Social work

Children's Workforce Development Council

Guide for supervisors

Newly Qualified Social Worker Pilot Programme 2009-2010

Foreword

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) exists to make a difference to the lives of children and young people, their families and carers through support for employers, those in the children's workforce and volunteers.

Children's social workers are a very important part of our workforce. They are key to ensuring that our most vulnerable children and young people are safe and able to prosper, and so it is very important that we all invest in their support and development.

One of our main initiatives for 2008 – 2011 is the development and implementation of the newly qualified social worker (NQSW) pilot programme. The pilot is designed to support NQSWs in their first year of employment as a social worker and to assist their employers to develop these key assets to the sector throughout this period.

A vital component of this support and assistance is supervision and, to help ensure that existing good practice in the field of supervision is maintained and built upon, we have commissioned this handbook. It specifically focuses on developing high-quality supervision which will support the NQSW and help deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

I hope you find this publication useful and that it helps you to build a world-class workforce that makes a difference to the lives of the children and young people in your care.

Jane Haywood

Jane Haywood
Chief Executive
Children's Workforce Development Council

Contents

Foreword 03

Introduction 08

Synopsis of the chapters 09

Style of this handbook 13

Chapter 1: The impact of supervision on practice and practitioners 15
Introduction 16
1.1 The importance of supervision 17
Activity: How important is supervision to me? 17
Activity: How robust is my organisation's supervision policy? 20
1.2 The impact of supervision 21
1.3 Linking supervision to outcomes 24
Activity: My own supervision history 29
Activity: What influences change? 31
1.4 Key knowledge and skills for supervisors 34
Activity: What do supervisors need to know? 34
1.5 Key messages from this chapter 37
1.6 Further reading 38

Chapter 2: From student to NQSW: understanding the journey 39
Introduction 40
2.1 Making the transition from student to NQSW 41
Activity: NQSW transition review 44
2.2 Understanding transition processes 46
2.3 Negotiating an effective supervision contract 49
Activity: NQSW supervision history exercise 51
Activity: 'Are we clear?' Supervision contract review 54
Activity: Rights and responsibilities toolkit 55
2.4 Structures for supervision 56
2.5 How to structure planned supervision sessions 57
Activity: NQSW supervision progress review sheet 58

2.6 Understanding professional development 61
2.7 What factors affect NQSW's capacity to use supervision? 62
Activity: Independence, dependence and scaffolding 64
2.8 Key messages from this chapter 66
2.9 Further reading 67

Chapter 3: Frameworks for supervision: an integrated model 68
Introduction 69
3.1 The 4x4x4 integrated model of supervision 70
3.2 The four functions of supervision 71
Activity: Delivering four functions of supervision 73
3.3 The four stakeholders in supervision 74
3.4 The four stages of the supervision cycle 78
3.5 The supervision cycle 81
Activity: The art of the good question: some practical tips 85
3.6 The supervisee cycle 87
Activity: A shared map 88
3.7 The four levels of reflection 89
3.8 Using the four levels in supervision 93
Activity: Practising reflection 95
3.9 Key messages from this chapter 97

Chapter 4: Supervising assessment work: underpinning knowledge 98
Introduction 99
4.1 The influence of supervision on assessment practice 100
4.2 The quality of analysis in assessment practice 105
4.3 Intuition and analysis 113
4.4 Features of a good assessment 115
4.5 Key messages from this chapter 119
4.6 Further reading 120

Chapter 5: Supervising assessment work: framework, tasks and tools 121
Introduction 122
5.1 Clarifying the purpose and focus of the assessment 124
Activity: The practitioner preparation tool 125
5.2 Pre-assessment reflection: reflecting on the worker's beliefs and values 127
Activity: Cultural review 128
5.3 Information gathering and multi-disciplinary collaboration 129
Activity: Focusing on experience (Appendix 3) 131
5.4 Exploring feelings and dynamics 132
5.5 Critical analysis 135
Activity: Using the resilience matrix (Appendix 5) 138
Activity: Focusing on analysis (Appendix 3) 138
5.6 Planning and reviewing 139
Activity: Supervisory assessment questions: a tool for interrogating the cycle 141
Activity: Supervising assessment practice: a self-evaluation tool for supervisors 147
5.7 Key messages from this chapter 148
5.8 Further reading 149

Chapter 6: Creating the secure environment for practice: emotion, power and anxiety 150
Introduction 151
6.1. What are emotions and why are they so important? 152
6.2 How emotional competence contributes to effective practice 154
Activity: Responding to emotion 159
6.3 Power and authority issues in supervision 160
Activity: Reflecting on power and authority in supervision 164
6.4 Creating a secure environment for supervision 165
6.5 The green cycle: the collaborative organisational environment 167
Activity: My team's strengths 168
6.6 The red cycle: the compromised organisational environment 169
6.7 Punching above your weight 172
Activity: Exploring the red cycle 173
Activity: NQSW supervision feedback form 174

6.8 Team strategies for creating a secure environment for practice **176**
Activity: Team audit (Appendix 7) **177**
6.9 Key messages from this chapter **180**
6.1 Further reading **181**

Appendices:
1. Core skills and knowledge for supervisors **182**
2. The four function checklist **184**
3. Questions around the supervisory cycle **188**
4. Chronology template **194**
5. Using the resilience matrix **196**
6. Supervising assessment practice: a self-evaluation tool **197**
7. Team audit **200**

Introduction

Supervision is a pivotal activity, as well as a key relationship for the practitioner throughout their career. However it is of particular importance during the early years of professional practice as newly qualified social workers (NQSW) and during the early professional development stage (EPD). It is over these first three years, or so, that the social worker develops the foundations of professional practice that will guide her/him for the rest of their career. The commitment, skills, knowledge and modelling of the supervisor during this formative period is the most significant external influence on the social worker's early progress.

The Guide has been commissioned by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) as part of their overall programme to improve the quality of supervision during both NQSW and EPD stages, and there is a companion Guide for the Supervision of EPD workers. Together they provide an integrated guide to the supervision of social workers over the first three years of qualified practice, and lay the foundations for social workers to progress towards advanced social work professional status. The material in these Guides is also the basis for the two national supervision training programmes that are being offered to NQSW and EPD supervisors.

This Guide has been written to help supervisors in their crucial role of providing high quality supervision for NQSWs and assisting them in meeting he requirements of the NQSW outcome statements. It presents core knowledge, frameworks and tools to guide and support your supervisory work with NQSW workers.

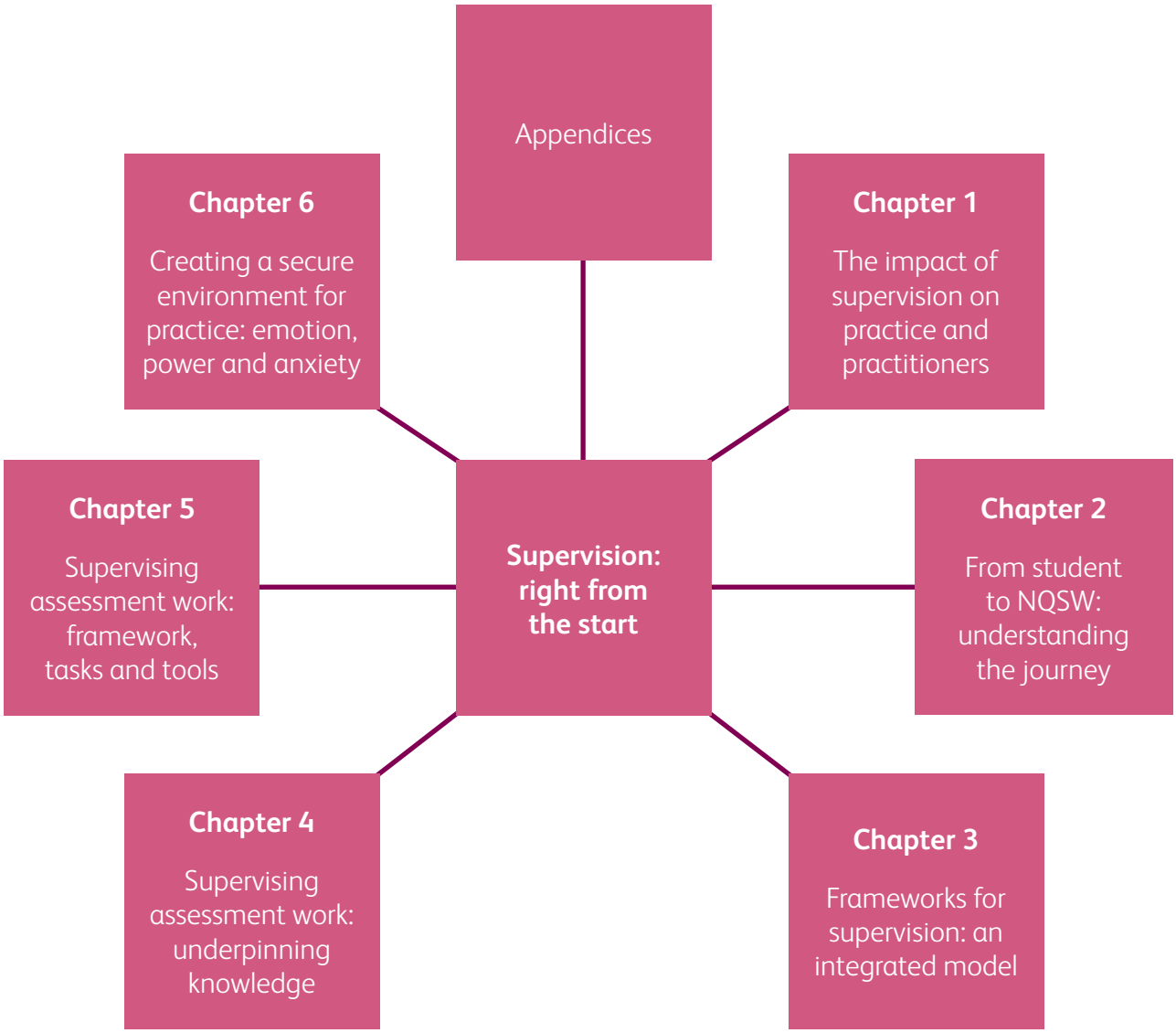
If we can support supervisors in delivering quality supervision from the start, we will see NQSWs who are ready and confident to progress to the EPD stage and beyond. This Guide, alongside the associated training programmes, represent a national opportunity to raise the profile, standard, and level of support of, and for supervision. It is about helping you to play your role in getting supervision right from the start.

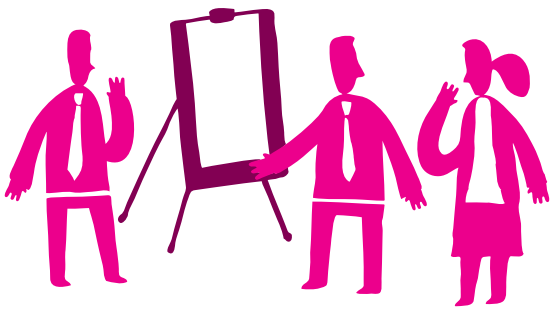
What does this handbook aim to do?

This is, above all, a practical guide. Even so it is a guide to a complex activity that can influence difficult decisions and sensitive services for the some of the most vulnerable children in our society. A clear theory and research base is as important for supervision as it is for practice. Therefore this guide has sought to find a balance between being straightforward while avoiding being simplistic, offering sufficient theory while remaining practical, and being positive while remaining realistic about the role and influence of the supervisor.

The CWDC knows that the readers will range from the very experienced and expert supervisor to those are new to the role of supervisor. Therefore the Guide offers a range of material from the basics of definitions, contracts and structures to more advanced material about working with staff on complex and challenging issues, in particular the supervision of assessment practice. In addition each chapter includes one or more appendices containing further tools and resources, and concludes with recommendations for further reading. One text of particular relevance to this material is the second edition of the 'Child's World: The Comprehensive Guide to Assessing Children in Need' edited by Jan Horwath (Jessica Kingsley 2009).

Synopsis of the chapters





What's inside?

Chapter 1

You don't have to read too deep into the social work literature to see that supervision is crucial in social work. But then again everyone's experience of supervision is unique. This chapter looks at what happens when supervision goes well, how good supervision contributes to good outcomes, the consequences of getting it wrong and identifies the skills and knowledge you need to be an effective supervisor. It describes seven links between supervision, practice and outcomes and identifies the key knowledge and skills supervisors need.

Chapter 2

What is it like to go from being a student to becoming a professional? Not easy. Supervision has a key role to play in helping this transition and seeing the newly qualified social worker move from novice to expert. This chapter looks at the challenges of transition and the importance of engaging newly qualified social workers in a positive supervisory process right from the start.

Chapter 3

Effective supervision is linked to good practice and of course good practice involves several stakeholders. So does supervision also need to take into account these stakeholders? Put simply: yes. But how and when? You will find out as this chapter takes you through the 4x4x4 model of supervision.

Chapters 4 and 5

Together look at the supervision of assessment practice, first introducing the theory and then moving onto the practical. Very little has been written about this crucial supervisory role and much of what you will read over the next two chapters is new in the way it brings together the theoretical base for practice with useful tools and exercises for supervisors and NQSWs. Chapter 4 discusses key findings about assessment practice and implications for supervision, whilst Chapter 5 presents a new 6 stage framework called the Supervision Assessment Cycle, together with practical tasks and tools for the supervisor to use at each stage.

Chapter 6

The chapters all highlight the importance of emotion and relationships in children's social care practice. This chapter focuses in more detail on the impact of emotion on practice, professional/power relationships, and the practitioner's own health and welfare. There are implications for supervisors in this, and the chapter considers the strategies you can employ to promote emotionally competent practice and the resilience of the practitioner. The underpinning assumption is that emotions are fundamental to communication, relationships and to problem solving. The chapter is therefore particularly relevant to NQSW outcome statements 7 on communication and 8 on relationships.

‘Do I need to read the handbook from start to finish?’

Some readers may be happy to start at the beginning and work through the book. Other may prefer a more individual route. Much will depend on your experience, training and confidence. So here are some suggestions:

If you are new to supervision:

These sections will be helpful in preparing you to supervise an NQSW and to negotiate an effective supervision contract:

Chapter 1
Chapter 2, sections 1 to 4
Chapter 3
Chapters 4 to 6 are dependent on getting the foundations in place, so read them once you feel confident with the earlier sections.

If you are an experienced supervisor:

If you are familiar with the 4x4x4 integrated supervision in Chapter 3 and interested in new material, go to:

Chapter 2, sections 1, 2, 5 and 6
Chapter 3, section 6
Chapter 4
Chapter 5

If you are interested in organisational/policy issues around supervision, go to:

Chapter 1, section 1
Chapter 6, section 4

If you are interested in differences between supervision and management, go to:

Chapter 3, section 2 and Activity: The Four Functions of Supervision.

Guide to Supervising EPD Workers

As many readers will also be supervising EPD workers, here is a brief look ahead to the contents of the EPD Supervision Guide. Whilst the two Guides have been issued separately, they are written as a continuous guide to the supervision of workers over the first three years of qualified practice.

Chapter 1

This chapter offers a number of ideas about the nature, stages and signposts along the journey to becoming an authoritative professional. It helps supervisors think about the differences between NQSW level work and the growing sophistication of the EPD worker in being able to process information and decisions more maturely.

Chapter 2

The supervision of EPD workers is about assisting workers to deal with complexity and risk. This is described in terms of helping the practitioner reflect on the interaction between family, inter-professional, organisational and supervisory systems. It also considers the role of supervision in risk assessment and management. It concludes by presenting four tools that supervisors can use to develop workers' analytic and planning skills: genograms, ecomaps, decision trees and safety planning.

Chapter 3

This chapter is about how the supervisor can identify and address early performance concerns, and thus prevent bad habits from taking hold. The idea of the 'blocked cycle' is presented which shows how workers can get 'stuck' in feelings, thinking or rushing around. Factors that can contribute to this are discussed, including ways in which supervisors can unwittingly contribute through the 'Set-up-to-fail' syndrome. The importance of accurate feedback is stressed, and a framework for a performance improvement conversation is presented. Finally the Coaching cycle is presented based on an example of a worker who has problems with report writing.

Chapter 4

This chapter focuses on supporting, sustaining and developing supervisors. Strategies are described at three levels: organisational, peer and individual. The benefits of peer support strategies, such as action learning sets, are emphasised. These have particular value in building a secure sense of supervisory identity, and in restoring supervisors' confidence following difficult events. Finally individual strategies are presented, with a discussion of the difficulties that supervisors may face in accessing support and development. The chapter concludes with the message that we all need a 'shoulder to cry on, someone to scratch our brain, and someone to kick our butt'!

Style of this handbook

Style of this handbook

The guide is designed to be a practical, accessible, authoritative and action-orientated text, containing information, frameworks, tools, activities and worksheets. Each chapter opens with a summary of contents and activities, and ends with a list of key messages, appendices with further tools/resources, and further reading.

Please remember that the successful use of any of the activities suggested depends on supervisors being clear and collaborative in their approach, and engaging the worker in a purposeful and safe process.

Many of the activities are designed for use by supervisors with their NQSWs, as well as involving the NQSW programme mentor and in some cases other team members.

Finally the Guide has been designed in such a way as to make it easy for you to copy tools, worksheets and any other material for your NQSW or indeed others whom you supervise.

Where else can this handbook be used?

The focus here is on supervising NQSWs but the underpinning models and approaches are applicable to the supervision of practitioners operating in a wide variety of social, health, criminal justice, and educational settings. Indeed this material has been extensively road tested across agencies and disciplines not only in the UK but also in several other countries.

Guiding beliefs

Six beliefs underpin this material:

1. Supervision is an inextricable part of the assessment planning and intervention process through which effective services are delivered. There are common processes in both the supervisory and practice domains.

2. Supervision is a process for integrating thinking and feeling and action.

3. The 'perfect' supervisor does not exist. What makes a difference is the 'good enough' supervisor who understands his or her own strengths and limitations, who cares about service users and staff, and who wants continuously to improve his/her supervisory practice.

4. Many supervisors punch above their organisational weight, frequently having a much greater influence on staff and practice than they may imagine.

5. The supervisor is the principle bridge for the practitioner's relationship with their organisation.

6. Early experiences of supervision have a powerful and sometimes profound impact on professional confidence, competence, identity and direction. Supervisors of NQSWs workers thus have a unique opportunity to influence the values, professionalism, practice and confidence of the worker.

Please note that where the terms practitioner and supervisee are used, these primarily refer to the NQSW role, although you may decide that the material is relevant for other staff that you supervise.

In summary, this handbook will support you by:

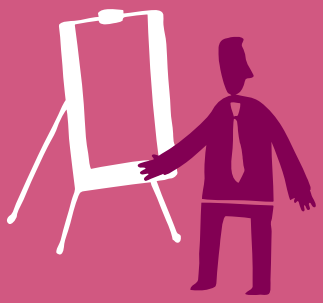
- Reinforcing and validating the critical importance of your role as the supervisor.
- Providing an overview of core supervisory models and frameworks.
- Offering frameworks to identify your current strengths and knowledge.
- Describing the key areas where supervisors make a difference.
- Providing tools that can assist you in supervising NQSWs.
- Helping you to reflect on your learning as a supervisor throughout this programme.

Finally, this handbook cannot:

- Be a substitute for a clear policy on supervision.
- Replace good-quality supervisory training.
- Be a substitute for the supervisor's need for, and entitlement to, good supervision.

It is the hope and spirit of this guide that the supervision of staff can be a joint venture, in which there is learning and development for both parties, however experienced each may be. With that in mind, bon voyage!

Chapter 1
The impact of supervision on practice and practitioners



This chapter:

1.1 Discusses why supervision matters and examines the policies driving it.

1.2 Considers the impact of supervision.

1.3 Describes the key factors that link supervision to outcomes.

1.4 Identifies the quality of assessment and quality of relationships with service users as the most important areas for supervision.

1.5 Identifies the knowledge and skills required for supervisors.

Activities

Activity 1: How important is supervision to me?
For supervisors.

Activity 2: How robust is my organisation's supervision policy?
For supervisors.

Activity 3: My own supervision history.
For supervisors and NQSWs.

Activity 4: What influences change?
Team exercise.

Activity 5: What do supervisors need to know?
For supervisors.

Activity 6: Readiness and preparation checklist.
For supervisors.

Introduction

You don't have to read too deeply into the social work literature to see that supervision is crucial in social work. Then again, you don't have to dig very deep to realise that each person's experience of supervision is unique. This chapter looks at what happens when supervision goes well and the consequences of getting it wrong. It identifies the skills and knowledge you need to be an effective supervisor.

1.1 The importance of supervision

Supervision is fundamental to the delivery of effective social care services, so much so that it can be considered an integral part of the service.

The concept is deeply embedded in the history and culture of social care, and is one of its defining features. Many argue that it is the social worker's most important helping relationship.

So in one sense, everyone knows what supervision means. But each of our experiences of supervision is different, and in practice we all have different perceptions of the definition and value of supervision. At different times and to different people it can be:

A place for reflecting and planning

A couch to lie on

A way to develop skills and confidence

A one-way process

A 'no-way' process

Activity 1: How important is supervision to me?

Think about your own experiences as a practitioner. Then rate the extent to which you think the quality of supervision affected your practice, on a scale of 1 to 5 where:

1 = supervision had little real impact on my practice.

5 = the quality of my practice (good or bad) was strongly related to the way I was supervised.

List three reasons for your rating:

1.

2.

3.

Notes

Comment

Most supervisors will have had varied experiences, all of which will have contributed to your beliefs and expectations about the importance or limitations of supervision. These beliefs may affect the way you approach supervision.

To deliver good supervision, you need to understand your beliefs and start to explore the beliefs that NQSWs are beginning to develop about supervision. We will return to this in Chapter 2.

What is driving developments in supervision now?

A good starting point is work in 1996 by the Association of Directors of Social Services, forerunner to the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Association of Directors of Adult Services, which identified supervision as one of five key factors for effective practice[1]. This was further highlighted in the 2003 Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Social Services[2], which observed:

Services which are most effective are those where front-line workers are supported in a clear managerial framework and where they are encouraged to develop 'reflective practice'. There is a clear and positive relationship between the quality of services and an effective management structure. The only way of delivering improving care services and delivering public sector reform is by involving the people who are going to deliver it – engaging with front-line staff, listening to them and service users.

The 2003 Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report[3] stated that supervision is a 'cornerstone of all good social work practice' and recommended that all staff working directly with children must be regularly supervised. The 2006 White Paper, Working Together to Safeguard Children[4], states that 'For many practitioners involved in day-to-day work with children and families, effective supervision is important to promoting good standards of practice and to supporting individual staff members' – a recommendation not restricted to children's social care staff.

Supervision has been highlighted in other social care areas too. The recent development of adult protection services and vulnerable adult policies have stressed the importance of supervision. The 2006 White Paper, Our Health, Our Care, Our Say[5], said that supervision is crucial in supporting and quality-assuring assessments and care packages, which in turn ensure that users retain maximum independence and control over their lives. In the development of integrated services, for both adults and children's services, supervision is seen as essential to support staff working in inter-disciplinary settings and to enable them to negotiate extended roles.

1 ADSS/NCH (1996) *Children Still in Need: Refocusing Child Protection in the Context of Children in Need*. ADSS/NCH London
2 Department of Health/SSI (2003) *Modern Social Services: A Commitment to Improve: 8th Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Social Services*. London. The Stationery Office
3 Laming H (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report*. London. The Stationery Office
4 *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children*. London. The Stationery Office
5 Department of Health (2006) *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*. White Paper. London. Department of Health

Government policy is equally clear about the future of supervision too. In 2005, Options for Excellence[6] set out a vision for 2020: a proud, professional and successful social care workforce that will be committed, well trained and properly supported to improve the lives for all users of social care services. The first priority listed in the Executive Summary is to ensure appropriate support from supervisors, managers and leaders.

