acknowledged and contained, and dilemmas translated into doable tasks (with help provided to do tasks if needed).
- Physically safe: A place that's away from other people, interruptions and distractions and isn't overheard or overseen. Remote working and hot-desking arrangements in open plan offices may mean staff have limited access to 'physically safe' spaces.

The role of reflective supervision in promoting analysis and critical thinking

Why is analysis and critical thinking important?

Social Work involves dealing with complexity and uncertainty. Whilst this means professionals often cannot know the best course of action to take, they need to be able to make well-reasoned judgements about complex situations and understand the implications of decisions for the individual.

This involves analysing the sometimes limited, disparate or misleading information available and being prepared to revise judgements. Without analysis and critical thinking, practitioners are essentially gathering information rather than forming professional judgements.

Knowledge and Skills Statements

The Knowledge and Skills Statements for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors recognise the central importance of a culture of 'focused thinking' to confident analysis and decision-making, and the role of supervisors in helping to build that culture. They explicitly recognise that supervisors can promote the different and equally important kinds of thinking by:

- Using focused questioning to identify whether practitioners need to adopt a more reflective and curious approach or respond with greater pace.
- Consistently exploring a wide range of contexts (including family and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances).
- Generating multiple hypotheses that make sense of the complexity in which individuals and families are living.
- Ensuring that an individual's and their family's narratives are sought and listened to, and that relevant family members, are engaged in shaping plans and supported to carry them out.
- Helping practitioners to make decisions based on observations and analyses, taking into account the wishes and feelings of individuals and families.
- Promoting reflective thinking to drive more effective discussions so that reasoned and timely decision making can take place

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is about weighing up different options, interpretations and sources of information and being explicit about why one might be chosen over another.

Hypothesising

Trying out different interpretations of the information at hand – allows a practitioner to think about a range of possible meanings or ways of explaining what might be going on.

Characteristics of an analytical practitioner

The literature points to a number of attributes and skills that support critical, analytical and reflective thinking:

- ✓ Curiosity
- ✓ Open-mindedness
- ✓ The ability to manage uncertainty
- ✓ Being able to question one's own assumptions as well as those of others
- ✓ The ability to hypothesise
- ✓ Self-awareness
- ✓ Observation skills
- ✓ Problem-solving skills
- ✓ The ability to synthesise and evaluate information from a range of sources
- ✓ Creativity
- ✓ Sense making
- ✓ The ability to present one's thoughts clearly, both verbally and in writing.

What these skills and attributes underline is how important it is for practitioners not to jump to conclusions in order to try and make sense of complex, sometimes disparate and misleading case information.

Promoting analysis and critical thinking

Four key things have been suggested that should happen in supervision to support analysis and critical thinking. It should:

- ✓ Provide an opportunity for reflection.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for challenge.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity to test out ideas and hypotheses.
- ✓ Increase a practitioner's confidence in their own judgement.

Recording reflective supervision

Recording is an integral part of the services we provide to individuals and families and is an essential component of gathering information, analysis and decision-making and a means by which staff can justify, explain and be accountable for their actions.

Good reflective supervision can offer the chance of moving from a generalised response to one in which responses become tailored to individual needs. When done well and proportionately, recording can facilitate reflection rather than hinder it.

Defensible decision-making: showing our workings and recording uncertainty

The Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice Supervisors is clear about what is expected of supervisors in terms of recording. They should:

- Establish recording processes, provide the full analysis underpinning decisions, making sure the rationale for why and how decisions have been made is comprehensive and well expressed.
- If it isn't possible to follow how a practitioner reached a particular conclusion, it isn't possible to explain why a decision to follow a particular course of action was made. Professionals cannot be expected to know for certain which individuals are safe, and which are not but can be supported to make 'the best decision at the time with the information available.'

When deciding what to include in the supervision / case notes, it may help to draw on Kemshall's criteria for defensible decision-making. These are:

- All reasonable steps are taken.
- Reliable assessment methods are used.
- Information is collected and thoroughly evaluated.
- Decisions are recorded and carried through.
- Agency processes and procedures are followed.
- When making a decision, the test is: Did you act 'reasonably' to gather, appraise and apply relevant information?
- Did you follow the steps that someone in your position would be expected to?
- Did you record your workings out and the decision itself?
- And, crucially, did you then put the decision into effect?

Reflective Supervision Tools

Tool One: [Supervision Agreement](#)

Tool Two: [Supervision Preparation Tool](#)

Tool Three: [Reflective Supervision – Before, during and after](#)

Tool Four: [Reflective Supervision – Gibbs](#)

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Tool Seven: [Practice Observation Record](#)