Elsewhere, research has shown that effective supervision ensures that staff feel valued, prepared, supported and committed, and also reduces rates of staff turnover. As Gibbs[7] shows, the quality of supervision is a critical factor in staff retention. Lack of supervision can result in work overload, stress, sickness and absence, as well as a reduction in personal and professional competence and confidence. These factors, in turn, impact on the very qualities that users repeatedly stress as important: courtesy, willingness to listen, warmth, accessibility, clarity and knowledge.

Providing Effective Supervision, published by CWDC and Skills for Care in 2007[8], is probably the most significant national policy statement on supervision in social care ever issued. A positive supervisory culture has to be based on an effective, informed and live supervision policy. Without one, supervision occurs that is individual, inconsistent and disconnected from the needs of staff, users and organisations. If there's no clear framework, supervisees will feel less confident, secure and willing to engage in the process.

Providing Effective Supervision sets out the strong link between the quality of supervision and care for service users. Good supervision motivates and assists workers in building purposeful relationships, making professional judgements and providing an overview of practice.

The paper sets out clear expectations:

All organisations need to make a positive unambiguous commitment to a strong supervision culture through:

- A clear supervision policy with practices that support the policy.
- Effective training of supervisors.
- Strong lead and example by senior managers.
- Performance objectives for supervision practice in place for all supervisors.
- Monitoring of actual practice – frequency and quality.

6 Department for Education and Skills/Department of Health (2006) *Options for Excellence: Building the Social Care Workforce of the Future*. London. DH Publications

7 Gibbs J (2001) *Maintaining Front-line Workers in Child Protection: a Case for Refocusing Supervision*. Child Abuse Review 10, 323-335

8 Skills for Care (2007) *Providing Effective Supervision: Workforce Development Tool*. Skills4Care/Childrens Workforce Development Council

Activity 2: How robust is my organisation's supervision policy?

Thinking about the five elements of a robust approach to supervision listed above, ask yourself:

What are the strengths and gaps in your organisation's supervision policy?

What training and supervision are provided for supervisors?

To what extent do senior managers reinforce the importance of supervision?

How is the quality of supervision defined and monitored?

Notes

Comment

In light of your organisation's participation in the CWDC's programme of support for NQSWs, might this create opportunities to review and address any deficits in your supervision policy? If so, who are the other stakeholders and potential allies to take this forward? For instance, has your organisation reviewed its supervision policy in the light of the CWDC/Skills for Care document[9]?

9 Ibid

1.2 The impact of supervision

One of the most powerful experiences when training supervisors over the past 20 years has been hearing what happened when they took a supervision history from a member of staff. Time after time they reported that an individual's prior experience of supervision had a significant impact on his/her capacity, confidence and willingness to engage with supervision.

Positive experiences lead to supervisees who are confident about supervision and committed to the process, which is why it is so important to get supervision right early in a social worker's career.

What do supervisees tell us?

Supervisees report that the quality of the relationship with their supervisor is central to their experience, and is shaped by the supervisor's professional and personal qualities[10]. This relationship affects the supervisee's skills and knowledge development, professional growth and sense of support.

Indeed, supervisors or practice teachers often provide the first relationship a student has with a professional social worker, and can have a powerful influence in shaping the worker's professional identity.

The most effective supervision is focused on skills rather than therapeutic support or adherence to procedures[11]. Writers such as Quarto[12] have used the phrase 'supervisory working alliance' to describe a goal-process, located within an authority relationship in which control and conflict need to be negotiated:

The degree to which a supervisory dyad collaborates to achieve mutually agreed goals and tasks ... is a by-product of how control and conflict are negotiated.

One critical factor is the extent to which the parties share expectations and goals for supervision. Sloan[13] notes frequent discrepancies between what supervisors and supervisees believe to be important and what their supervisees think. For example, counselling supervisors believed it was important to give feedback about the worker's practice, while supervisees thought that a supportive relationship and help in developing skills and treatment planning had more significance.

10 Hensley P (2002) *The Value of Supervision*. The Clinical Supervisor 21(1), 97-110

11 Burns C, Holloway E (1989) In Kavanagh D, Spence S, Strong J, Wilson J, Sturk H and Crow N (2003) *Supervision Practices in Allied Mental Health: Relationships of Supervision Characteristics to perceived Impact and Job Satisfaction*. Mental Health Services Research Vol 5(4), 187-195

12 Quarto C (2002) *Supervisors' and Supervisees' Perceptions of Control and Conflict in Counseling Supervision*. The Clinical Supervisor 21(2), 21-37

13 Sloan G (1999) *Good Characteristics of a Clinical Supervisor: A Community Mental Health Nurse Perspective*. Journal of Advanced Nursing 30(3), 713-722

Where there is no agreement about the goals of supervision and competition over topics for discussion, the relationship can become strained. Not surprisingly, this occurs more often with experienced practitioners, and is best dealt with by experienced supervisors who can negotiate and define dependency and autonomy without being too controlling or structured. This underlines the need for supervisors themselves to make sure they receive proper induction into the role, good training and ongoing supervision.

What is valued and needed by supervisees depends on their stage of professional development, confidence and the particular situation. In general, however, inexperienced practitioners prefer relatively direct supervision[14]. This includes role play, rehearsal and observing the supervisor's own skills, characterising a coaching element to supervision.

To sum up, the evidence from supervisees suggests they value supervisors who:

- Are available.
- Have knowledge about professional tasks and skills.
- Can guide them through organisational processes.
- Can relate theory to practice.
- Have expectations and values that are similar to those of the supervisee.
- Provide a safe and supportive environment.
- Encourage professional growth and validate the supervisee's professional role.
- Serve as positive professional role models.
- Observe practice and provide feedback and praise.
- Teach skills and enable supervisees to observe the supervisor's practice skills.
- Provide specific ideas about intervention.
- Delegate responsibility.
- Communicate in a mutual and interactive style.
- Are from the same discipline.

14 Kavanagh D, Spence S, Strong J, Wilson J, Sturk H and Crow N (2003) *Supervision Practices in Allied Mental Health: Relationships of Supervision Characteristics to Perceived Impact and Job Satisfaction.* Mental Health Services Research Vol 5(4), 187-195

Barriers to good supervision

Unfortunately, supervisors' ability to meet these needs does vary widely. Many face considerable barriers, including gaps in supervision policy, training and support. These are compounded by capacity and the ability of supervisors to influence the organisation as a whole, as well as by the increasing pressure on first-line managers to manage both strategic and operational responsibilities.

The result is that supervisors are frequently giving what they are not getting. Many supervisors do an extraordinary job in difficult circumstances, but even so, it's not surprising that some poor supervision occurs. Watkins'[15] study of psychotherapy supervisors noted that those who had failed to successfully make the move from practitioner to supervisor were particularly affected, resulting in:

Rigidity, low empathy, low support, failure to track the supervisee's concerns, failure to teach or instruct, being indirect or intolerant, being closed, lacking respect for difference, lacking in praise and encouragement, and emphasising weaknesses. The worst experiences are characterised more by what they fail to provide than what actually occurs.

Failure to provide the necessary induction, training and on-going supervision for new supervisors was identified as a key reason for them not making this transition.

15 Watkins C (1997) *The Ineffective Psychotherapy Supervisor: Some Reflections about Bad Behaviors, Poor Processes and Offensive Outcomes*. The Clinical Supervisor 16(1), 163-180

1.3 Linking supervision to outcomes

There has been lots of research undertaken on the experiences of supervisees, and to a lesser extent those of supervisors. However, there has been much less research on the important question of how supervision affects the level of practice and the service user outcomes.

For too long, the assumptions that having supervision is a 'good thing' and that 'more supervision will result in better outcomes' have remained largely unquestioned. The question remains therefore: what are the links between supervision, practice and outcomes?

Wonnacott[16] conducted a small but significant study to explore the links between supervision, quality of practice and care for 12 families whose children's names had been placed on the child protection register. Thirteen social work supervisors and 14 practitioners were interviewed about their experiences of supervision. This was followed by a case-file analysis to track the impact of supervision of the 12 cases over a five-month period. Three types of supervision process were identified:

Active intrusive

This was the most common type, where the supervisor adopted a very direct approach to make sure the worker carried out key tasks. Its benefit was that the supervisor had a good knowledge of the worker's cases and could ensure that their work was done in accordance with agency procedures. However, little attention was paid to the worker's feelings, or to worker-user relations.

Active reflective

These supervisors were active and knew about the work being undertaken, but engaged supervisees in a collaborative and reflective process. Attention was paid to the worker's feelings and to the worker-user dynamic as an additional source of information. When the worker was struggling or had lost focus, these supervisors helped the worker reflect on what was going on, using challenging and user-focused questions. This included the supervisor observing the worker's relationship with the family to gain an accurate assessment of the workers' strengths and limitations.

Passive avoidant

This was a relationship where the supervisor regarded the practitioner as being competent, and left it up to her/him to decide if and when contact with the supervisor was required. Although this left the worker in control at one level, the supervisor has effectively abandoned her/him, and therefore the agency was unable to take responsibility for their work. If things went wrong, the worker, supervisor, users and agency were all vulnerable.

16 Wonnacott J (2003) *The Impact of Supervision on Child Protection Practice - a Study of Process and Outcome.* University of Sussex. M Phil unpublished

Active intrusive	Active reflective	Passive
Proscriptive	Collaborative	Laissez-faire
Knows the cases	Knows the cases	Cases not known
Task and procedure	Task and process	Supervisee-led
Assessment of supervisee's tasks and output	Overall assessment of supervisee's competence	Lack of assessment
Checking up	Reflection and challenge	Avoidant
Directive	Developmental focus including emotional competence	Collusive

Table 1: Three types of supervisor styles

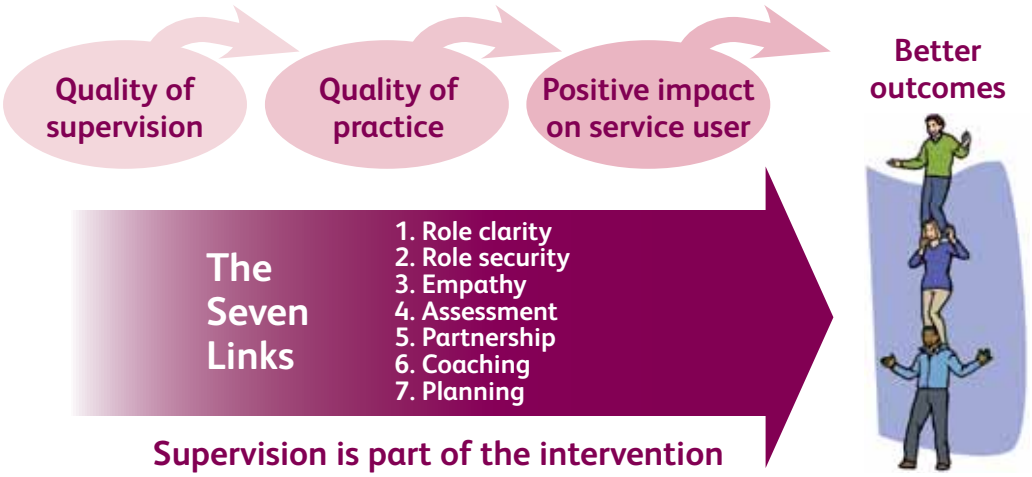
In summary, Wonnacott found that the strongest links between supervision and good outcomes were when the supervisor had an accurate assessment of the worker's knowledge and skills, and had the emotional intelligence to help the practitioner address any areas of weakness.

The message from the research is that establishing a supervisory working relationship is an important condition for supervision to make a difference to practice. In addition, the supervisor must have a good assessment of the worker's skills and be able to influence the worker's practice through observation, feedback, modelling and developing the worker's skills, intervention ideas and knowledge.

The supervision outcome chain

Drawing on these studies and the theoretical literature, we can now begin to build a model for effective supervision. It has seven key elements linking the quality of supervision to the quality of practice, the impact of this on the lives of services users.

Fig 1: The supervision outcome chain



Let's look at each link individually, how it impacts on the supervisor/NQSW relationship and the interaction between the NQSW and service-user.

The seven links

1. Role clarity

This starts with the supervisor being clear on his/her role. For the practitioner, supervision provides the opportunity to clarify their role and responsibility, or to re-focus when there has been confusion or conflict over their role. For the NQSW, the transition from their previous student role and identity to their new role is a major task. Hence, it is very important that the supervisor is clear about what is and what is not expected of the NQSW. In turn, the practitioner needs to be clear about their role with the user and to help the user to clarify their role in working with the service provider.

2. Role security

Practitioners need to not only be clear about their role but also feel secure in it. Role security comes from a combination of knowledge, skills, experience and support. For NQSWs, who lack experience in their role, it is essential that anxieties and doubts can be raised and resolved, providing a secure base from which they can practice effectively.

Role security also depends on the NQSW being given an appropriate workload at the appropriate level. In turn, the practitioner's clarity, composure, knowledge and responsiveness enable the service user to develop confidence and trust in the practitioner. NQSWs who are also young may face challenges from users about the extent of their life experience or parenting experience.

3. Emotional competence and empathy

The supervisor's empathy and emotional capacity create a secure and collaborative working relationship. This allows the supervisee to develop sufficient trust to be open about their doubts, feelings and mistakes as well as to take risks, accept new challenges and take the initiative. For the NQSW, there may be anxiety about revealing weaknesses, or a fear that they should know about this from college.

This can manifest itself through inconsistent presentation to the supervisor and new colleagues as they shift between overconfidence and a lack of confidence.

In turn, the practitioner's empathy and understanding enable vulnerable and anxious service users to be open about their needs and reveal the real nature of their concerns. In particular, empathy helps the user to talk about emotional issues – for instance, experiences of loss or trauma – or moral issues, such as a drinking problem or a parent's approach to boundaries and sanctions for their children.

4. Accurate observation and assessment

The three previous elements establish the clarity, security and collaborative approach in which the supervisor can make and share an accurate assessment of the worker's knowledge and skills. This is the basis for the future development of the worker through supervision – if this hasn't been established, the worker cannot be open with the supervisor and the supervisor's assessment is unlikely to be accurate. For NQSWs, the supervisor's assessment will be based on the 11 outcome statements, and will need to include observations of the worker's practice.

In turn, the practitioner who can explain the purpose and process of assessment clearly and engage openly with the service user will create a more accurate assessment. In addition, this approach to assessment is much more likely to lead to the resulting plans being shared between colleagues.

5. Partnership and power

The clarity of the supervisor's role, collaborative approach and accurate assessment of the worker will inevitably result in an appropriate level of supervision and control. It should be neither collusive nor punitive, and will mature as the worker develops in confidence and knowledge. This is particularly relevant for the NQSW whose level and scope of case responsibility should be increasing during their first year of employment.

In turn, the practitioner will be clear with the service user about their authority and its limits, and will be able to establish a suitable level of partnership reflecting their assessment of the needs, strengths and risks in the case.

6. Coaching

The supervisor plays a key role in developing the worker's practice skills. This occurs through a combination of modelling, practice observation, feedback, reflection, problem solving and knowledge enhancement.

However, practice skills are developed not only through the supervisor but also through the modelling, mentoring, shadowing, co-working and feedback that occurs in a healthy and collaborative team setting. The skill for the supervisor lies in creating the opportunities for these peer-practice learning situations while helping the NQSW identify what they are learning from these experiences.

In the same way, the worker has to build the user's skills, strengths and coping capacities through practical problem-solving work. At times, the worker may act as a coach, for instance in working on parenting issues, using observation, providing feedback, practical advice, teaching child management strategies or other techniques to grow their skills.

7. Planning

The final link is planning. The supervisor can only develop timely and appropriate supervision plans if they are based on the earlier stages. For the NQSW, this is particularly important in organising, targeting and planning activities designed to help achieve the 11 outcome statements.

In turn, the practitioner uses supervision as a place to analyse the needs, strengths and risks of their cases, and to identify priorities and plans to address these issues. The worker can then involve service users in developing plans, and in monitoring and reviewing their progress towards agreed goals that improve their lives.

Activity 3: My own supervision history

1. Write out a list of your previous supervisors. These may include significant figures outside your current profession, such as previous managers, mentors or teachers.

2. Beside each name, make a brief note about their impact on you, particularly when you were a student or an NQSW. Were they helpful or not to your development, and in what ways? Think about whether factors of gender, race, etc. were significant.

3. Identify which aspects of their style, focus, practice, understanding, knowledge, skills, values, use of authority, empathy or any other factors impacted on you.

4. Consider how the way you were supervised impacted on:
   a. Your practice with users.
   b. Your team and colleague relationships.
   c. How you used supervision (or not).
   d. Your confidence.

5. Compare these factors with the seven links described previously.

6. Finally, to what extent is your current approach as a supervisor influenced by these experiences? What good models are you seeking to apply? What bad models are you seeking to avoid?

Notes

Comment

Almost all supervisors who complete this exercise agree with the statement that 'previous experiences of supervision have a powerful and shaping influence on current attitudes and approaches to supervision'. Some individuals supervising NQSWs may not have received the level or consistency of supervision that is increasingly required, especially within the NQSW programme. However, this can often trigger a determination to offer their own staff high-quality supervision. The CWDC Programme of Support for NQSWs, together with the additional mentoring support and this handbook, provide the means to develop and strengthen their supervisory skills.

Note: This exercise can equally be undertaken with an NQSW, even though they may only have had a few supervisors. An early reflection on their experience of supervision can help them think about what they find helpful and about how they approach and use supervision. We will return to this in Chapter 2.

McKeown's Four Change Factors: implications for supervision

Wonnacott's core findings concerned the importance of the supervisor having an accurate assessment of the worker's competence and having good interpersonal skills to assist the worker. These findings are given further support by McKeown's[17] research on change.

In a major review of what works in family support services for vulnerable children, McKeown found that four main factors accounted for change. These were:

- 40% characteristics of the user (IQ, history, socio-economic status and social support).
- 30% worker relationship with the user, especially empathy, goal setting and planning.
- 15% method of intervention, for example, family therapy or parental education.
- 15% degree of hope verbally expressed by the user about change, for example, 'This time I will kick my drugs habit.'

17 McKeown K (2000) *What Works in Family Support with Vulnerable Families*. Dublin. Department of Health and Children. Also at www.dohc.ie/publications/?year=2000

Hence the combination of assessment – understanding the characteristics and situation of the user – and establishing an empathic and structured relationship account for 70% of the change effort. Only after a clear assessment has been undertaken does choice of method become significant. Verbal expression of hope is also seen to play a very modest role – a factor that less-experienced staff may miss.

This suggests that the two most important areas for the supervisor to focus on are:

- The quality of the worker's assessment knowledge and skills.
- The worker's ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with service users.

Activity 4: What influences change?

This is a team activity based on McKeown's Four Change Factors:

7. Explain to your team McKeown's Four Change Factors, but do not reveal the percentages at this stage.
8. Invite your staff to estimate the respective percentage influence of each factor (make sure the totals add up to 100%).
9. Invite staff to compare their estimates.
10. Ask participants to share their scores and record these under each of the four factors. This usually reveals considerable variation. Explore how people have arrived at their percentages.
11. Next reveal the true percentages, and ask those who scored correctly (or nearly correctly) why they rated the items as they did.
12. Explore what the consequences might be if supervisor and supervisee or two co-workers have very different percentages, for instance in drawing conclusions from an assessment.

Notes

Comment

This activity is both fun and educational. Typically, groups over-score on the worker-user relationship and under-score on the characteristics, in some cases scoring as low an average as 20%. Exploring why this might be makes for an interesting discussion. Low scores on characteristics suggest that despite the number of assessment frameworks and requirements, some workers rely on instincts rather than the facts of the user's situation and context.

There are clear implications for supervision here. For instance, those who score very high on characteristics and low on the worker-user relationship will look at the same assessment information very differently from those who score the opposite. The former will tend to over-emphasise static factors such as past history which cannot be changed, whilst the latter will place too much emphasis on their relationship with the user. One may be overly pessimistic about the chances of change, the other overly optimistic.

Less experienced workers, such as NQSWs, often over-score on the user's verbal hope, failing to make the distinction between verbal hope and efficacy. Finally, you should consider that these findings apply not only to clients/service users but also to staff, whether they are practitioners or supervisors. It suggests that it is our underlying characteristics (emotional, moral and relational skills) rather than our technical skills that are likely to have the greatest influence on our performance.

The collaborative supervision cycle

All the evidence we have explored so far in this chapter points towards a collaborative supervision cycle in which supervision reinforces good practice, which in turn reinforces good supervision.

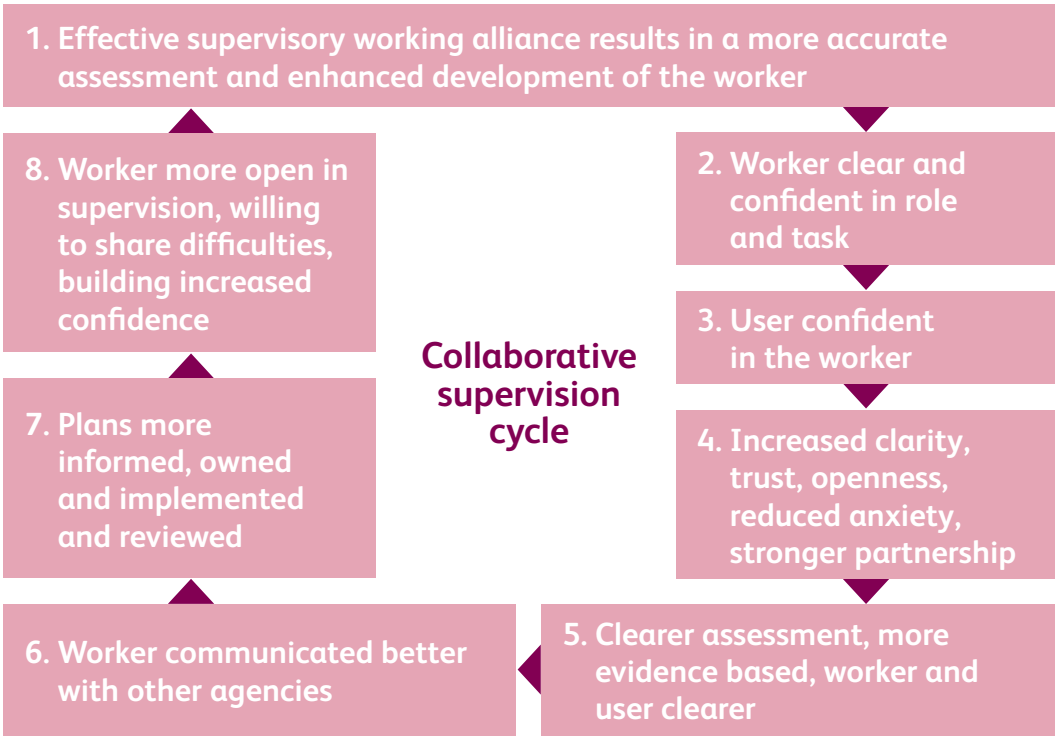


Fig 2: The collaborative supervision cycle

Contrast this with the compromised supervision cycle in which poor supervision or lack of supervision reinforces poor practice.

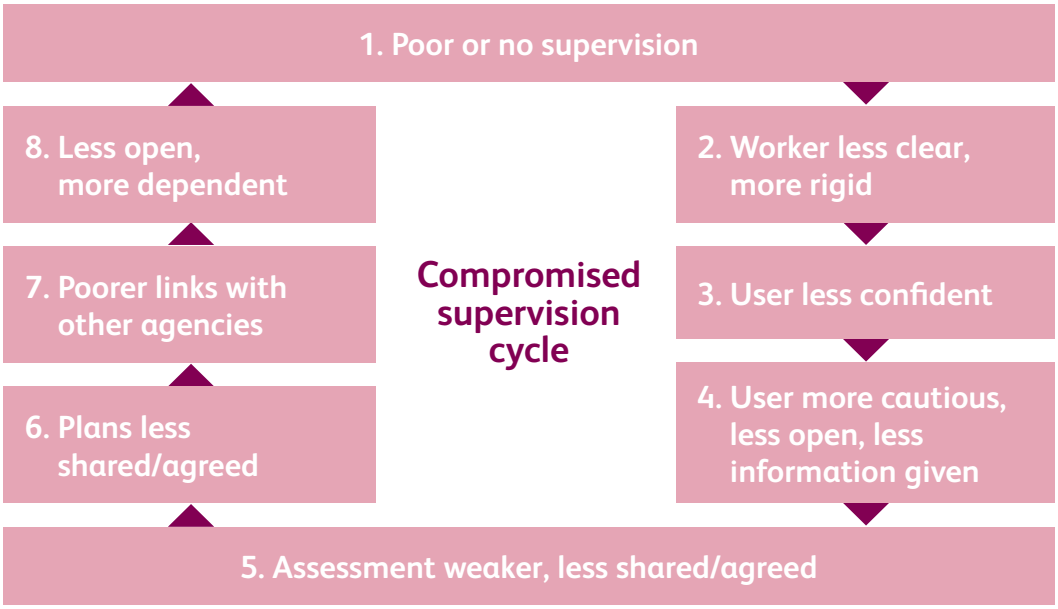


Fig 3: The compromised supervision cycle

Both cycles show that clarity and confidence have a powerful impact on the quality of the worker's relationship with the user as well as on their observation and assessment of the user's situation. These core processes affect two further processes: the worker's communication with other agencies, and the user's engagement in the planning process.

Underlying these cycles are the powerful connections that exist between clarity, power, engagement, communication, planning and reflection. Where these are aligned with others in a committed and shared purpose, people can discover new skills and confidence.

1.4 Key knowledge and skills for supervisors

Supervision is a complex and multi-faceted set of activities requiring a range of organisational, professional and interpersonal knowledge and skills. These were usefully summarised nearly 20 years ago by Richards and Payne[18], who stated that supervisors required:

- Knowledge of the agency's functions, policies, resources and constraints.
- Professional judgement regarding risks, needs and resources of service users.
- Knowledge about human behaviour and ambivalence.
- Capacity to use authority, recognising the different sources of authority and power.
- Recognition of the processes of change, both for individuals and organisations.
- Capacity to work with those processes.

The CWDC's Providing Effective Supervision document puts these ideas into a modern performance management context, and specifies three areas of competence for supervisors, each of which is supported by a number of performance criteria:

- Implementing supervision systems and processes.
- Developing, maintaining and reviewing effective supervision relationships.

Activity 5: What do supervisors need to know?

Appendix 1 describes the three core areas of knowledge for supervisors, namely legislation policy and guidance, organisational management and managing human resources.

1. Where do your strengths and gaps lie?
2. Which areas might be particularly important in supervising NQSWs?
3. How might those gaps be filled for you?

Notes

18 Richards M and Payne C (1990) *Staff Supervision in Child Protection Work*. London. National Institute of Social Work

- Developing, maintaining and reviewing practice and performance through supervision.

Finally, here are five supervision outcomes that are particularly important within the CWDC Programme of Support for NQSWs:

- The supervisor engages and maintains the NQSW in a purposeful and supportive supervisory working relationship, underpinned by a negotiated supervisory contract.
- The supervisor develops and reviews an evidence-based assessment of the NQSW's professional strengths and areas for development, and identifies any aspects causing difficulty.
- The supervisor plans, delivers and reviews supervisory interventions that assist the NQSW in progressing towards achieving the 11 outcome statements.
- The supervisor models positive professional and child-centred attitudes, practices and skills.
- The supervisor reflects on and reviews their own experience and learning from participating in the pilot CWDC Programme of Support for NQSWs.

Supervisors need a combination of organisational and professional skills as well as process and interpersonal skills if they are to negotiate, maintain, review and develop effective supervisory systems, relationships and processes.

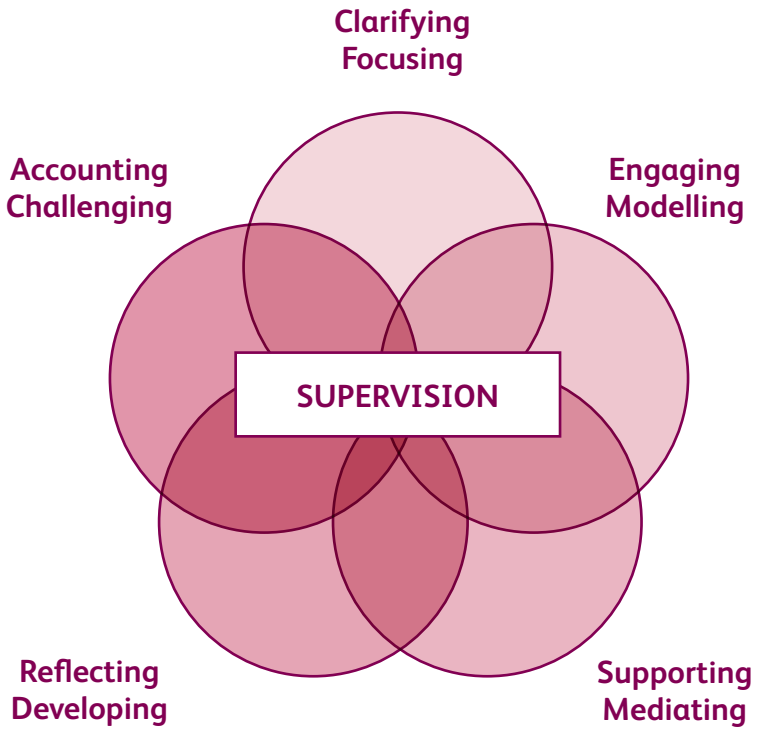


Fig 4: Skills needed by supervisors to deliver outcomes

Readiness and preparation checklist

Thinking about the contents of this chapter and your own work context, please rate your level of readiness on a scale where:

0 = not at all
1 = partly
2 = fully

1. How clear am I about the requirements of the NQSW programme on:
   a) the NQSW
   b) the supervisor
   c) the line manager
   d) the mentor?

2. What concerns do I have about participating in this programme?

3. Who can best assist me to clarify or resolve the above?

4. What do I hope to achieve or develop through participation in this NQSW programme?

5. What do I want to offer the NQSW from my own positive supervision experiences?

6. What do I want to avoid passing on from my supervision experiences?

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, you should have an understanding of the importance and impact of supervision and of the model that links supervision, practice and outcomes.

While the supervisory relationship is the bedrock, it is not enough on its own. Effective supervision depends on the supervisor's ability to use the relationship to make an accurate assessment of the practitioner's strengths. They can then translate this into a plan for developing the NQSW's practice knowledge, skills and confidence.

The delivery of this plan cannot and should not rest on the supervisor's shoulders alone but should involve your team members, the programme mentor and your own line manager. Even so, it is the supervisor who is key to targeting and coordinating the NQSW's practice development activities. It is also you as the supervisor who, above all, provides the NQSW not only with supervision but also with the leadership of their practice.

1.5 Key messages from this chapter

Supervision is integral to the delivery of effective services, and is part of the intervention.

Activity 1: 'How important is supervision to me?'

Supervision needs to be embedded into the organisation and underpinned by a robust supervision policy and development framework.

Activity 2: 'How robust is my organisation's supervision policy?'

The quality of the supervision relationship is critical and needs to be both supportive and goal-focused.

Seven key features link supervision and outcomes: role clarity; role security; emotional competence; accurate assessment; partnership; coaching; and planning.

Accurate assessment and purposeful relationships account for nearly three-quarters of the change effort.

Activity 4: 'What influences change?'

How supervisors/supervisees approach supervision is strongly determined by previous experiences of supervision and management.

Supervisors need knowledge and skills about agency and professional functions and standards; professional judgement; human behaviour and ambivalence; the capacity to use authority appropriately; and the processes of change.

Activity 5: 'What do supervisors need to know?' and readiness checklist

Notes

1.6 Further reading

Providing Effective Supervision, CWDC and Skills for Care.

This document can be downloaded at: www.skillsforcare.org.uk – type in 'providing effective supervision' and follow the orange link. It offers a number of supervision policy examples which would be useful to look at in the context of following activity.

McKeown's report *What Works in Family Support Services for Vulnerable Families* can be accessed via:
www.dohc.ie/publications/family_support_services_for_vulnerable_families.html

Chapter 2:
From student to NQSW: understanding the journey

This chapter:

2.1 Considers the issues involved in making the transition from student to NQSW.

2.2 Presents two frameworks for understanding this transition process.

2.3 Outlines a process for negotiating an effective supervision contract.

2.4 Presents structures for supervision.

2.5 Provides a framework about the stages of professional development.

2.6 Explores factors affecting the capacity of NQSWs to use supervision, including dependence and independence.

Activities:

Activity 1: NQSW transition review framework.
Joint supervisor and NQSW exercise.

Activity 2: NQSW supervision history exercise.
Joint supervisor and NQSW exercise.

Activity 3: 'Are we clear?' Supervision contract review.
For supervisor, NQSW, mentor.

Activity 4: Rights and responsibilities toolkit.
Joint supervisor and NQSW exercise.

Activity 5: NQSW supervision progress review sheet.
Joint supervisor and NQSW exercise.

Activity 6: Independence, dependence and scaffolding.
For supervisors.

Introduction

What is it like to progress from student to professional? Not easy. Supervision has a key role to play in helping this transition and seeing the newly qualified social worker move from novice to expert. This chapter looks at the challenges of transition and where supervision comes in.

2.1 Making the transition from student to NQSW

The transition from student to qualified practitioner is one of the most significant and challenging changes that any professional makes. It is a crucial stage in professional socialisation, one where individuals acquire and integrate into their lives the knowledge, behaviours, skills, attitudes, values, roles and norms of their profession[19]. It involves not only their professional role (what they do) but also their sense of professional and personal identity (who they are).

We know from research in social work[20], education and nursing that newly qualified professionals suffer significant stress during their first year of work. We also know that a lot has been done to improve the prospects for social workers, including establishing the CWDC, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and other workforce development initiatives. Even so, this transition will always be challenging and complex.

Ten transition factors

This section looks at ten factors that influence the transition from student to NQSW. Broadly speaking, they fall into three main stages: separating, joining and integrating. It's easy to think of these as a sequence; however, in reality each NQSW's journey is unique. Stages overlap and are continuously renegotiated. It is a process that continues throughout one's career.

Separating

1. Experience of the training course

The quality and experience of the training course will have a significant impact on the confidence levels of the new worker. Studies have found students to be anxious about how well prepared they felt, with only half feeling 'adequately prepared' and only a third feeling 'well prepared'[21]. The quality of placements is particularly important, especially if the NQSW's first job is not in the same area of work as their major placement.

The quality of teaching is another factor, as is the strength of the links between teaching and placement opportunities. Strong partnerships between employers and universities, in which service users, practitioners and managers contribute to the teaching are essential. This not only provides a solid knowledge base but also helps the student develop more realistic expectations about being a qualified worker.

19 MacIntosh J (2003) *Reworking Professional Identity*. Western Journal of Nursing Research 25(6) 725-741

20 Marsh P and Triseliotis J (1996) *Social Workers: Their Training and First Year in Work*. In Connelly N (ed) *Training Social Services Staff: Evidence from New Research*. National Institute for Social Work 4: 54

21 Matthias-Williams and Thomas in Dougherty R (2007) *Exploration of the Implementation of the Assessed Year in Employment*. Research report. MSc in Advanced Social Work. Universities of Ulster and Queens

2. Loss of student role

The change from student to qualified employee involves simultaneous transitions. These include the loss of student role, tutor and sometimes additional support; separation from social group; loss of social role and sense of belonging; and possibly also relocation of home and family. For the social work trainee, the experience is different, as the NQSW year is designed to help smooth this transition, but it is still full of challenges.

Joining

3. Motivation

The individual's motivation and commitment to a particular type of work, and their preparation during the application process, all play a role in making a smooth transition. The moral and emotional demands of social work are considerable, and for any individual there are types of work for which they are more or less suited.

4. Induction

Good induction is crucial – but perceptions about what constitutes an effective induction can vary depending on whether the process is corporate or departmental, and on who one asks. In one study, 91% of managers stated that induction had taken place, but only 58% of workers said the same. Indeed, in general, managers offer a more optimistic picture than workers[22].

5. Clarity and appropriateness of expectations

The NQSW encounters three sets of expectations: those of the employer; the NQSW programme; and the GSCC code of conduct for registered social workers. Much hinges on how the term 'qualified' is interpreted. Research on the assessed year of employment in Northern Ireland[23] found that there was much uncertainty and variation about expectations regarding workload and levels of responsibility. Questions arose about the difference between protected and managed case loads, and when the NQSW should take the lead in cases.

There is a need for clarity on these issues as well as on the difference between shadowing, assisting and co-working in relation to tasks such as recording and assessment work.

6. Team support

As social beings, work fulfils some of our needs for belonging, affection, esteem and recognition, all of which help shape our sense of identity. The search for acceptance is a significant challenge when entering a new workplace, especially for NQSWs trying to establish their reputation as a qualified worker.

22 Claxton G (1988) *Live and Learn: An Introduction to the Psychology of Growth and Change in Everyday Life.* Milton Keynes. Open University Press

23 Matthias-Williams and Thomas in Dougherty R Ibid

To gain acceptance, newcomers have to immerse themselves in the culture and rules of their new community[24]. Managing this is significantly affected by the support, professionalism and stability of the team. Those teams with a strong learning culture, that involves an organisational ethos committed to supporting the learning of others, will help this process most. Where there are several NQSWs in a department, bringing them together to share and process their experiences will also be an important source of support.

Integrating

7. Entry shock

The initial period of work for the NQSW will always be a testing one, and some may experience a sense of shock as they face the complexity, pace, newness and pressures of their new workplace.

The pressures and risks involved in working in statutory children's social care place particular demands on the new worker. This impact comes not only from the external realities of the workplace, but also from expectations, hopes or anxieties that the NQSW brings to the role. The greater the mismatch between expectation and experience, the greater the entry shock.

8. Supervision

How well the NQSW works their way through this shock will depend largely on the guidance and support they receive, both in supervision and from the team. In the opening chapter, we identified the seven key elements of effective supervision. Yes, a range of people and processes play a part in developing the NQSW, but the role of the supervisor as guide and coordinator of these activities is pivotal.

9. Learning and development

Providing the NQSW with practice-learning opportunities requires a range of buddying, observational, shadowing, co-working, mentoring and formal training opportunities. These allow the NQSW to test, translate and transfer their theoretical knowledge to real case issues.

This is how the NQSW learns that the language and application of theory in the workplace is different from educational settings. The NQSW begins to learn that knowledge and practice is socially situated. As Eraut[25] states, 'knowledge occurs in the context of its use'. In other words, knowing 'that' is different to knowing 'how'. Professionals need both sorts of knowledge. These peer-learning practice opportunities also help the NQSW build team relationships and gain credibility as a qualified practitioner.

24 MacIntosh J (2003) *Reworking Professional Identity*. Western Journal of Nursing Research 25(6) 725-741
25 Eraut M (1994) *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London. Falmer Press

10. Reflection, adaptability and learning

Finally, there is the personal adaptability and resourcefulness of the NQSW. Many factors in the individual's experience, intelligence, temperament and personal circumstances will shape this. The supervisor plays an important role in helping the NQSW identify their positive coping strategies, such as being able to modify expectations, the ability to tolerate discomfort, reflect, separate themselves from their role, and make use of a variety of support systems.

NQSW transition review framework

Four domains will affect the NQSW's ability to make the transition process. They are organisational support, team support, supervision and development, and personal strengths. The framework overleaf lists 20 transition support factors under these four domains. It aims to help the NQSW identify what support/ systems are in place, where there are gaps and how these can be addressed. The framework can be completed either jointly by the NQSW and the supervisor, or by the NQSW alone and then discussed.

Invite the NQSW to read the framework and choose which factors they would find most helpful. The NQSW might prefer to take away the personal factors for private reflection. This format can be repeated with NQSWs at different points during their first year.

Activity 1: NQSW transition review

Please rate each following item using the traffic light system:

Red = not in place/significant concern
Amber = in progress
Green = in place/ongoing

Notes

Self rating (date)	Red	Amber	Green	One action that would help
Organisational support				
1. Induction	☐	☐	☐	
2. Clear expectations about my role and accountability	☐	☐	☐	
3. Understanding systems at work	☐	☐	☐	
4. Appropriate workload	☐	☐	☐	
5. Information about key partner agencies	☐	☐	☐	
Team support				
6. Welcomed by and engaged in team	☐	☐	☐	
7. Meetings with other NQSWs	☐	☐	☐	
8. Opportunities for shadowing and co-work	☐	☐	☐	
9. Supportive and useful team meetings	☐	☐	☐	
10. Being introduced to other parts of my agency/other agencies	☐	☐	☐	
Supervision and development				
11. Regular supervision	☐	☐	☐	
12. Meetings with my mentor	☐	☐	☐	
13. Access to training	☐	☐	☐	
14. Extending my role and types of work; identifying next stage of development	☐	☐	☐	
15. Opportunities to reflect on my learning and skills	☐	☐	☐	
Personal strengths				
16. Family/friendship support	☐	☐	☐	
17. Work/lifestyle balance	☐	☐	☐	
18. Health/other stresses	☐	☐	☐	
19. Taking pride in my achievements as an NQSW	☐	☐	☐	
20. Managing the transition overall	☐	☐	☐	

2.2 Understanding transition processes

There is a lot of academic work describing the transition process. These models may help provide a better understanding of what NQSWs are experiencing.

The transition curve

This model can be used to describe a wide variety of changes at both group and individual levels. In essence, the model suggests that initial excitement at taking up the new job quickly gives way to shock, anxiety and even immobilisation at the reality of workplace demands.

In response, the worker's sense of confidence and competence drop. In some cases, a defence against this might be denial, in which the NQSW presents themselves as confident, even over-confident, to ward off the underlying anxiety. With solid support, the worker can begin to accept and come to terms with the new reality. This allows them to engage more fully with the experience, and start to work out what it actually means to be a qualified social worker.

Through gradual exposure to a wider range of tasks and responsibilities, combined with learning and development opportunities, the integration of previous knowledge and workplace know-how deepens. Together, these processes help the NQSW to develop their professional confidence, as well as public acceptance and recognition as a qualified practitioner.

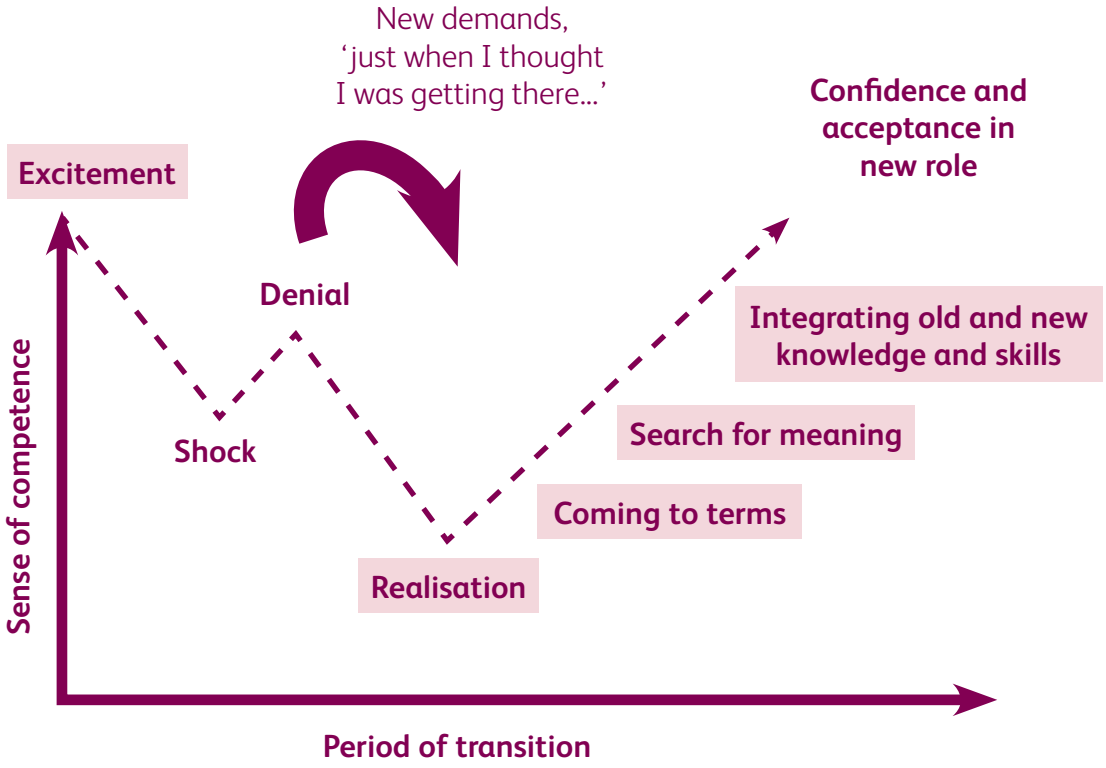


Fig 5: The transition curve[26]

26 Nye C (2007) *Dependence and Independence in Clinical Supervision: An Application of Vygotsky's Developmental Learning Theory.* The Clinical Supervisor 26(1/2), 81-98

The model only tells part of the story as the NQSW is making multiple transitions. They are learning not only about practice but also about all the organisational systems and rules within which they must work. Often they are only just coming to terms with one area when along comes a new learning challenge. NQSWs are involved in a transition process that is both multi-layered and continuous. While it is at its most intense in the first year of employment, transitions continue throughout a worker's professional career.

Tasks, roles, identities and self

By now, the scale and significance of the NQSW's transition journey should be becoming clear. The process of professional socialisation involves more than the achievement of new tasks, skills and roles. Underlying these are changes in the individual's sense of identity and self. In simple terms, the NQSW is changing not only what they do, but also who they are. Successfully making these transitions, therefore, involves issues of identity and sense of self. No wonder that this is a rollercoaster emotional journey.

The diagram below shows how the performance of roles and tasks is anchored these issues. Part of the entry shock is discovering the gap between expectations of who and what a qualified worker is versus the reality. How they negotiate their changing identity is therefore important in adapting to their new role and tasks. It's also critical to the NQSW's capacity to be able to make 'use of self' in their social work practice.

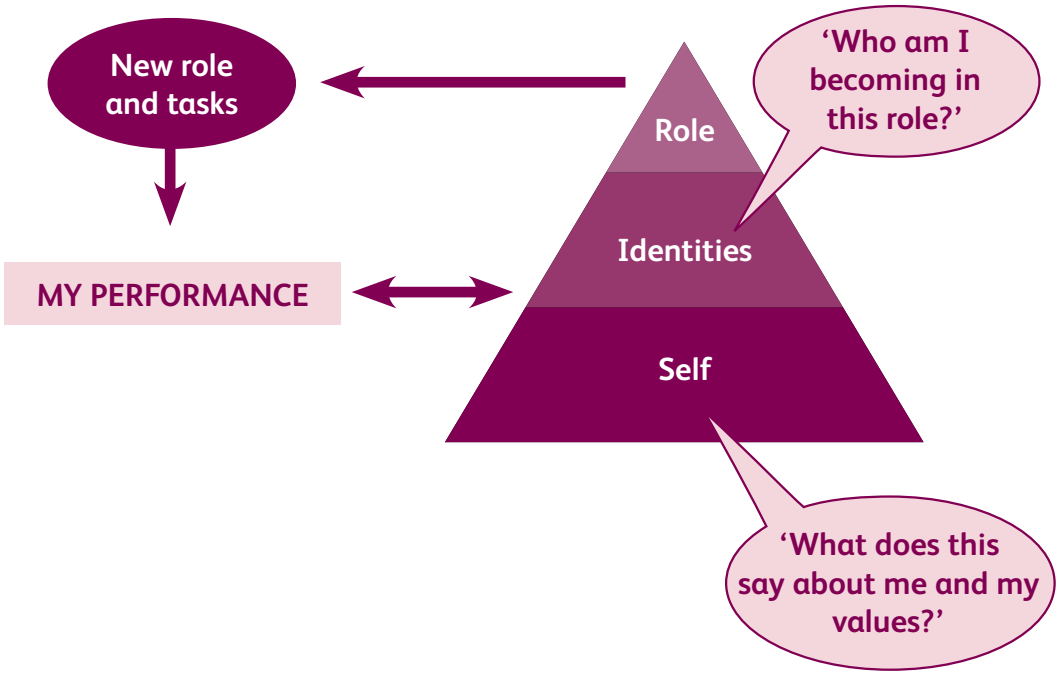


Fig 6: Negotiating identity changes

The next diagram shows a three-stage identity transition process, from separation to incorporation via negotiation. The diagram shows the shock that can accompany the early stage of transition, and highlights that successful transition to a new identity has to be negotiated. It cannot be imposed. Success in making this transition is critically dependent on the support available to the NQSW.

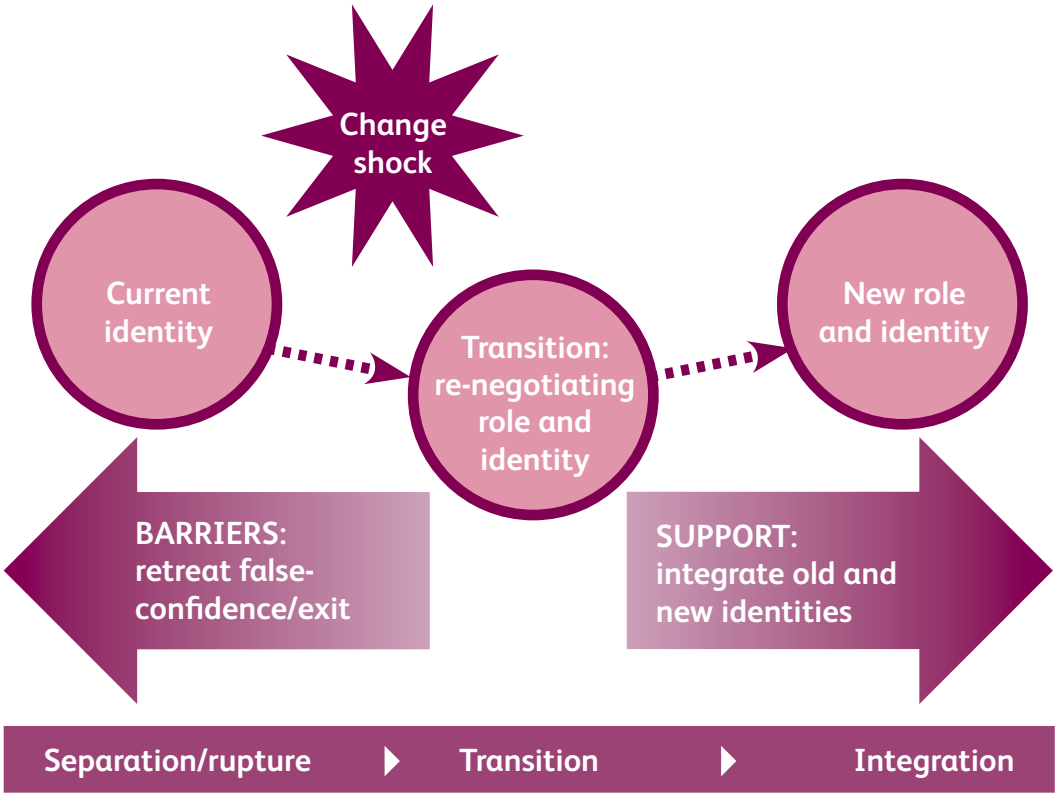


Fig 7: Three-stage identity transitions

Good supervision is central to helping the NQSW make a successful transition and in the next section, we look at how the supervisor can establish an effective supervision contract that supports this.

2.3 Negotiating an effective supervision contract

Effective contracts have three elements:

- Administrative – frequency, location, recording.
- Professional – purposes, focus, principles, accountabilities.
- Psychological – motivation, trust, commitment, ownership, investment.

Like a three-legged stool, all three elements need to be addressed if the process is to stand up, although the nature and level of each element may change over time, at different stages of the practitioner's development.

Negotiating a written supervision contract

The value of a written supervision contract lies less in the paperwork and more in the way it is established. The following discussion outlines a four-stage framework for negotiating such an agreement:

- Mandate.
- Engagement.
- Acknowledging ambivalence.
- Written agreement.

Mandate

Both supervisor and supervisee need to know from the outset what the mandate for supervision is, for example, what authority the supervision is based on. In addition to the supervisor's professional and personal authority, supervision must be firmly rooted in agency policy and standards for supervision.

An additional element will be the expectations on both parties arising from NQSW programme requirements. A clear supervision policy allows everyone concerned to set out the non-negotiable and negotiable issues, and how these are to be handled within supervision.

Key issues to discuss at the mandate stage are:

- What does agency policy state about the expectations of supervision?
- What is non-negotiable?
- What is negotiable?
- What rights are there for each person in supervision?
- What responsibilities does each person have in supervision?
- What are the boundaries and limits to confidentiality?
- What records are to be maintained, who keeps them, who can see them and for what purposes?
- How do NQSW programme requirements fit with the above?
- What is the difference between supervision and the role of the mentor? (Note: see also Activity: The four functions of supervision in Chapter 3, which identifies the different roles of the supervisor, manager and mentor with the NQSW.)

Engagement

A clear mandate for supervision is the foundation, but it does not necessarily guarantee engagement by either party. There still needs to be a psychological mandate, providing a shared perception and commitment to supervision by both parties, based on agreed roles, responsibilities, needs and expectations. With this engagement, both parties can start to build trust, reduce anxiety and increase certainty about supervision.

Engagement does not occur overnight. It requires time, mutual trust and understanding. The process of getting to know each other can be greatly helped by focusing on specific engagement issues. This helps to clarify where each person is coming from professionally and what influences their approach both to practice and supervision. Addressing these areas up front can help build a fruitful and collaborative supervision relationship.

Areas to explore at the engagement stage include:

- Previous training, placement and supervisory experiences, and their effects on the way each perceives and approaches supervision.
- What the worker would find helpful from the supervisor in the light of their previous experiences of supervision, and the expectations of the NQSW programme.
- Expectations around the handling of authority and conflict within supervision.

- The learning styles of the supervisee and the degree to which this matches the learning style of the supervisor.
- The beliefs and values each bring about the nature, purpose and rationale of the work.
- Each party's approach to user participation and the use of authority in practice.

This list includes areas for both supervisor and supervisee to explore. Building the relationship is not simply about the supervisor understanding the supervisee, but also the supervisee understanding the supervisor. For instance, if the supervisee brings a strongly interventionist approach to their practice but the supervisor is strongly anti-interventionist, this needs to be acknowledged and discussed early on.

Activity 2: NQSW supervision history exercise

This activity is very similar to the supervision history you completed in Chapter 1 – but this time it is aimed at the NQSW.

Invite the NQSW to reflect on their own experience of supervision using the list of questions below. This is a sensitive area so make sure that it is an optional exercise and give prior notice as well as the chance to reflect on the questions in private first.

1. Write out a list of your previous supervisors, including significant figures outside your current role, such as previous managers, mentors or teachers.
2. Make a brief note about their impact on you. Were they helpful to your development or not, and in what ways?
3. Identify what it was about their style, focus, practice, understanding, knowledge, skills, values, use of authority, empathy or any other factors that impacted on you.
4. How did the way you were supervised impact on your work or your relationship with colleagues?

Discuss the answers with the NQSW and ask what needs to happen to ensure their supervision relationship with you is supportive, focused and purposeful.

Notes

Acknowledging ambivalence

NQSWs will inevitably experience strong emotions such as:

- Personal impact of cases causing sadness, despair, confusion or fear.
- Over-identification with certain users or situations.
- Intolerance or moral disgust at the user's situation or behaviour.
- Frustration or demoralisation at the lack of time or resources.
- Mismatch of positive expectations about the job with its realities.

In addition to these, Claxton[27] states that adults are ambivalent about learning and development because they carry irrational beliefs about themselves. These beliefs are particularly strong in the helping professions, and NQSWs may feel a pressure to prove their skills and worth to their new employer and colleagues. They may feel:

- I must be competent.
- I must be in control.
- I must be consistent.
- I must be comfortable.

Each new supervisory relationship is an unknown quantity, and both parties have to take some level of risk. This is especially true for the NQSW, who will inevitably encounter areas of their own incompetence, inconsistency, or discomfort. These may have been unrecognised aspects of the worker's experience or located at a level below their conscious awareness. Exploring these emotions and ambiguities in supervision offers some of the best developmental opportunities. It is also possible that the NQSW's distress may reflect wider processes at play within the team, agency or with other agencies.

There are real benefits to exploring issues around emotion and ambivalence and this can lead to a much deeper level of analysis (see Activity: Practising reflection in Chapter 3). However, the NQSW may be very apprehensive about exploring such issues, fearing that they will be perceived as unable to cope, or even incompetent.

27 Claxton G. Ibid

It is important to recognise experiences like these as normal and expected, especially during this first year, and to stress that even though it may be difficult, exploring feelings can have a positive role in problem solving. The following example may help.

Supervisor: 'Social work generates strong emotional and attitudinal responses. I can think of cases that really got to me. But the triggers vary with each of us, as does the way that we deal with such situations, and especially how they surface in supervision. In order for me to know how to respond most helpfully, could you say something about what happens when you feel out of your depth, confused, distressed, scared or angry. What would I notice as a supervisor that would alert me to this? What would you find helpful in such situations?'

We will look more closely at the role of emotion in Chapter 6.

Written agreement

A structured approach to forming a supervisory contract will motivate both parties to be proactive and considered in making their expectations a reality. So far, the emphasis has been on the need for dialogue, negotiation and clarification of responsibilities and expectations, all of which help develop trust and security.

However, these discussions need to be translated into specific written agreements. The CWDC's Programme of Support for NQSWs contains documentation for this purpose and this should be linked to your own agency's formats for such contracts. Whatever format you use, it is essential that it:

- Is arrived at through negotiation.
- Addresses issues and how they will be managed.
- Is co-signed and dated.
- Is copied for both supervisor and supervisee.
- Is reviewed at least annually.

Activity 3: 'Are we clear?' Supervision contract review

It's important to establish a supervision contract early on. The four-stage process outlined in this chapter should have helped you both develop clearer expectations and joint commitment to supervision. Here are some final questions to think about as you finalise that contract with your supervisee:

The supervisor's final check

- What do you need from me as your supervisor to make this work?
- What am I willing to bring as your supervisor to make this work?
- Is there anything that remains unclear?

The supervisee's final check

- What do you need from me as your supervisee to make this work?
- What am I willing to bring as the practitioner to make supervision work?
- The one thing (if relevant) I am unclear about is ...

Notes

Preparing supervisees

Establishing effective contracts is much easier if the supervisee understands what supervision is for and has thought about how they can best use the process.

Rights and responsibilities toolkit

This is a way of identifying what commitment to process really means. In practice, the distinction between rights and responsibilities is very fine, so we have combined them here. Some aspects are more clearly one than the other and most are as much a responsibility as a right. There may be other items you wish to add.

Activity 4: Rights and responsibilities toolkit

In the light of your previous experiences of supervision and the particular requirements of the NQSW programme, identify the three most important elements in this checklist for the supervisor and the NQSW. Discuss why these are important and how you can work together to make sure they are addressed in supervision.

1. To accept the mandate to be supervised accountable.
2. To negotiate a supervisory contract.
3. To attend regularly and on time and have minimal interruptions.
4. To have an agenda and to participate actively.
5. To be open and share information.
6. To promote anti-oppressive practice and behaviour, and to be curious about difference.
7. To have permission to express one's feelings and uncertainties and have them heard.
8. To have permission, and be supported, to learn from difficult experiences.
9. To actively pursue one's own development.
10. To give and accept constructive feedback, with particular reference to the 11 NQSW outcome statements.
11. To have one's experience and contribution acknowledged.
12. To reflect, think through and explore options.

Of course, these rights and responsibilities apply equally to the supervisor's own supervision.

Notes

2.4 Structures for supervision

Supervision encompasses much more than the supervision session. It is an ongoing process that takes place in different settings, ranging from the formal planned office-based session to discussions in a corridor, telephone calls from a car park to three-way meetings with the programme mentor.

Different arrangements will suit different settings. However, be aware of the situation where formal planned supervision becomes informal and ad hoc or where formal supervision sessions are continually rearranged. Informal and ad hoc supervision cannot be an effective substitute for planned one-to-one sessions. Continuity and regularity of sessions are particularly important for NQSWs.

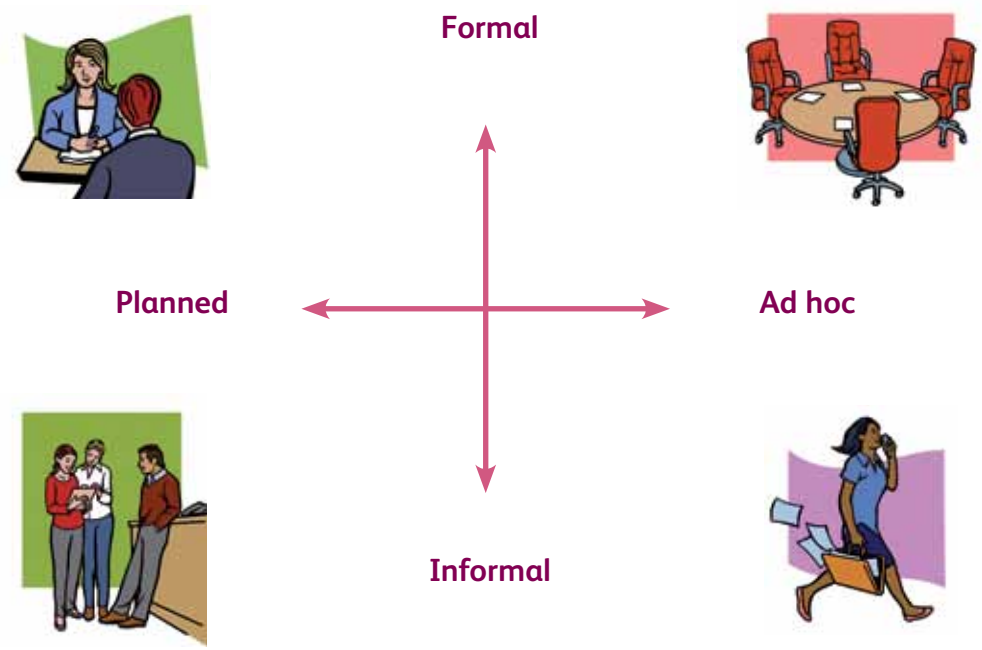


Fig 8: Formal and informal structures for supervision overlap

2.5 How to structure planned supervision sessions

The following is one format for an NQSW supervision session. It can be adjusted to suit different settings.

Preparation

1. Set a calendar of supervision sessions in advance.

2. Avoid sessions early on a Monday morning or last thing on a Friday.

3. Review the supervision record of the previous session, and note items and action plans that need following up. This should form the basis of an agreed agenda.

Session

4. Start the session on time. Check whether there are likely to be any unavoidable interruptions (these should really be exceptional).

5. Clarify the agenda, making sure the supervisee has had an opportunity to contribute but do not start discussing the items yet.

6. Within the first few minutes ask the worker, 'How are you?' It is surprising how much information this simple question yields, often providing a context for understanding much of what the worker subsequently tells you.

7. Use the 11 outcome statements as a basis for discussion at EACH session, asking the practitioner to bring and discuss pieces of work that relate to the different statements. One format might invite the NQSW to discuss:

- One piece of work showing how they are achieving parts of the 11 outcomes.
- One piece of work they find challenging in relation to the 11 outcomes.
- Their learning from an activity undertaken with colleagues, for instance, observing a strategy meeting or assisting in a core assessment.
- Feedback from the supervisor highlighting the NQSW's progress or particular challenges for the NQSW. The feedback should include some direct observation of their work.

Recording

8. Agree and record action plans arising from the above. You may wish to use the NQSW supervision progress review sheet below.

9. Review developmental and training needs and plans. This may include co-ordinating work with other team members or with the mentor.

10. Record the session, and give a copy of the record to the supervisee. Note any areas of disagreement or concern, making sure that both points of view are recorded.

Activity 5: NQSW supervision progress review sheet

The NQSW programme is framed around 11 outcome statements that the NQSW is expected to work towards during their first year of work. This review sheet helps the supervisor and NQSW keep track of progress and plan opportunities for the NQSW to gain experience of and highlight successes around these outcomes.

This should be a regular exercise during supervision, and this handbook has been designed so copies can be made easily to record progress and follow-up action. You will also need to read the detailed description of the 11 outcome statements in the NQSW programme document in order to understand the expectations. The emphasis here should be less on evaluating the NQSW's practice and more on identifying opportunities for the NQSW to make progress in each area. This might be through task setting, specific work allocation, mentoring, coaching, co-working or training.

Ratings: These should be done initially by the NQSW, although they may be adjusted after discussion with the supervisor.

0 = The practitioner has had no experience in this area

1 = The practitioner is getting started on work in this area

2 = The practitioner is making progress in this area

3 = The practitioner is becoming competent in this area

4 = An area of particular challenge, requiring intensive work to assist the practitioner

Notes

NQSW outcome	Date	Rating	Evidence	Action agreed to progress this outcome
1. Referral				
2. Assessment				
3. Planning				
4. Review				
5. Formal meetings				
6. Recording				
7. Communication				
8. Relationships				
9. Multi-agency working				
10. Disadvantaged groups				
11. Professional development & accountability				

Supervision records

Your agency should have a clear policy for recording the following areas, in addition to the specific recording requirements of the NQSW programme:

- Case material discussed in supervision.
- The supervision activity.
- Information that belongs in a personnel file.
- NQSW programme recording requirements.

2.6 Understanding professional development

Gauging the appropriate level of supervision for individual NQSWs is an art, so a framework to describe how professional development takes place may help. Several different models have been developed, including by Eraut[28] who suggests that in the first year of qualification, progression should take into account the following areas:

- Extending competence over a wider range of situations and contexts.
- Becoming more independent of support and advice.
- Making certain tasks routine.
- Coping with a heavier workload and getting more done.
- Becoming competent in further roles and activities.

Other writers have adopted a stage approach such as Hawkins and Shohet's[29] four-stage framework shown below. This uses the analogies of learning a craft and life stages.

Level 1 **Self-centred**	**Level 2** **User-centred**	**Level 3** **Process-centred**	**Level 4** **Process in context**
Dependent on supervision	Fluctuates between dependence and autonomy Overconfidence vs overwhelmed	Increased professional confidence Supervision more collaborative Overview of user in context and more fluid adjustment to user's changing circumstances	Professionally autonomous Able to conceptualise and generalise Capable of supervising and teaching
Childhood stage Novice	Adolescent stage Journeyman	Adult stage Craftsman	Master craftsman Expert

Table 2: Hawkins and Shohet's four stages of professional development

28 Eraut M Ibid
29 Hawkins P and Shohet R (1989) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*. Open University Press

2.7 What factors affect NQSW's capacity to use supervision?

Although Hawkins and Shohet's model is useful, development is usually a more back and forth affair, characterised by a gradual spiral upwards rather than linear progression. New roles, turbulent environments, complex cases or distressing incidents can all trigger regression back to a less confident stage, or indeed into a pseudo-confident mindset.

There is no guarantee that more experienced workers will always function at more mature levels, or that NQSWs will necessarily be in the adolescent stage. The important thing for the supervisor is to assess the worker's progress and respond accordingly.

Socio-cultural factors	Organisational/ professional factors	Personal factors
Cultural rules about self-sufficiency and dependence	Organisational culture	Attachment style Experiences of trauma/ abuse/loss
Gender, class, age, education	Supervisor characteristics	Perception and experience of help-seeking and receiving
Experiences of being included or excluded	Role models Use/abuse of power and authority	Experience/attitude to authority Capacity to trust authority
Community cohesion and care	Workplace stability and support	External supports/stressors Work-life balance
Social roles and expectations Stigma/shame Help seen as linked to control	Professional role, status and power Attitudes to coping in different professions	Internal expectations as a 'helping professional' Motivation and meaning of work
Access/entitlement to help Language Ethnicity Legal status	Availability of help Occupational health services	Accuracy of self appraisal Recognising need for help Knowing how to seek help

Table 3: Factors shaping help-seeking

A more serious criticism of stage models is their focus on independence and autonomy as a desirable goal of professional development. Nye[30] points out that theories of development are culturally bound. A range of cultural, organisational, professional and personal factors shape attitudes to, and rules about, help-seeking, as depicted in table 3.

Modern western democratic cultures characterise 'independence' and 'autonomy' as hallmarks of mature healthy people and conversely label 'dependence' as immature and undesirable. However, feminist writers criticise the idea of autonomy as a male and instrumentalist perspective, which devalues women's more expressive role.

Development as separation vs development in relation

An alternative view is to see development occurring in relation to others rather than through separation from others[31]. The basis of development in relation theory is Vygotsky's[32] work on learning theory, in which dependence is seen as an ongoing and essential aspect of learning. He argues that learning occurs through three processes: internalisation; scaffolding; and the zone of proximal development.

Internalisation is the process through which external social processes are 'taken in'. For the NQSW, this will occur almost unconsciously through the supervisory process as they participate and observe the team and other agencies at work.

Scaffolding occurs through a 'tutoring' process when knowledge or skills are passed from one person to another, in a step-by-step and interactive process. This involves gaining the other's attention, demonstrating that the task is possible, breaking the task up into manageable parts and helping the tutee to recognise their competence in the task. For the NQSW, it is the supervisor, team colleagues and mentor who act as their main scaffolding.

The zone of proximal development is where learning occurs. The zone is the gap between actual development (what can be accomplished independently) and potential development (what the individual can accomplish in collaboration with the scaffolding of a more competent partner).

Nye summarises the implications of this model for supervision and professional development:

Independence and autonomy are not posited as ideal points of development. According to Vygotsky, dependence is an ongoing and essential aspect of learning and development. Independence confines the learner to the realm of their actual development.

30 Nye C Ibid
31 Nye C Ibid
32 Bruner (1986) In Nye C Ibid

Actual development

Potential development

For supervisees, this model normalises three aspects of supervision that can often be seen as exposing and threatening:

- Revealing gaps or weaknesses.
- Allowing supervision (or other processes such as co-working) to act as scaffolding.
- Being comfortable with an appropriate level of dependence.

Activity 6: Independence, dependence and scaffolding

These questions can be used either by supervisors to reflect on their responses to supervisees, or by NQSWs to reflect on their responses to service users.

- What cultural, family and professional rules around dependence and independence have influenced you as a professional?
- To what extent have these rules been shaped by factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, ability/disability or other socio-cultural forces?
- How do you think these rules influence your view of staff/service users who are more dependent or more independent than you? Which do you find easier to work with?
- How do you think these two types of staff/service user experience supervision/working with you?
- What do you think are your main strengths/gaps as a scaffolder?
- Who provides you with scaffolding in your current role?

Notes

Comment

These are complex questions that invite professional, personal and cultural reflection. They are particularly important when supervising NQSWs where issues of dependence-discretion-autonomy are likely to be more pronounced. The same issues apply to practitioners' relationships with service users, how they manage dependency issues, and the degree to which practitioners provide scaffolding for the people they work with. Hence, this activity is equally relevant for NQSWs.

Summary

Vygotsky's model has wider implications for the concept of professional autonomy and the way it is seen as the highest form of professionalism. Reflective and challenging supervision creates the foundations for professionals who know that qualification is just the start of a learning career, and who learn the value and skills of checking out judgements, and holding their practice to account.

In Chapter 3, we will explore the application of Kolb's learning theory[33] as a framework to facilitate this process.

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, you should understand the ten key issues that impact on the student-NQSW transition and the importance of identity as an underlying factor.

Transition is a continuous process, not only for NQSWs but for professionals throughout their careers. You should also understand that an effective supervision contract is essential for establishing real engagement, which can be achieved through a four-stage negotiating framework. It must, however, include exploring the worker's early supervision experiences and acknowledging the role of emotion in social work practice. Supervision must also take place within a structure, with progress against the 11 outcome statements reviewed and recorded.

33 Kolb D (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*. London. Prentice-Hall

2.8 Key messages from this chapter

The journey from student to NQSW involves a complex and continuing series of transitions.

The transitions involve three stages: separating, joining and integrating. It also involves issues of confidence and identity negotiation.

Organisational support, supervision, team support, development opportunities and personal factors all play a role in shaping the NQSW's journey.

Activity 1: NQSW transition review framework

The negotiation of a meaningful contract is an essential foundation for supervision.

Activity 2 : NQSW supervision history exercise

Activity 3: Are we clear?' Supervision contract review

Activity 4 : Rights and responsibilities toolkit

Use the rights and responsibilities toolkit to identify the key processes to get right.

Supervision is critical in helping the NQSW to achieve the 11 outcome statements and needs to be regular, structured and supportive.

Activity 5: NQSW supervision progress review sheet

Good supervision is not straightforward. It involves help-seeking to which we all bring a variety of personal, professional and cultural beliefs and experiences.

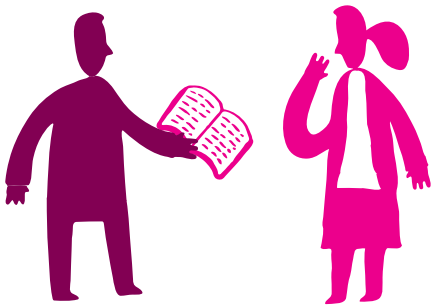
The ability to make use of scaffolding, and some temporary dependency, is essential in order to develop.

It is important for supervisors to be aware of their responses to issues of autonomy and dependence in relation to their staff.

Activity 6: Independence, dependence and scaffolding

Notes

2.9 Further reading



Knapman J and Morrison T (1998) *Making the Most of Supervision in Health and Social Care: A Self-Development Manual for Supervisees,* OLM-Pavilion

Morrison T (2005) *From Strength to Strength: A Facilitator's Guide to Preparing Supervisees, Students and Trainees for Supervision*, OLM-Pavilion

This action learning resource was developed to help supervisees understand and make the best use of supervision. It can either be used directly by supervisees or by supervisors, mentors and trainers working with staff groups. The material is structured around a set of supervisee competences and 20 development sessions, which are fully described and supported by presentation and background resource material.

Chapter 3:
Frameworks for supervision: an integrated model

This chapter

3.1 The 4x4x4 integrated model of supervision

3.2 The four functions of supervision

3.3 The four stakeholders in supervision

3.4 The four stages of the supervision cycle

3.5 The supervision cycle

3.6 The supervisee cycle

3.7 The four levels of reflection

Activities in this chapter

Activity 1: Delivering the four functions of supervision.
For supervisor, NQSW, manager and mentor.

Activity 2: The art of the good question: some practical tips.
For supervisor and NQSW.

Activity 3: A shared map.
For supervisor and NQSW.

Activity 4: Practising reflection.
For supervisor, NQSW and team.

Introduction

Effective supervision is linked to good practice and of course, good practice involves several stakeholders. So does supervision also need to take into account these stakeholders? Put simply: yes. But how and when? What are the implications of this for supervision? Crucially, how can we maintain clarity with such a complex web of interactions? This chapter maps this out in detail.

Some background

Before looking into the ways supervision needs to take account of stakeholders, it's worth considering how we arrived at this point by looking at the history of supervision as recorded by academics.

The practice of supervision in social care has a long history and its evolution has mirrored the development of the social work profession itself[34]. Early supervisory texts focused on administrative control, and training and education, especially of novice workers.

The focus then expanded to therapeutic support for workers[35], emphasising the confidentiality of the supervision process and developing the worker's self-awareness. Hughes and Pengelly[36] suggested that the dynamics occurring within supervision mirrored the organisation's responses to external pressures and turbulence. Therefore, the supervisor's role was to provide a secure base for containing anxiety and reflecting on practice.

Writers such as Middleman and Rhodes[37] saw supervision as impacting not only on practitioners but on the organisation as a whole. They emphasised the 'political' role of the supervisor in terms of accessing resources. Richards and Payne[38] introduced the idea of the 'mediation' function, whereby the supervisor acts as a bridge between organisational and professional systems and between individual staff and the organisation.

The emergence of clinical supervision in health settings in the early 1990s reasserted the practitioner's professional independence. Clinical supervision separated the managerial function of supervision from discussion of cases and clinical judgements for which professionals were deemed to be accountable due to their regulatory body. However, over the last decade, accountability and performance have emerged as a dominant force in supervision, particularly in response to issues around the management of risk.

34 Bruce E and Austin M (2000) *Social Work Supervision: Assessing the Past and Mapping the Future*. The Clinical Supervisor. 19(2) 85-107

35 Hawkins P and Shohet R (1989) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*. Open University Press

36 Hughes L and Pengelly P (1997) *Staff Supervision in a Turbulent World. London*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

37 Middleman R and Rhodes G (1985) *Competent Supervision: Making Imaginative Judgements*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

38 Richards M and Payne C (1990) Staff *Supervision in Child Protection Work*. London. National Institute for Social Work

3.1 The 4x4x4 model of supervision

Supervision has to address a range of requirements on behalf of different stakeholders, involving a complex set of activities. The 4x4x4 model is an integrated framework that brings together the functions, stakeholders and main processes involved in supervision. These elements have all been separately described in the literature, but the 4x4x4 model integrates them into a single model.

The 4x4x4 supervision model brings together the:

- Four functions of supervision.
- Four stakeholders in supervision.
- Four elements of the supervisory cycle.

This chapter explores these three domains.

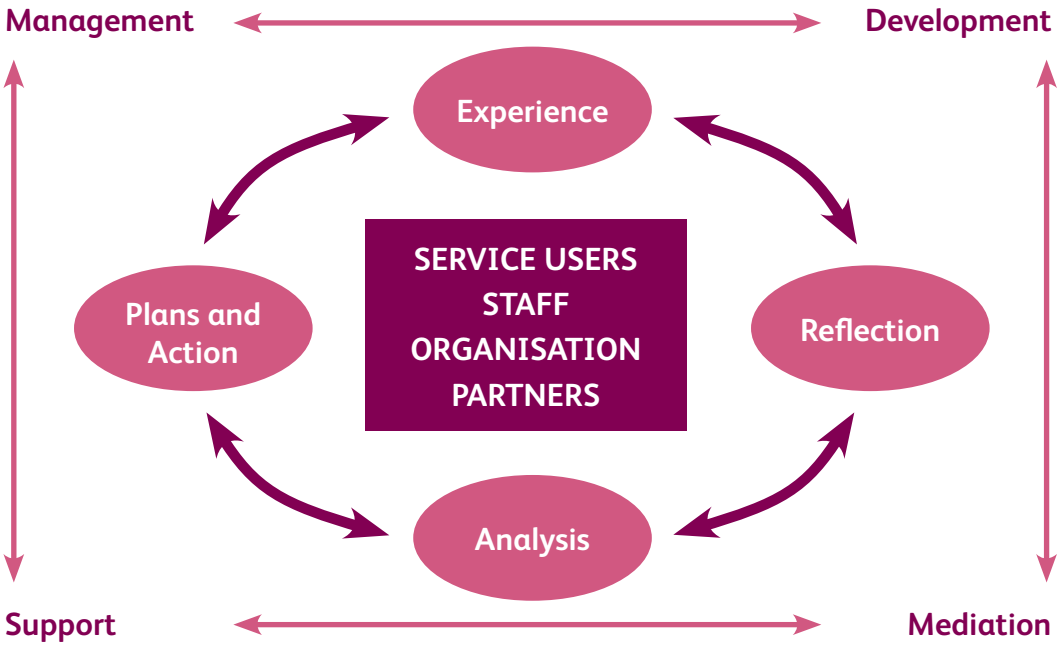


Fig 9: The 4x4x4 model of supervision

3.2 The four functions of supervision

The four functions are based on an original definition of supervision by Harries[39] which has been adapted and updated:

Supervision is a process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another worker(s) in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives which together promote the best outcomes for service users.

The four objectives or functions of supervision are:

- Competent, accountable performance/practice (management function).
- Continuing professional development (development function).
- Personal support (support function).
- Engaging the individual with the organisation (mediation function).

In summary, supervision is:

- A process rather than an event or session or method.
- A specific type of organisational and professional relationship.
- Concerned with the performance of all staff not just practitioners.
- A set of activities that can be delivered by one or more people in different roles.
- A process of negotiation between inter-related, but sometimes different, objectives.

Recognising the different functions of supervision and the needs of different stakeholders is essential. Sometimes the needs of supervisee, service user, supervisor and agency may be aligned; at other times they will conflict and the different functions will pull in opposite directions.

For instance, if the accountability function dominates the supervision process, little time is left for the developmental function. This imbalance causes problems because the four functions are interdependent. For example, if the worker is struggling with a particular task or is underperforming, action may be required at the other three levels to address the issue requiring attention. This could mean needing to provide training; support to encourage the worker to deal with the associated feelings; and mediation to seek assistance from other team members to cover duties while the worker attends extra training.

39 Harries M (1987) in Morrison T (2005) *Staff Supervision in Social Care*. Brighton. Pavilion

Sharing the load

An individual supervisor cannot hope to meet all the needs of a supervisee, not just in terms of time, but also in terms of the range of skills, role models, styles and knowledge that supervisees may need. Supervisees require different things from supervisors at different stages of their professional development, so it is necessary to share the load.

The supervisor can ensure that some of the NQSW's practice learning and developmental needs are met by commissioning, or collaborating with, others such as the trainers or mentors. Alternatively, they can set up shadowing or co-working opportunities in their own team (see figure 10).

Similarly, many of the support needs of workers can be met in a positive team setting. However, there are some areas of supervision, for instance in the management or mediation functions, which are less easy to delegate because they require the authority and role of the supervisor.

Moreover, significant parts of the development and support functions still require the supervisor's involvement. The supervisor can delegate where appropriate but must always retain overall responsibility for ensuring that the four functions of supervision are delivered. To adapt a popular saying, 'it takes a network to develop a professional'.

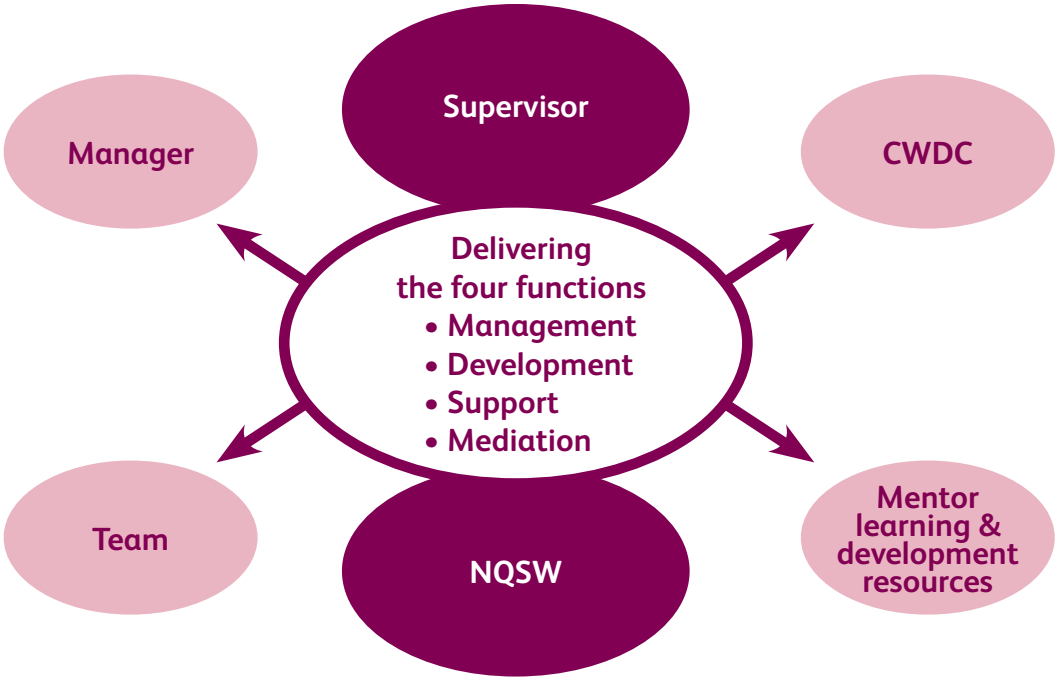


Fig 10: Supervision: a collective responsibility

This is important in the context of the NQSW programme where manager and supervisor may not be the same person. This could occur in multi-disciplinary team settings, where the manager is from a different discipline and therefore professional supervision is provided by a separate social work supervisor, following the clinical supervision model.

Another possibility is where a senior practitioner is delegated responsibility for some aspects of the NQSW's supervision. There is also the role of the mentor who will contribute to the development function of supervision.

Finally, there is the role that the team will play in assisting the NQSW. It's essential, however, that there is clarity and coordination about how supervisor, manager and mentor each contribute to the delivery of the four functions. The following activity will help to address this.

Activity 1: Delivering the four functions of supervision

This activity is best undertaken as a joint exercise as it is designed to clarify the respective contributions of supervisor, manager (if separate) and mentor in delivering the four functions of supervision for the NQSW. You may also wish to involve the NQSW in this exercise.

Appendix 2 contains four checklists under each of the four functions of supervision. You may wish to use the checklists in a subsequent task with your staff, and this handbook has been designed to make it easy to photocopy these.

Task

1. Go through each of the checklists and tick which tasks belong primarily to the supervisor, the manager or the mentor in relation to delivering the four functions for the NQSW.

2. Identify how best to coordinate the three roles (supervisor, manager, mentor) in a way that will ensure clarity, communication, and clear planning and reviewing arrangements for the NQSW. Identify any areas of potential overlap or confusion.

3. Finally, consider those tasks that the team can assist with, especially in the developmental and support functions.

Notes

Comment

This activity can also be undertaken with the rest of your staff to check how far you and your supervisees have shared expectations about supervision. (We have provided the checklists so that they are easy to photocopy.) This makes a good basis for preparing a supervision agreement. It informs supervisees in detail about the range and complexity of the supervision process and invites them to think about how they can help address these tasks.

3.3 The four stakeholders in supervision

The second element of the 4x4x4 model focuses on the different stakeholders with an interest in supervision. There are four main groups:

- Service users.
- Supervisees.
- The organisation, as represented by the supervisor.
- Partners such as other agencies or professionals whose engagement is required.

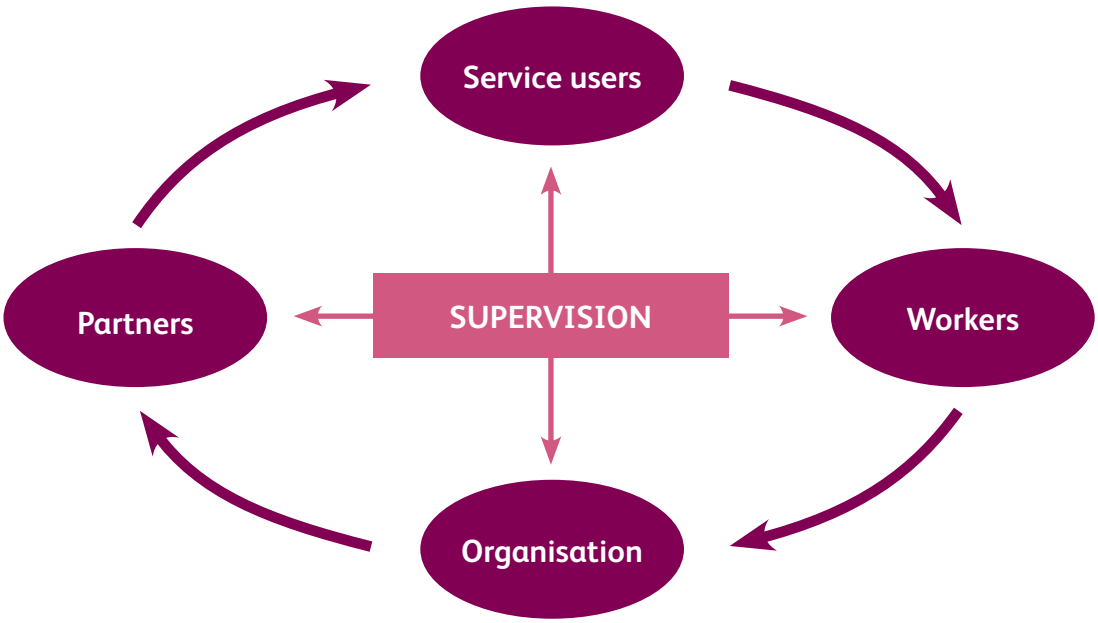


Fig 11: The four stakeholders in supervision

These could be further sub-divided. For instance, there are often competing needs and priorities between service users such as parents and children. There may also be more than one organisation or employer involved, for example, when a practitioner is seconded to a multi-agency team.

In the context of the NQSW programme, CWDC is one of the stakeholders. We could also include politicians and the public. However, a four stakeholder model provides a framework that is practical to apply.

Good supervision has a positive impact on all of these stakeholders and Figure 12 shows this in more detail. It highlights supervision as one of the key processes that regulates both the internal life of the organisation (shown in the bottom half of the diagram), and its external relationships (seen in the top half).

As you consider this diagram, recall the seven key links in the supervision-outcome chain described in Chapter 1: clarity, security, empathy, accurate observation and assessment, appropriate use of power and planning.

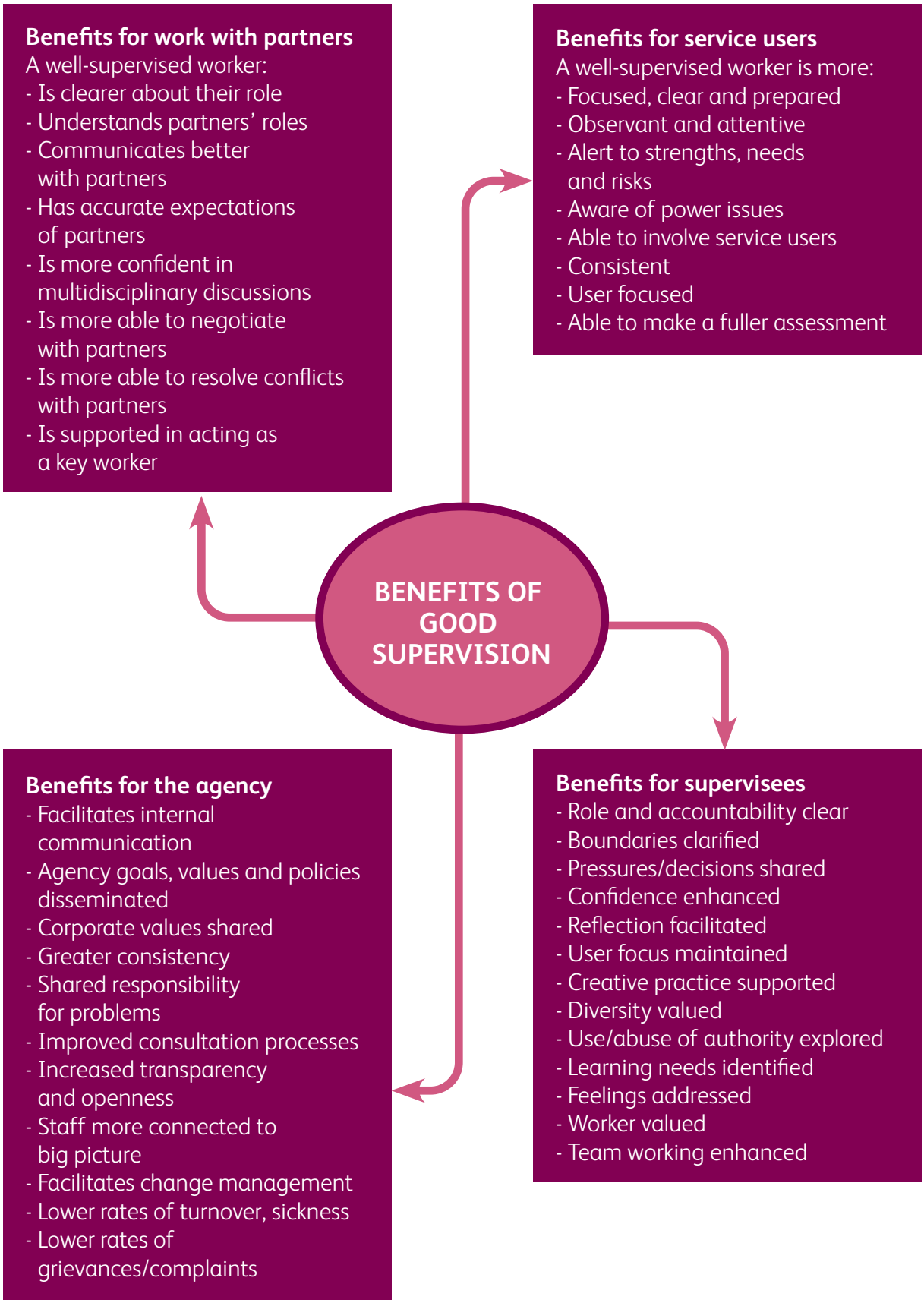


Fig 12: Benefits of good supervision for four stakeholders

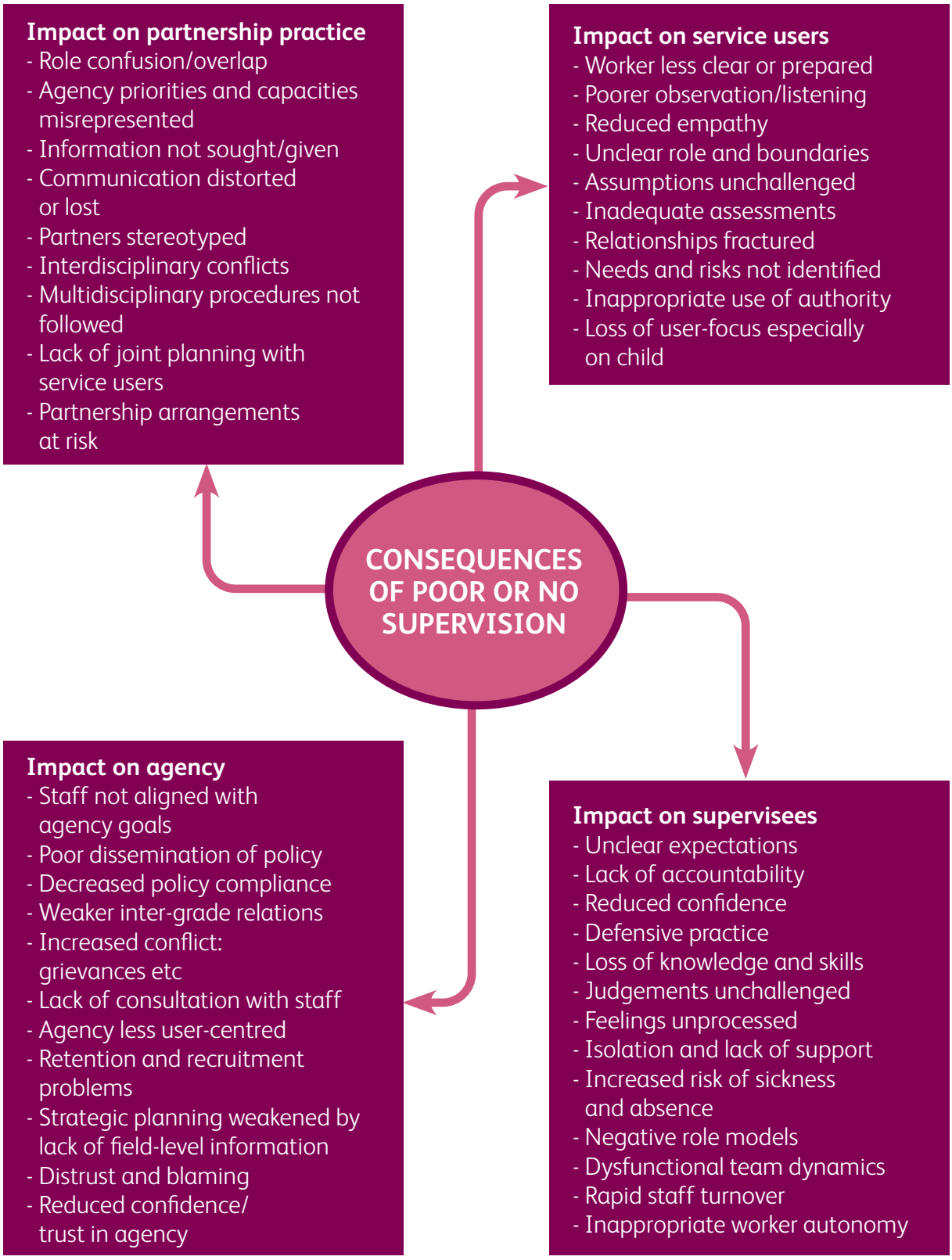


Fig 13: Consequences of poor or no supervision

Now look at figure 13 to see what happens when there is poor or no supervision.

This shows how poor supervision leads to problems around clarity, security, empathy, accurate observation and assessment, appropriate use of power and planning.

Keeping all stakeholders in mind

So while there may only be two stakeholders physically present in supervision (the worker and the supervisor) almost invariably other stakeholders (service users or other agencies) are also involved and affected by what happens in supervision. Therefore, one of the most important tasks for the supervisor is to ensure engagement with the other stakeholders during supervision.

When stakeholders go missing from supervision, this is perhaps a sign that the focus has been lost or that the interests of one stakeholder are dominating at the expense of others.

3.4 The four stages of the supervision cycle

This is the third element of the 4x4x4 model and focuses on the process of supervision itself and its relationship with practice. The problem-solving supervision diagram shown in figure 14 is actually made up of two cycles: the 'story' or practice cycle in green and the supervision cycle of experience, reflection, analysis and planning in burgundy.

These parallel cycles describe the process of effective practice and effective supervision and show how they are intimately related. Let's start by explaining the story cycle.

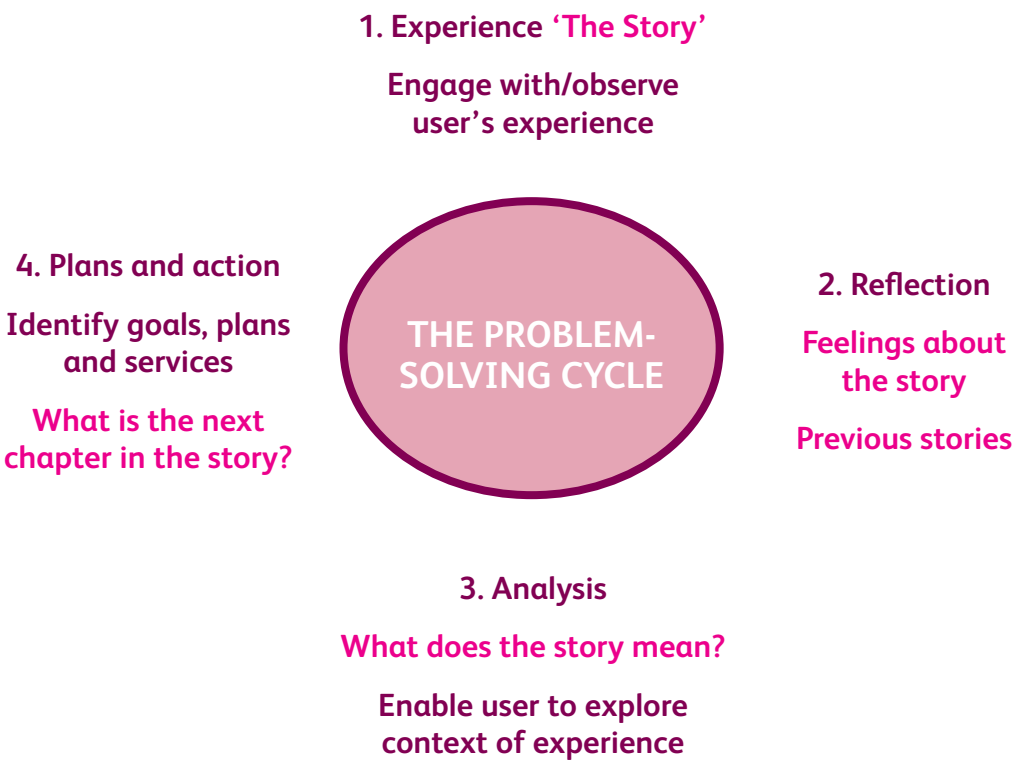


Fig 14: The supervision cycle

The 'story' or practice cycle

- This cycle shows that good practice occurs when the worker:
- Engages with the user and their story and identifies the stories of other people who are involved.
- Helps the user to identify the feelings generated by the story, and the feelings of others involved.
- Helps the user to consider the meaning of the story, its causes, consequences and impact.
- Helps the user to think about how they would like the next chapter of the story to be written, and what help they need to move the story on.

1. Experience: eliciting the story

Engaging the user at the outset is crucial in creating the context for exploring their situation. The worker must be clear and coherent about their role and be emotionally attentive, so that the user feels able to describe their situation and talk openly about their needs, anxieties, risks, difficulties and hopes.

In this way the worker elicits the user's story. Often this will involve engaging with multiple stories, such those of different family members. The story also includes the worker's observations such as the user's emotional demeanour, presentation and interactions with others, the physical environment as well as the worker's own responses and actions. Finally, the worker will need to seek information from other agencies who are involved, providing an extra dimension to the story.

2. Reflection: the feelings about the story

Vulnerable users face situations and needs that are often accompanied by powerful and sometimes conflicting emotions, both within and between family members or others such as friends or neighbours. The worker needs to provide a sense of containment and security so that the emotional content of their stories can be addressed without it overwhelming the user.

However, the user's feelings and responses to the current story are often compounded by previous unresolved stories of loss or powerlessness. These earlier stories may include patterns, habits or learned responses such as the inability to trust, which have created further difficulties and complicate the current story.

It is important for the worker to help the user identify how these earlier stories or patterns may contribute to the current situation. Equally, there may also be earlier stories or experiences of resilience, courage or care that act as potential strengths or protective factors. These adaptive and pro-social patterns are just as important to explore.

3. Analysis: understanding the meaning of the story

It is essential for the worker to hear how the individual understands and attaches meaning to their story. What sense does the individual make of their situation, and how do they explain it, not only to the worker but also to themselves? It will include how the individual perceives the triggers, consequences and impact of their situation.

Crises often raise unspoken questions about an individual's sense of identity, self worth, social role and future standing in their family or community. These perceptions are often bound around social and cultural expectations connected with gender, ethnicity, health, disability or class. Services and interventions cannot be planned without awareness of the social and psychological meaning of the story to those involved.

Consider the example of two sisters, each of whom has a disabled child requiring respite care. The elder sister's view is that life can be tough, and sometimes you need help to get through. The younger sister believes that her child's disability was a punishment for an extra-marital relationship she had ten years earlier. The elder sister is ready to negotiate respite care, but the younger one refuses to do so. She does not believe she deserves respite care because she must serve her punishment. The same offer of service meets with opposite responses because of the unique meanings of each sister's story. If the worker has no awareness of the younger sister's explanation of her situation, they may misinterpret her refusal of respite care.

4. Plans and action: the next chapter of the story

This is about working with the user to identify their needs, developing tailored plans and instilling motivation and optimism for the future. Using the story metaphor, this stage involves exploring different story lines for the next chapter, re-scripting the current characters, introducing new characters, and identifying who should/could play what roles in the new story. As the next chapter unfolds and services are delivered, a further round of the cycle begins, adding new elements to the story.

In the real world, workers are usually dealing with multiple story cycles, only some of which they may know or understand. Other agencies may also be engaged, and their workers will have developed their own stories about the user. The cycle is a simplification, but it's a useful way of describing mindful practice.

Now that we have explained the cycle as it applies to practice, we'll focus on its application in supervision.

3.5 The supervision cycle

The same four stages of the cycle can be applied to the supervision process. The way in which the supervisor asks questions is as important as the way the worker elicits the user's story. Appendix 3 lists a variety of questions that can be used to help you identify what needs to be asked/answered at each stage of the supervision cycle. You may find it helpful to refer to these as you read about each of the four stages.

1. Experiencing

The origins of the supervision cycle lie in work on how adults learn. According to Kolb[40] and Jarvis[41], learning is triggered by experience, either in terms of a problem to be solved, a situation that is unfamiliar, or a need that must be satisfied. Learning involves transforming experience into feelings (reflection), knowledge, attitudes, values (analysis), behaviours and skills (plans and action).

In professional terms, the cycle is triggered when the worker experiences a problem when undertaking a practice task, or when they identify a need such as practice development. Alternately, the supervisor may trigger the cycle by asking the worker to review a case, or by seeking improved performance.

To make use of experience and to learn from it, there first has to be an engagement in that experience. For instance, the worker may complete the task while being psychologically disengaged with it.

At this stage of the cycle, the task for the supervisor is to help the worker obtain accurate observations of what went on, and the nature of the user's circumstances. It cannot be assumed that, because the worker was present, accurate observations were made. Nor can it be assumed that in a busy office, when the supervisor asks 'What happened?' that this will elicit a full account of the worker's observations. Instead, 'What happened?' may be shorthand for 'I only want to address urgent or high-risk matters, or offer immediate guidance.'

Ask the right question

The account of practice comes as a result of the dialogue between worker and supervisor, and is significantly influenced by the ways in which the supervisor conducts that discussion and by the types of questions asked. Therefore, the practice cycle does not exist as an objective piece of information. Rather, the way in which the supervisor asks about the worker's observations shapes both the focus and scope of the practice account.

40 Kolb D (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*. London. Prentice-Hall
41 Jarvis P (1995) *Adult and Continuing Education*. London. Routledge

What happened?

Evidence-based practice depends on how well the story is elicited in the stage of the cycle. Open-ended questions about the user and the context will generate a very different account of what happened than closed questions with a narrow focus. In other words, the worker's account and focus is shaped significantly by the questions asked by the supervisor.

2. Reflecting

Engaging in experience is not sufficient. Without reflecting on the experience, it may be lost or misunderstood. For instance, the worker may have been engaged in a powerful interview but if the interview is not debriefed nor reflected on, its benefit may be lost or misunderstood.

Processing the feelings often reveals a richer layer of observations, for example, observations held at an emotional level. Reflection explores feelings, patterns, and connections arising from the experience. It is also through emotion that workers identify what values or assumptions are triggered by a piece of work.

The nature of the social care task can produce strong emotional and moral responses that need to be acknowledged and processed. It's also important to clarify the source of these responses. Sometimes we feel before we see. For instance, gut reactions or feelings that can't be initially rationalised are sometimes clues to vital information about unspoken situations or dangers. When these are explored in supervision, the unconscious observations that resulted in these reactions can be uncovered.

Supervisor: 'So what was happening during the home visit at the point when you began to feel cold and shivery?

Worker: 'Thinking back, it was when I saw the look of terror in the child's face when he heard his step-dad shouting at the back door to f…ing well let him in or else.'

Such responses also need to be explored to check whether they are contaminated by the worker's personal experiences. For NQSWs facing new demands and levels of responsibility, the opportunity to talk about the emotional demands of the work is particularly important. It is crucial that they pick up the positive message that talking about emotions is a sign of strength and competence.

Reflection allows us to recognise common elements in different situations by referencing our previous experiences. This helps the worker to identify key issues quickly, along with early warning signs, priorities and tasks.

This is less easy for the NQSW, especially those with limited pre-qualification social care experience. They need more time and support to identify the key elements in each case. Over their first year, the NQSW will begin to build their store of case experience, which can subsequently be used to accelerate recognition and assessment skills.

3. Analysis

Reflection should lead to analysis. If the cycle stops at reflection, false and subjective conclusions may be drawn. Analysis ensures that evidence and feelings are located within an external body of knowledge, theory, research and professional value, and then tested against it. Hence the reflections of a white male practitioner about working with a black client who appears resistant might be re-assessed when exposed to research on the wider experiences of black people in the criminal justice system.

Analysis translates information and observations into professional evidence. This occurs through interrogating information and probing discrepancies so that its meaning and significance can be elicited. It is how the worker makes sense of the situation and of their own assessment, intentions and plans.

In doing so, analysis must incorporate the meaning of the situation to the user, as well as to the worker or their organisation. Analysis is essential in explaining and justifying intervention in people's lives, advocating resources or seeking external authority for action.

From a development perspective, analysis provides the basis for wider learning through generalisations that can be made from analysis done on a specific case. If this analysis is not done, and the worker moves straight from reflection to action, it is possible to get it 'right' without knowing why.

Equally, if no analysis is done and things go wrong, it is impossible to understand why. This will prevent workers from being able to learn from difficulties or to improve their practice.

4. Action planning

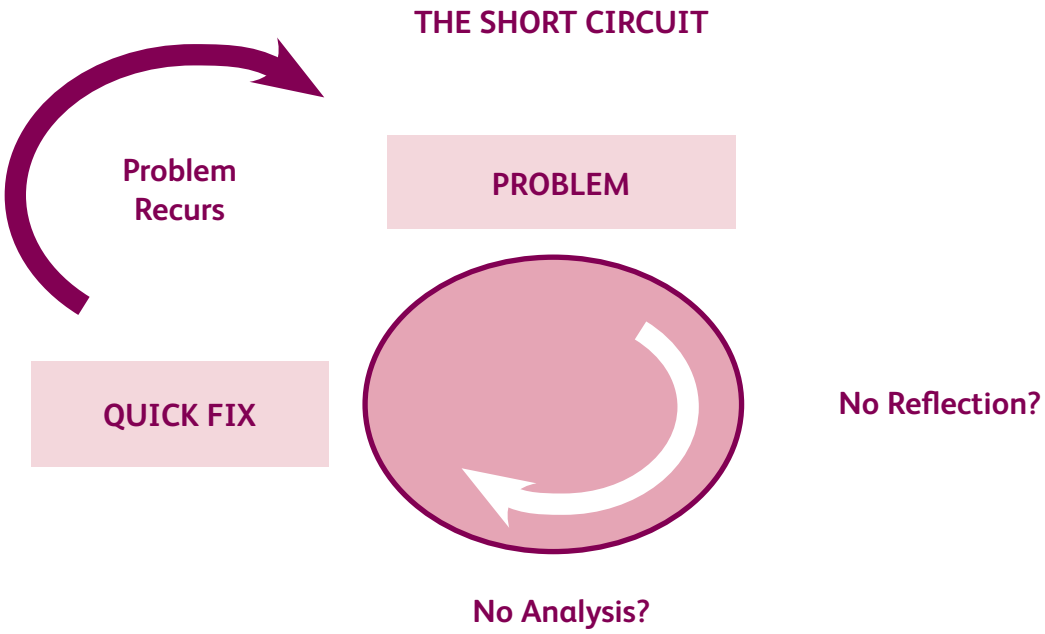
In order to deliver effective services, the analysis needs to be translated into plans and actions. At this stage in the supervision cycle, the focus is on the planning, preparation and rehearsal of strategies.

Goals need to be set and practical options examined. Before the worker tries out a new approach or a change of tack, the supervisor may need to go through the plan with the worker, facilitate co-working or identify contingency plans. The supervisor's skills are important here, helping to generate and test different options. Finally, as strategies are put into action, the cycle moves into its next phase as new experience is created and a fresh cycle begins.

Beware short circuits and quick fixes

The supervision process can therefore be seen as a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, analysis, planning, action and review. For problem solving or development to be fully effective, all four parts of the learning cycle need to be addressed. The challenge for supervisors is to resist the temptation and/or pressure to move rapidly from experience to plan, with little or no focus on reflection and analysis. This is the 'short circuit'.

Fig 15: The quick fix



In addition, workers have different styles and preferences, so that while one worker may engage easily in questions about feelings, another will find this much harder. Factors such as the worker's level of professional developmental, discipline, role, gender, language and class all contribute to their problem-solving style.

Novice workers are more likely to prefer directive forms of supervision, so the NQSW supervisor has to strike a balance between recognising this stage-specific need without falling inadvertently into the short-circuit pattern. Using questions that focus the NQSW on each part of the cycle can help.

Activity 2: The art of the good question: some practical tips

In Appendix 3 you will find some useful questions that supervisors can ask themselves at each stage of the supervision cycle. Review these questions and ask:

- In which questions/parts of the cycle am I most confident?
- On which questions/parts of the cycle do I spend less time?
- To what extent does this vary according to the worker and how open are they to certain types of question?
- Which questions/type of questions do I need to:
  Ask more often? Choose one question from each list.
  Start asking? Choose one question from each list.
- Now think about the staff you supervise and their strengths and weaknesses around the cycle. Focus on the list of questions they find most difficult. For a worker who finds reflection difficult, focus on the reflection list, or for a worker who finds analysis difficult, choose questions from that list.
- Share the question lists with practitioners and invite them to identify which questions are relevant to a particular case. This underlines the shared responsibility for addressing the reflection and analysis elements, and avoiding the short circuit.

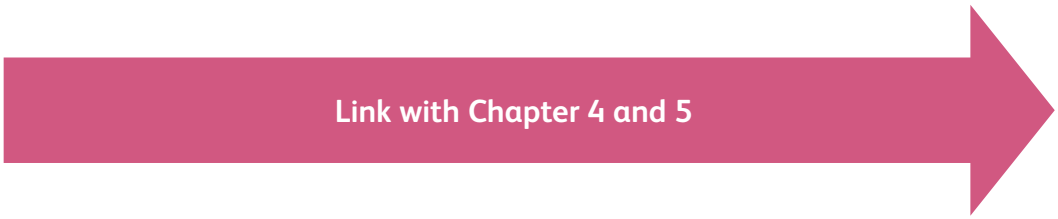
Notes

Comment

It is neither necessary nor appropriate for every situation to be processed in detail around the cycle, but it is important that:

- Supervisors know how to engage staff in all parts of the cycle.
- Supervisors access the cycle when significant decisions are being made that affect either staff or users.
- Supervisors use the analysis questions to help NQSWs to make the links between theory and practice.

Link: In Chapters 4 and 5, we will look in detail at how the supervisor can assist the worker to analyse, and we will see a slightly expanded version of this cycle that is used in supervising assessment work.



So far we have looked at the supervision cycle through the eyes of the supervisor. Now let's look at the cycle through the supervisee's eyes. The aim of external supervision is to facilitate the development of a mindful and reflective practitioner who will use the four stages not only in supervision, but also in their own practice.

3.6 The supervisee cycle

Fig 16: The supervisee cycle

Activity 3: A shared map

It can be helpful to share this supervision cycle diagram with your NQSW as a basis for talking about their contribution to, and journey through, the supervisory process. This might trigger discussion about which elements the practitioner feels more/less comfortable with and how the supervisor can help them engage with the whole cycle.

Notes

3.7 The four levels of reflection

Reflection is a term that can be over-used and under-defined. It is a useful and practical concept only when supervisors and staff use shared language about what it is, why it is important and what evidence will show that supervisors and staff are engaged in reflection.

Reflection involves facts, feelings, assumptions, norms, values, attitudes and perceptions. Although it is an internal activity, it requires engagement with the perspectives and concerns of other stakeholders: colleagues, users, agencies or the community. Reflection makes connections between situations, contexts, roles and actions. It involves the past, present and future as well as personal, professional, political and philosophical frames of reference.

At its core, reflection is a process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience in terms of self and self in relation to the world.

Ruch[42] identifies four levels of reflection:

- Technical.
- Practical.
- Process.
- Critical.

Technical reflection involves the comparison of performance in practice with standards, policies or procedures. It is based on theories stating what 'should' be done, and is a pragmatic form of reflection using external/technical information to identify the correct form of action. At the macro level, a performance management audit or inspection could be thought of as a formal organisational technical reflection.

Practical reflection draws on the work of Schon[43] who stated that knowledge can be generated from the bottom up, using the practitioner's experience as a source of self-evaluation, insight and learning. Schon stated that the reflective practitioner should possess three levels of reflectivity:

- Knowing in action – practitioners being aware of what they have done and what they aimed to do.
- Reflection in action – practitioners operating in uncertain and messy situations where simple solutions do not apply but where their experience, intuition and practice wisdom guides them.

42 Ruch G (2000) *Self and Social Work: Towards an Integrated Model of Learning*. Journal of Social Work Practice 14(2) 99-112

43 Schon D (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York. Basic Books

- Reflection on reflection in action – practitioners look back in a more detailed way, perhaps using a critical-incident approach to analyse their work.

Process reflection has its roots in psychodynamic theory about the impact of unconscious processes. As an activity based on interpretation, the focus is on the interaction of thoughts and feelings, and how these shape the practitioner's judgements and decisions. One aim of process reflection is to increase the practitioner's awareness of the nature, source and impact of the unconscious intra- and inter-personal forces acting on them.

Sheppard[44] describes it as means to explore the assumptions, tacit knowledge and underlying theories that practitioners use. This includes raising awareness of how the practitioner's knowledge has been shaped by cultural and political forces and of the practitioner's hidden assumptions.

Critical reflection takes the scrutiny of the professional's knowledge and practice one step further. It encourages practitioners to question and challenge existing power relations, and to examine how knowledge about practice is created, in whose interests and for what motives[45].

It assumes that knowledge is formed socially rather than being neutral or objective, so it can only ever be partial and evolving. At the same time, it offers a process for challenging discussions about the experiences of practitioners and service users, and the power relations between them. Kondrat[46] proposes the following goal of critical reflection:

Social workers as knowing subjects to achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-historical reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality... (p472)

Table 4 on the following page shows the different purpose, focus, theoretical base and sphere of action for each of the four levels of reflection. Hence the sphere of action at the technical level might be the organisation, whilst at the process level it will be the individual, and at the critical reflection level it will be social and collective change.

44 Sheppard M (2006) *Social Exclusion and Social Work: The Idea of Practice*. Aldershot. Ashgate
45 Fook J (2002) *Critical Theory and Practice*. London. Sage
46 Kondrat M (1992) *Reclaiming the Practical. Formal and Substantive Rationality in Social Work Practices*. Social Service Review. June 237-255

Level of Reflection	Purpose	Theoretical Underpinning	Sphere of action
1. Technical or surface reflection	Compliance Doing it right	Normative What should be done?	Organisation
2. Practical	Delivery Solving a problem	Descriptive What is going on? Pragmatism How can we solve this?	Intervention
3. Process	Self-awareness	Interpretive Why do things happen? Why did I do this?	Individual
4. Critical/in- depth reflection Knowledge as socially constructed	Challenging Transforming social relations	Critical What larger social processes is my theory and practice part of?	Society

Table 4: Four levels of reflection

Reflective practitioners

The four levels of reflection are like peeling the layers of an onion, each layer deepening the level of analysis. Burgoyne and Reynolds[47] distinguish between three types of practice: effective practice, reflective practice and critically reflective practice. Effective practitioners are successful even when they cannot give an account or explain their practice. Often such practice relies on an intuitive level of skill (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion about intuition).

Reflective practitioners however, can provide an explanation of how they perform and a theory of action. These practitioners provide the additional benefit of being able to transfer their skills, and being able to adapt existing theories and practice to a new situation.

Finally, critically reflective practitioners possess a rich mix of normative, interpretative and critical theory which allows them to continuously question and revise their theories, as well as pay attention to the moral and ethical aspects of practice. They are also aware of the wider role that practice is fulfilling and the kind of society that their work is reproducing or changing.

47 Burgoyne J and Reynolds M (1997) *Management Learning: Integrating Perspectives in Theory and Practice*. London. Sage

3.8 Using the four levels in supervision

In practice, there's often a lot of overlap between levels. A supervisory conversation may start off at one level and then move to another level. Below are examples of the four levels, showing how the supervisor may move to another level by changing the focus, perspective or purpose of the conversation. In this way, the supervisory process moves from surface to deep forms of reflection.

Example of technical reflection

The supervisor checks whether a worker has completed an assessment task within required timescales. Here, the level is technical. The purpose is compliance monitoring; the focus is on task (completion of this assessment); and the perspective is organisational. This level of reflection is very similar to the short circuit described earlier, namely that a problem leads directly to a response.

If, for example, the supervisor used this example to illustrate the worker's general difficulty meeting deadlines, this would represent a move to another level of focus. This could either be on the practical level of reflection, 'What can we do about this?' or on the process level, 'Why do you think this is happening?'

Example of practical reflection

The supervisor helps a worker to think about how to structure a report. Here the level of focus is pragmatic, assisting the worker to solve a problem, and the perspective widens to include professional and user considerations.

However, if the supervisor asks the worker to reflect on any anxieties about report writing, and what writing reports means to them, this would be a move to the process level.

Example of process reflection

The supervisor observes how the worker's report refers to a service user in a negative way. The supervisor asks the worker to talk about how she/he feels about the service user and how the user might experience the worker and this report. Further discussion could include asking the worker to reflect on whether this user reminds them of anyone else or of a previous case. In this way, the focus of reflection moves to a personal perspective, and the purpose now moves to promoting self-awareness and empathy for the service user's experience.

The questions offered in the reflection list (see Appendix 3) would be particularly relevant to process reflection. This situation would highlight a need to consider agency standards for report writing, which would thereby involve some level 1 reflection.

This example would move to a critically reflective level if the supervisor asked the worker to think about how reports on service users raise wider issues about power-knowledge relations, accountability and transparency. Another example would be where a worker's reports contained assumptions, for instance, about the parents of children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. This would widen the reflective process to include a focus on how knowledge is created and how public opinion and social interpretation of immigration influences the worker's attitudes.

Example of critical reflection

A supervisor working in a multi-disciplinary service for children with disabilities invites the team to explore different models of disability, and in particular the differences between medical and social models. Critical reflection has a liberating aspect to it as it provides the opportunity to challenge existing power-knowledge relations. Critical reflection explores the nature of the underlying assumptions or implicit theories of action, for example, that mental illness is a biological rather than a socially defined problem.

Critical reflection asks in whose interest forms of knowledge have been created and how the construction of knowledge reproduces certain forms of social relations, for example, who wins and who loses by a particular construction of disability. Hence the perspective now widens to include public and social spheres, and the purpose is to engage in social as well as professional change. The questions offered in the analysis section of Appendix 3 would be particularly relevant at this level.

When workers can practice in this manner, they surely meet the definition of the reflective practitioner who, according to Sheppard[48]: ...is aware of the socially situated relationship with their clients; has a clear understanding of their role and purpose; who understands themselves as a participant whose actions and interactions are part of the social work process; who is capable of analysing situations and evidence, with an awareness of the way their own experience affects this process; who can identify the intellectual and practice processes involved in assessment and intervention; who is aware of the assumptions underlying the ways they make sense of practice situations; and who is able to do so in relation to the nature and purpose of their practice.

48 Sheppard M (1998) *Practice Validity, Reflexivity, and Knowledge for Social Work*. British Journal of Social Work 28, 763-781

Activity 4: Practising reflection

This is an activity designed to promote a common language and model between the practitioner and supervisor about reflection.

11. Ask the practitioner to read through section 3.7 The four levels of reflection in this chapter.

12. Identify an issue in a case which is puzzling or complex, or where there is a real difference of opinion between the worker and the service user.

13. Use the four levels of reflection in any order to explore the issue.

Example: The discussion focus might start with a practical issue about how to engage a reluctant service user in assessment (level 2). The agency's expectations about assessment might need to be clarified (level 1). However, the discussion could move on to consider the worker's feelings about the user and where these originate (level 3). This might lead to an exploration of the worker's values, sources of knowledge and assumptions about the situation. Consideration might be given to the assessment's meaning within the user's family/community cultural systems and values (level 4).

14. It may be useful to copy the questions from Appendix 3 as a prompt for this discussion.

15. As an alternative, you could run this as a team or group discussion, in which different participants take responsibility for prompting reflections at the four different levels.

Notes

Summary

The four levels of reflection loosely relate to the different parts of the supervisory cycle described in this chapter. Hence levels 1 and 2 (compliance and problem solving) focus more on the experience and action parts of the cycle, while levels 3 and 4 (process and critical) focus more on the reflection and analysis parts.

The value of the four-level reflection framework is that it places reflection in the centre of supervision of practice rather than a luxury addition to be added when and if there is time. Getting this right will depend on the understanding, skills and capacity of supervisors to reserve space for reflection. If good supervision can be provided right from the start, then the supervisor will have made a major contribution to setting the NQSW on the path to becoming a reflective practitioner.

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, you should understand the integrated model for supervision with its four functions, four stakeholders and four stages of the supervisory cycle. The 4x4x4 model brings together in one framework the range of needs, tasks and processes that constitute supervision.

The elements are inter-related, so the supervisor must be able to work with every part of each element. If this is not done, the 4x4x4 model may be reduced to a 1x1x1 process, where supervision is dominated by the organisation acting as stakeholder, accountability as function, and action as the imperative.

Finally, the four-level model of reflection shows us that supervisors and practitioners need to be clear what they mean by this elusive term if we are all to benefit from this reflection process.

3.9 Key messages from this chapter

The integrated 4x4x4 model for supervision is comprised of four functions, four stakeholders and the four parts of the supervisory cycle.

Activity: Delivering the four functions of supervision

The supervisor has overall responsibility for the four functions of supervision but should not lose sight of the fact that it takes a network to develop a professional.

It is important for the supervisor, mentor, manager and team to be clear how each of them contributes to the NQSW's practice learning.

Even though there may be only two parties in the supervision session, there are nearly always other stakeholders to the discussion. Supervisors need to keep all four stakeholders in mind.

Effective practice and supervision share many features. They each engage in experience, reflection, analysis and planning.

The quality of the supervisor's questions has a significant influence on the nature of the information provided by the practitioner.

Activity: The art of the good question and Appendix 3

Beware the short circuit: jumping from problem to quick fix.

Activity: A shared map: the supervisee cycle

Reflection is a complex and multi-layered activity.

There are four levels of reflection: technical, practical, process and critical.

Activity: Practising reflection

External supervision is essential to helping the practitioner develop an internal supervisor and become a reflective practitioner.

Notes

Chapter 4:
Supervising assessment work: underpinning knowledge

This chapter

4.1 Explains the role and influence of supervision on assessment practice.

4.2 Identifies issues about the quality of analysis in assessment practice.

4.3 Describes the difference between intuitive and formal types of analysis.

4.4 Identifies the key ingredients of good assessments.

Activities in this chapter

Activity 1: The activities to support the content of Chapter 4 are set out in Chapter 5.

Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 together look at the supervision of assessment practice, firstly introducing the theory and then moving on to the practical. Very little has been written about this crucial role for supervisors, and much of what you will read over the next two chapters is new in the way it brings together the theory of practice with useful tools and exercises for supervisors and NQSWs.

Assessing often complex needs is at the heart of social work, and the quality of this assessment defines the effectiveness of interventions and the quality of life for service users. Assessment planning intervention and review practice underpins NQSW outcome statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9. There is therefore no more important task for the supervisor than facilitating and ensuring high-quality assessment practice.

The supervision of assessment includes how workers engage and communicate with service users; how they collect and analyse information and use this to formulate plans; how they carry out and review interventions; how they work with partner agencies; and how they reflect on, and learn from, these experiences.

This chapter contains key messages from research on assessment, including: the influence of supervision on assessment practice; weaknesses in analysis; the tendency for early impressions to dominate; and the need for a better balance between intuitive and analysis-based judgement. Readers who are already familiar with this material may prefer to move on to Chapter 5.

4.1 The influence of supervision on assessment practice

Supervision has long been recognised as critical to the implementation of any assessment process[49]. Recent developments in child protection aim to ensure more consistent practice by providing formal frameworks guidance and procedures to make practice more open, standardised and methodical.

In this way, the role and influence of the manager in leading practice has greatly increased, while the autonomy and professional discretion of the practitioner[50] has reduced. The practice ethos, knowledge and skills of the supervisor influence the assessment at every stage of the process.

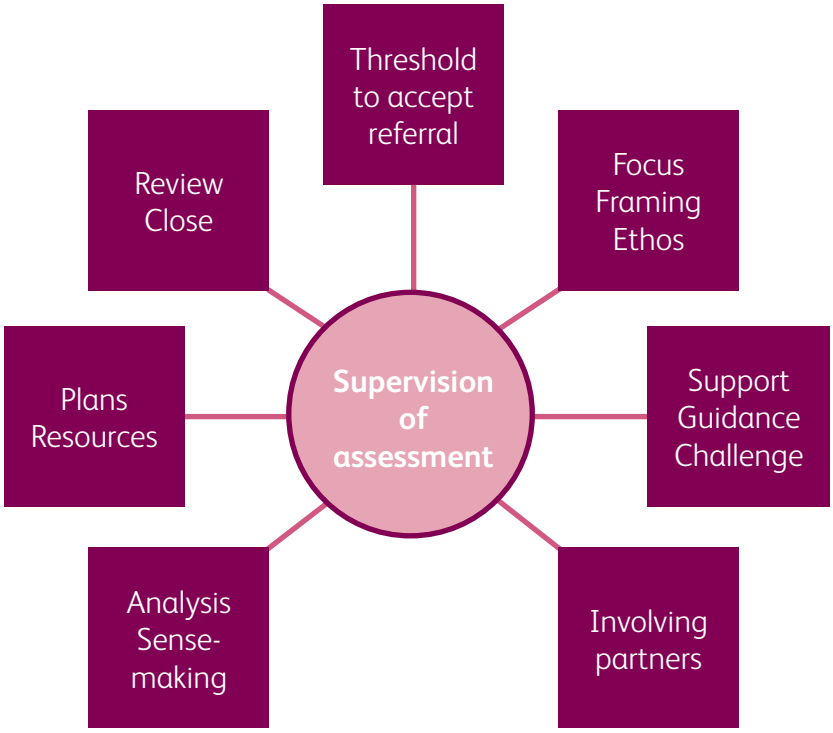


Fig 17: Influence of supervision on assessment

What gets through the gate?

Supervisors in initial assessment teams often have a significant gate-keeping role in crucial decisions: which new referrals are signposted to other agencies, which are dealt with by advice or accepted for initial assessment, and if so, the type of assessment undertaken.

49 Crisp B, Anderson M, Orme J, Lister P (2007) *Assessment Frameworks: A Critical Reflection*. British Journal of Social Work 37 1059-1077

50 Munro E (2002) *Effective Child Protection*. London. Sage

The exact scope of this role will vary depending on the agency and the team. This area is less relevant for supervisors in residential settings, for example. In many agencies, there is a single point of entry for external referrals, often staffed by generic customer care teams who undertake some initial screening. Supervisors of teams undertaking longer-term work, for instance, with children in public care, also adopt a gate-keeping role for the internal transfer of cases.

A key decision for workers in statutory children's social care settings is whether the assessment is undertaken as a child protection inquiry or as a child-in-need assessment. This is particularly important as high thresholds in children's social care have been an ongoing concern of inquiries, which have found that services have often been restricted to child protection cases.

However, the recent analysis of serious case reviews conducted in England between 2003-5 showed that 88% of the children had not been on the child protection register at the time of the critical incident. It's worth noting that these were children with complex needs and whose parents were often ambivalent, aggressive or passively compliant in their Interactions with agencies[51].

Focusing and framing the assessment

Approaches to assessment can vary widely in terms of the type of assessment undertaken and, just as importantly, the approach. Smale[52] distinguished between three approaches:

- The questioning model where the professional, as an expert, asks questions, collates and analyses information and produces conclusions.
- The procedural model where the worker follows a clear format to gather information and assesses whether standard thresholds have been reached.
- The exchange model where the emphasis is on the user, as an expert about their own situation, who needs help with planing how to reach their goals.

The Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families[53] combines elements of all three approaches. It has a clear framework for collecting information and is underpinned by a collaborative approach to assessment.

51 Brandon M, Belderson P, Warren C, Howe D, Gardner R, Dodsworth J, Black J (2008). *Analysing Child Deaths and Serious Injury through Abuse and Neglect: what can we learn?* A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews (2003-2005). Nottingham. Research Report DCSF-RB023

52 Smale et al (1993) in Holland S (2004) *Child and Family Assessment in Social Work Practice*. London. Sage

53 Department of Health (2000) *Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families*

Effective supervision can prevent procedural or questioning approaches from becoming a dominant factor here. One example is how the supervisor frames the assessment task to the worker and the language used. Consider the potential impacts of each of these two statements on an inexperienced worker:

'This needs a s47 investigation - we need to find out how risky these parents are.'

Or:

'We need, in consultation with other agencies, to establish the circumstances in which this child is living and the quality of care available to her.'

Thinking back to the four stakeholders model described in Chapter 3, we can see that the stakeholder for the first statement is primarily the organisation, highlighting its need to ensure that risk is identified and managed. In the second statement, the focus is on the child, the quality of care around her and her personal circumstances, indicating a more holistic and analytical approach. The use of the word 'we' also signifies the involvement of both worker and supervisor in a joint task. The language of the second statement incorporates all four stakeholders: the child, the worker, other agencies as well as the organisation.

Support and guidance for the worker

Assessment work is complex and emotionally demanding. It involves collating and making sense of large quantities of information from multiple sources. However clear the framework, assessment also involves a continuous series of mini-decisions about what information to collect, how to gather it and when to move to a decision. Each of these mini-decisions has an impact on future choices, and it is the supervisor who takes many of these decisions as they deliver assessments against closely monitored timescales and targets.

Involving partners

Assessing complex needs almost always requires a multi-agency approach. When it comes to statutory social work, the social worker has a central role in coordinating other agencies' contributions. The NQSW should be gradually moving into this key role during their first year, so the supervisor's understanding of, and attitude towards, other agencies and their role in making assessments is another area of influence.

There are many ways the supervisor can help the NQSW develop an informed and proactive approach to working with other agencies. They can introduce the NQSW to professionals in other agencies or ensure access to multi-agency training. They can also help them overcome communication barriers or develop confidence when challenging other professionals where their information is anecdotal, non-specific or fails to focus on the needs of the child.

This is particularly important when dealing with doctors, lawyers or psychologists, people who social workers often rely on to discharge their own statutory obligations. The reading list at the end of this chapter offers broader discussion of this topic.

Analysing and making sense of information

Helping the worker analyse information and formulate the problem is probably the single most important supervisory contribution to assessment. Research on assessment practice raises a concern about the degree to which social workers rely on intuitive rather than more formal modes of analysis. We will explore this in detail in the next section.

Plans, decisions and resources

Three issues can arise here. Firstly, there must be a strong link between analysis and planning. This occurs where the plan addresses the issues identified in the assessment, and a report is clearly focused so that professionals and service users are clear about what each of them has to contribute to make the plan work.

It's also important to gain an understanding of the situation and possible solutions that are acceptable to family members. Several factors may compromise this, including lack of cooperation or hostility from service users. Other factors the supervisor needs to be aware of include:

- The service user feeling that the worker does not understand their needs.
- Negative experiences of the way service users have been treated by workers.
- Barriers to engagement in the assessment, such as language, disability or geographical distance.
- Service users feeling confused and not receiving coordinated support.

Without this form of understanding or acceptable solutions, service users may not be engaged in the plan. A more worrying result may be superficial or disguised compliance[54].

Resources are also important. Supervisors who are responsible for allocating resources will recognise this as part of the reality, and there are no easy solutions. The supervisor's role in determining priorities and the allocation of resources in response to an assessment is vital. However, it is important that assessments identify and record any unfulfilled need and gaps in key resources - this can only be done if there are well-grounded assessment reports.

54 Brandon M et al Ibid

Reviews and case closure

Timely reviews of cases to prevent them drifting or agencies becoming disengaged are crucial to successful outcomes. Munro[55] found that workers are reluctant to change their perspective on a given case. They interpreted new information so it would fit with the existing analysis of the case; if it was conflicting they simply discarded it.

This shows how reviews can take place without any revision. The supervisor should make sure that the worker thinks about the implications of new information and changing circumstances for their original analysis, and explores the level of fit between their previous and current understanding of the situation. Finally, the supervisor's gate-keeping role surfaces again with decisions about case closure, which they are responsible for.

In summary, supervision is a fundamental part of the assessment and intervention process.

55 Munro E Ibid

4.2 The quality of analysis in assessment practice

Although we touched on some of these issues in section 4.1, we now explore them in more detail, paying special attention to how workers analyse information. There has been increasing recognition of the need for holistic assessments that consider the person in their particular situation, and to move away from overly problem-focused approaches.

Holistic approaches identify strengths and protective factors as well as needs and risks, both in the individual and their wider environment. The Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families and the Common Assessment Framework were both designed with these principles in mind.

Making the shift from deficit/risk-dominated to strength/needs-led approaches is a complex process. This is especially true in cases where risk is an issue and the consequences of things going wrong are potentially grave. Despite this, research into the implementation of the Framework for Assessment[56] found it to be a more transparent, accountable, focused and multi-disciplinary process.

The large majority of the parents who took part in these assessments said they felt more involved in the consultation process. Other research found that the new framework could be used therapeutically in some circumstances by Improving the user's personal understanding and their perception of 'feeling genuinely heard'[57]. However, the research also highlighted concerns that supervisors should bear in mind.

Quality of analysis

Several studies have identified problems in the quality and level of analysis.

Assessments can often be too static and descriptive, resulting in an accumulation of facts or concerns that are not analysed and woven together in a way that offers an explanation of the current situation[58]. For instance, assessments tend to over-focus on the parent's ability to carry out particular tasks rather than understanding how their own history, development and current environment shapes their parenting[59]. This also results in a focus on single events or concerns as individual incidents, rather than looking for patterns that might connect them[60]. An example of this[61] was highlighted in relation to neglect, where information documenting previous concerns about the parent's own difficulties could be ignored as part of a 'start-again-syndrome' in which:

56 Cleaver H and Walker S (2004) *From Policy to Practice: The Implementation of a New Framework for Social Work Assessments of Children and Families*. Child and Family Social Work 9, 81-90

57 Miller M and Corby B (2006) *'The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families - a Basis for a 'Therapeutic' Encounter?'* British Journal of Social Work 36, 887-899

58 Brandon M et al Ibid

59 Woodcock J (2003) *The Social Work Assessment of Parenting: An Exploration*. British Journal of Social Work 33, 87-106

60 Daniel (1999) In Holland S Ibid

61 Brandon M et al Ibid

A clean sheet was sometimes presumed and the impact of the history went unused in future work and planning... This was a way of dealing with the overwhelming information and feelings of helplessness generated in the workers by the families, by putting aside knowledge of the past and focusing on the present.

Others researchers have found that assessments tend to reach conclusions too soon without alternative explanations or hypotheses being developed or tested[62]. This comes from the powerful tendency to let first impressions rule. It can also happen through what is known in jargon as 'fundamental attribution error'. This occurs when we explain other people's behaviour solely in terms of internal personality traits and ignore the wider context.

Of course, when our own behaviour is under examination, we may prefer to explain it in terms of circumstances, not our personality. Munro[63] notes that these problems are often made worse by practitioners' tendency to stick to their original view of the case, even if they have new information. This can lead to disregarding children's accounts of what is happening in the home if they conflict with those of the parents or the professionals[64].

Three specific types of bias that can occur in safeguarding work are identified in a seminal study of child protection work[65]:

- The rule of optimism: describes a situation where pressures exist on workers to find the most positive explanation of situations in order to reduce conflict between parents, practitioners and powerful agencies operating in a liberal democracy.

- Natural love: the assumption that all parents love their children because they are their parents. Once this is assumed as a fact of nature, it becomes very difficult to acknowledge contradictory evidence. Any challenge amounts to an allegation that the parents do not share our common humanity.

- Cultural relativism: an infinitely elastic set of norms and standards about family life and the care of children, which can immobilise professionals when dealing with families from a different cultural or ethnic background.

62 Sheppard et al (1995) In Holland S Ibid
63 Munro E Ibid
64 Holland S Ibid
65 Dingwall R, Eekelaar J and Murray T (1983) *The Protection of Children: State Intervention and Family Life.* Oxford. Blackwell.

Sources of information

Despite the holistic intentions of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families, Brandon et al's study[66] of 42 serious case reviews finds that while assessments were strong on the child's developmental needs, they demonstrated a much weaker knowledge about the upbringing of the parents, especially the fathers:

- 93% of cases had medium/high levels of information about the child's development needs.
- 90% of cases had medium/high levels of information about family/ environmental factors.
- 65% of cases had medium/high levels of information about the female carer's (where present) own developmental and relationship history.
- 31% of cases had medium/high levels of information about the male carer's (where present) own developmental and relationship history.

The report stated in relation to the mother in one case:

The fact that attention was not given to specifically working with her history, and the implications on her needs and abilities to parent, is regarded as a major failing.

Holland's study of 16 assessments found that the major source of information was verbal interaction with the parents[67]. Recommendations for a child's return home were most likely where the parents cooperated with the assessment, developed a positive relationship with the worker and offered a plausible explanation for problems. The emphasis on verbal communication also led to passive or less articulate parents being seen in a less favourable light.

These findings also support Munro's finding about the degree to which assessments focus on parents' rather than children's views. Munro found that concerns expressed by other family members or neighbours are treated less seriously than information from professionals, and that the ethnicity of the person being referred can have a significant impact on worker responses and assumptions.

66 Brandon M et al Ibid
67 Holland S Ibid

Types of information

The nature and presentation of information in any field of social care is rarely straightforward. In the field of children's social care and safeguarding, it can be particularly complex and ambiguous due to professional and inter-agency anxiety, fear of getting it wrong and the difficulties of getting information from anxious and sometimes reluctant service users. In other words, information in this field rarely comes with clarity about what it is, how it has been obtained and what it means.

It's the task of practitioners, supervisors and multi-disciplinary planning meetings to share, sift, search for and determine how important their information is. It is through this process that raw data (facts, feelings and beliefs) can be transformed into useful intelligence. Often, one piece of the jigsaw only makes sense when fitted together with the other pieces.

Five types of discrepancy

One way to think about this issue is the idea of discrepancy, namely when one piece of information does not fit another piece. Here are five types of discrepancy which can occur in an inter-agency environment:

- Informational: there is contradictory information about a child/parent from different agencies.
- Interpretative: different conclusions are drawn from the same information by different professionals.
- Interactive: the parents' declared intentions are contradicted by actions.
- Incongruent: the parental manner or the way they talk about their child is inconsistent, contradictory or incoherent.
- Instinctual: the worker's gut feelings suggest that something is wrong but they cannot specify what.

Indications or clues about the existence of such discrepancies can occur at organisational, inter-agency, family and practitioner levels. Figure 18 shows some examples.

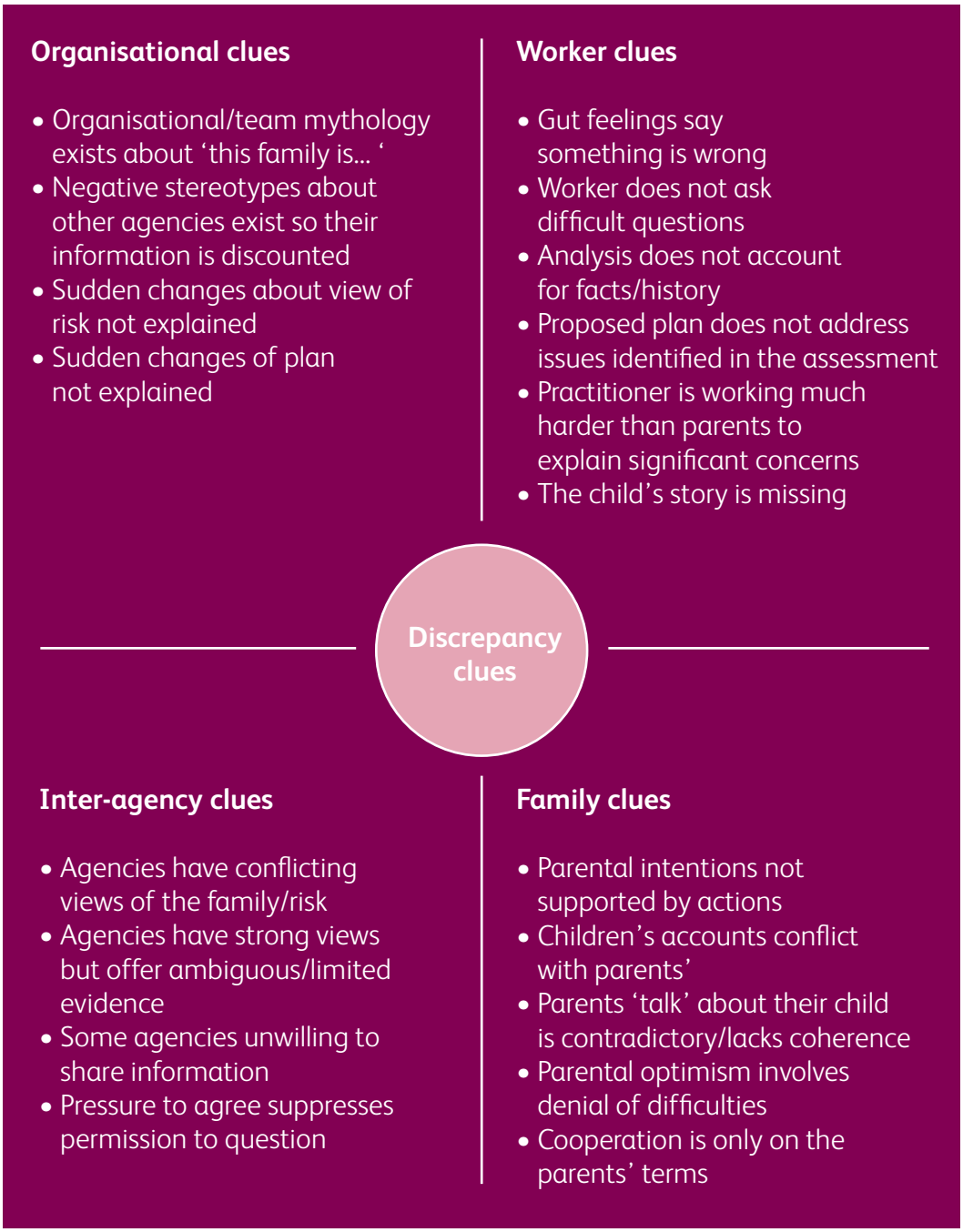


Fig 18: Examples of discrepancy

At the heart of these discrepancies are tensions between belief and behaviour, or between conviction and evidence. Figure 19 shows how different types of evidence and belief can produce four different types of information: ambiguous, missing, assumption-led or coherent information.

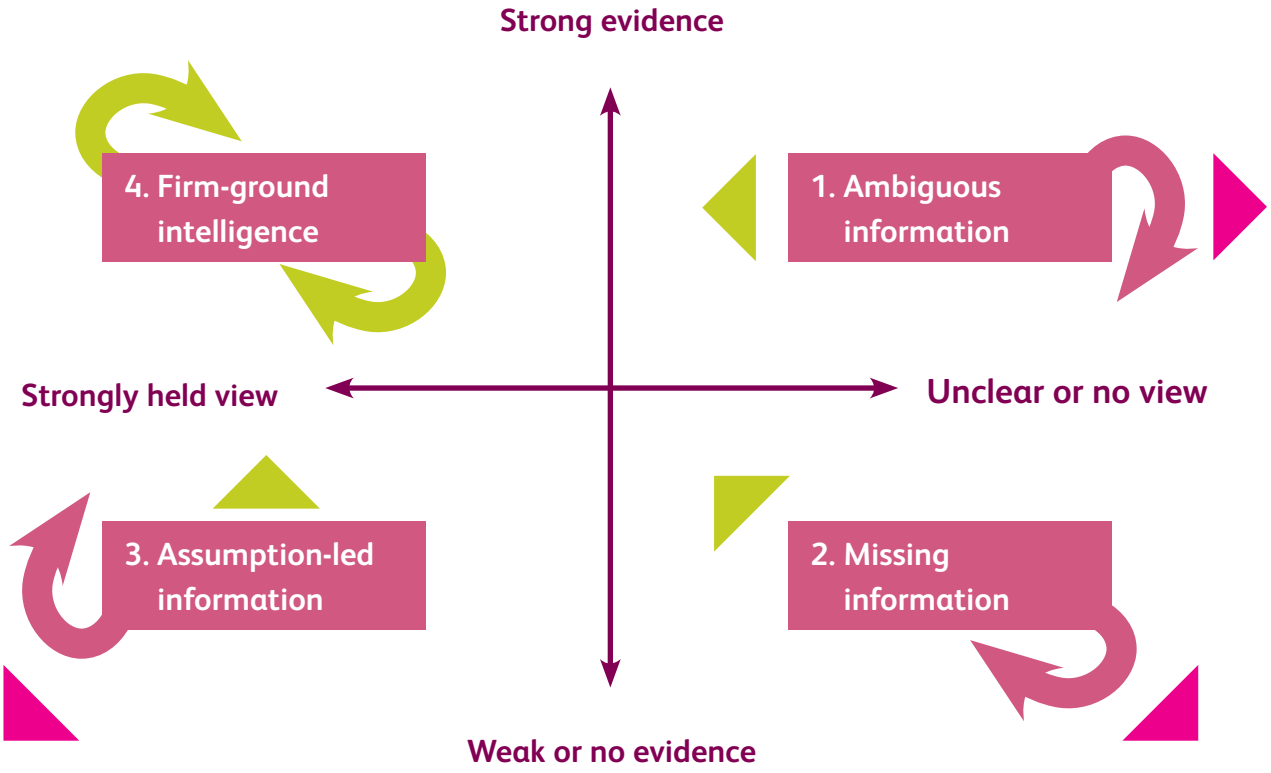


Fig 19: Types of information

The curved arrows indicate the need to inquire further and dig deeper to decide whether the information is useful and relevant. If so, it moves towards coherent information (green arrow). Alternatively, testing the information may eliminate it, either as irrelevant or as ungrounded (pink arrow).

Supervision, represented by the scrutiny (magnifying glass), the face-to-face discussion and the recording of information, is fundamental in helping the worker sift and test the information. This can lead to highlighting and exploring discrepancies in information, and deciding whether further inquiries are needed to clarify whether the information is valuable.

This approach starts from the viewpoint that raw information is almost always complex and problematic. However, good supervision can help to test and explore assumptions, ambiguities or gaps in information, ensuring that analysis and planning are on solid foundations.

Decision-making, intuition and bias

The discussion now needs to take place within the broader context of our general difficulties with decision-making. Some research[68] reveals that human beings are reluctant decision-makers:

The individual is beset by conflicts, doubts and worries, struggling with incongruous longings, antipathies and loyalties, and seeking relief by procrastinating, rationalising or denying responsibility for his own choices…Often the decision is made first and the thinking done later… When people do consider a number of options, they frequently stop as soon as they come across one that seems 'good enough.'

One simple reason for this is that our brains only have limited processing power, and conscious attention is a scarce resource. In order to conserve this, we resort to simplifications, short cuts and quick fixes that mean we are operating with limited information. In short:

Bias is inevitable and comes from the many ways in which the mind can distort, avoid or exaggerate information in order to support and confirm our beliefs.

68 Thiele D (2006) In Munro E (2007) *Effective Child Protection*. London. Sage

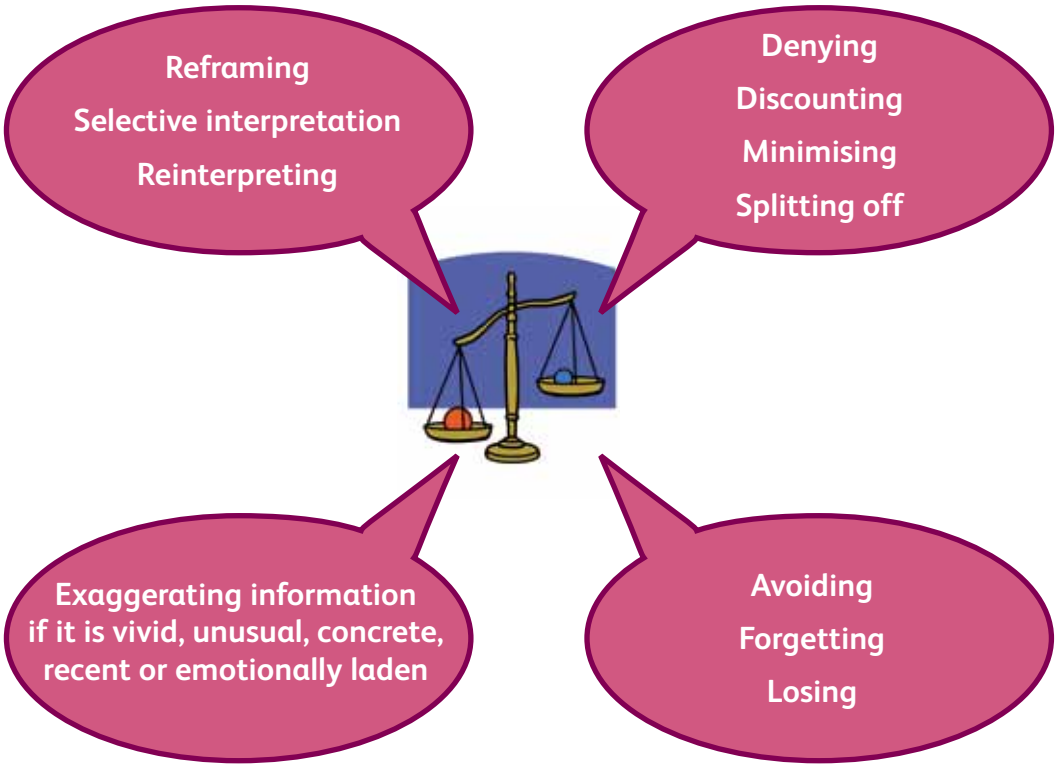


Fig 20: Bias comes from the way our minds can distort, avoid or exaggerate information

This may lead to:

Avoiding decisions

Tunnel vision

Short sighted decisions

Although we like to think of ourselves as rational, much of our decision-making operates on an intuitive rather than an analytical basis. This is the thesis of Eileen Munro's useful book Effective Child Protection,[69] from which much of the following discussion is drawn.

69 Munro E Ibid

4.3 Intuition and analysis

Intuitive thinking is a largely unconscious process where we integrate a large amount of information to produce a judgement in a relatively effortless way, based on identifying patterns, feelings and images based on our previous experience. We will return to the role of emotion in Chapter 5 but for now, it's important to note the significant contribution that emotion makes to decision-making in telling us where to direct our attention. Gigerenza[70] argues that intuition is best seen as an alternative method of reasoning that has evolved as we adapt to our environment:

Gut feelings are in fact neither impeccable nor stupid. They take advantage of the evolved capacities of the brain and are based on rules of thumb that enable us to act fast and with astonishing accuracy.

Expert versus folk intuition

Another important distinction can be made between expert intuition and 'folk' or 'lay' intuition based on life experience. The former is informed by extensive professional experience and is based on more formal knowledge such as theory and research. It brings in the service user's concerns and wishes and the practitioner's ability to make explicit and examine their values, assumptions, uncertainties and feelings. Expert intuition is judgement based on interpretation that brings together many types of evidence and which blends art and science[71].

By contrast, Munro calls analytic thinking:

...a conscious and controlled process using formal reasoning and explicit data and rules to deliberate and compute a conclusion.

Recent research has suggested that these two methods (intuitive and formal) of decision-making are interconnected in the brain, and that therefore we need both techniques, as suggested by Thiele[72]:

Analysis should be seen as acting like a good secretary keeping a check on the products of intuition, checking them for the known biases, developing explanatory theories and testing them rigorously.

Indeed this is Munro's central point: that social workers (and other professionals) need to use both intuitive and analyticmethods of thinking and decision-making. The skill is to know when to use which method, as they each have benefits and limitations as outlined in table 5.

70 Gigerenza G (2007) In Munro E (2007) *Effective Child Protection*. London. Sage
71 Gilgun J (2005) *The Four Cornerstones of Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work*. Research on Social Work Practice 15(1), 52-61
72 Thiele D (2006) In Munro E Ibid

Benefits of INTUITIVE METHOD	Disadvantages	Benefits of ANALYTIC METHOD	Disadvantages
Can process speedily especially in conditions of urgency	Over-confidence in 'my gut feeling' leads to poor judgements	Good when a complex or contested decision is required	Takes time and effort
Better for immediate/ short- term decisions	Relies on personal experience	Ensures systematic data collection and analysis	Requires training
Validates emotions and hunches as important information	Limited by information capacity of short-term memory	Maximises options and alternatives	Can be perceived as cold and mechanical
Values contribution regardless of status or experience	Short-term focus results in lack of contingency plans	Based on formal probability theory	Can be hard to engage busy practitioners and managers
Can be very accurate for modest effort	Generates low-level theory with limited application	Can generate higher-level theory with wider application	Can be used to bolster elitist/expert attitudes
Values life experience and practice wisdom	We seek to confirm own beliefs despite the evidence	Supports public explanation of decision	Can be manipulated to justify decisions as scientific or objective

Table 5: Pros and cons of intuitive and analytic decision-making

It is the combination of intuitive and analytic methods that produces the kind of evidence-based practice by which social work knowledge establishes its relevance, expertise and authority.

4.4 Features of a good assessment

Reder and Duncan[73] state that:

Assessments should be based on a set of theoretical constructs that guide the type of information needed and the sense that can be made of it… Otherwise the assessment is directionless and generates a mass of discrete pieces of information that cannot be organised or understood… In our view, the most useful theoretical principles are those within an interactional framework that portray individuals as existing in relation to other people and functioning within a social and relational context. Their history helps to describe who they are and further evidence can be found in the pattern of their current relationships with significant others.

Readers will be familiar with the three domains in The Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families, which provides the main theoretical framework for those working with the most vulnerable children.

It was designed as an holistic and ecological approach. However, assessments can still be static and descriptive in nature. Information from each side of the assessment triangle may well be gathered, but it is not necessarily analysed in a way that shows how risk and protective factors for the child relate to the parent/carer and the external environment.

A transactional-ecological model

Brandon et al[74] suggest a transactional-ecological model to help with this. It explains children's development as the result of complex, reciprocal and dynamic interactions of environment, caregiver and the child. A child's development is based on and shaped by a sequence of age- and stage-appropriate tasks. The successful completion of tasks at each level must be coordinated and integrated with their environment, and with any subsequent changes across the child's lifespan. Failure to do so may result in maladjustment and increased vulnerability.

This model emphasises the understanding of a parent's psychological sensitivity and availability to the child, factors which are strongly linked to the parent's own attachment experiences.

73 Reder P and Duncan S (1999) In Brandon M et al Ibid
74 Brandon M et al Ibid

Hypothesis: holding and testing your view

Good assessments are a continuous process of information gathering and sense-making, using the ideas of hypothesis and formulation. Hypothesis simply means a testable proposition which identifies the best way of understanding the family's situation and how to move forward.

Shemmings[75] describes the 'hypothesis' process in terms of the worker:

1. Having a view or idea about what is happening

2. Knowing what this view is and why they hold it

3. Putting their view to one side

4. Interrogating that view: why do I think that? What is my evidence?
How can I test my view?
Might there be other ways of seeing this situation?
How might others describe and explain what is going on?

5. Reviewing their view: does this still makes sense?
Do I need to change my view?

A case formulation should summarise and integrate the knowledge brought together by the assessment process. The formulation, which should draw on social, developmental and psychological theory, should provide a coherent framework for:

- Describing the problem.
- Examining its origins, development and maintenance.
- Planning an intervention.

75 Shemmings D (2008) *Address to Kent CSC Conference*. Maidstone

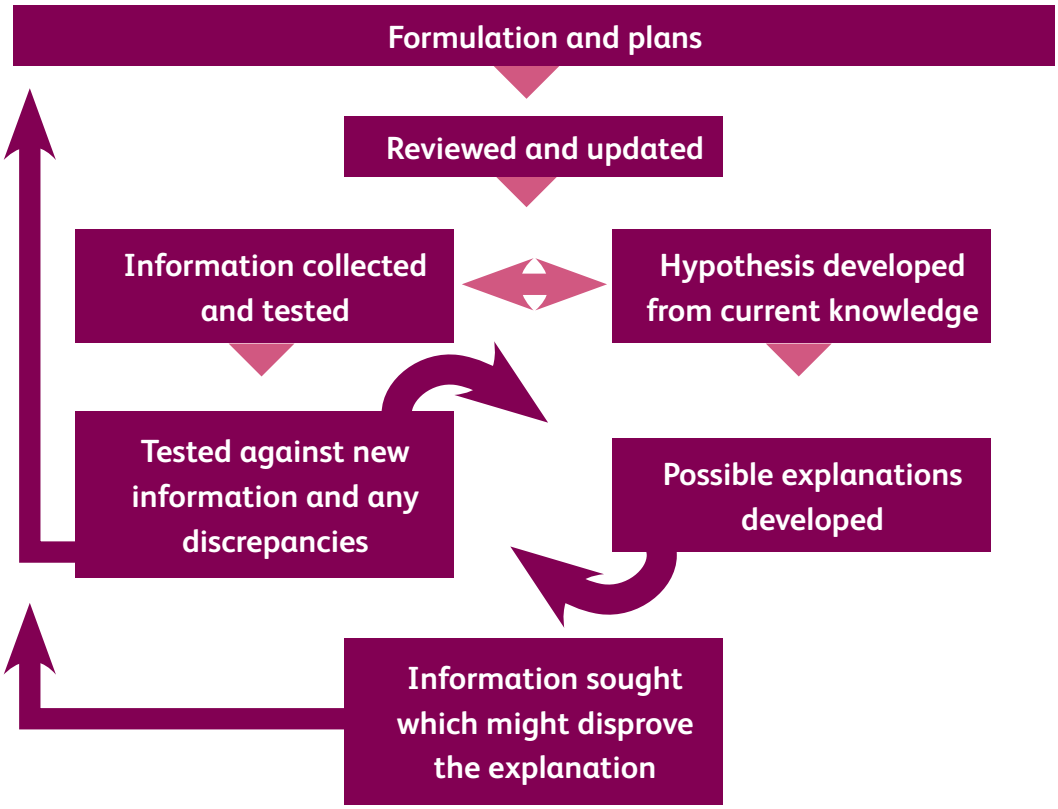


Fig 21: Fusion model of analysis adapted from Wonnacott and Wiffin[76]

Figure 21 depicts the overall process.

The supervisor's role is to help the practitioner identify which information to look for; to develop explanations about what is happening based on evidence; and to remain open to different explanations and curious about contradictory evidence. Practitioners can then identify specific outcomes for the child and plan how to achieve them.

In summary, a good assessment:

- Is clear about the purpose, legal status and potential outcomes of the assessment.
- Is based on a clear theoretical framework.
- Is clear about the context and value it is offering.
- Is collaborative and promotes accessibility for service users.
- Is based on the multiple sources of good information from different agencies.
- Values the expertise and understanding service users bring to their situation.
- Is clear about missing information.

76 Wonnacott J and Wiffin J (2008) Personal Communication

- Identifies themes and patterns about needs, risks, protective factors and strengths.
- Generates and tests different ways of understanding the situation.
- Gives meaning to the themes, using knowledge based on experience and research.
- Leads to an evidence-based formulation about the problem and possible solutions.
- Uses supervision to assist reflection, hypothesising and objectivity.
- Is able to record and explain its conclusions.
- Provides an outcomes-based framework for collaborative planning.
- Is reviewed, updated and amended in the light of new information.

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, you should have a great understanding of assessment and the role of supervision. Supervision has a significant influence on assessment practice, but supervisors must watch out for weaknesses in analysis such as the tendency for early impressions to dominate.

Supervisors must also keep in mind the need for a better balance between intuitive and analysis-based judgement. The message is that supervisors play a key role at every stage in the assessment process. It is through their supervision of assessment work that you have the greatest influence on the lives of children.

4.5 Key messages from this chapter

Supervision has a major influence on the approach to assessments as well as the way they are conducted.

Assessment tools are interpreted and managed through supervision.

Assessments have become more planned, collaborative and transparent.

Information is frequently ambiguous and problematic, and requires testing and exploring.

Spotting discrepancies in information is an important function of supervision.

Key challenges around assessment practice are the limited quality of analysis, the over-reliance on the verbal responses of users, and not making sufficient use of history.

Supervisors need to be aware of how quickly early impressions are formed by workers, and how reluctant workers are to revise these opinions unless something very serious happens.

Although intuition plays an important role in assessment, it needs to be balanced by analysis so that it becomes a form of expert intuition.

Notes

4.6 Further reading

Reder P and Duncan S *Understanding Communication in Child Protection Networks*. Child Abuse Review (2003) 12, 82-100

This is a very useful article on the complexities of inter-disciplinary communication and the factors that can distort communication, leading to misunderstanding.

Munro E (2007) *Effective Child Protection*. London. Sage

Useful reading on assessment

Brandon M, Belderson P, Warren C, Howe D, Gardner R, Dodsworth J, Black J, (2008). *Analysing Child Deaths and Serious Injury through Abuse and Neglect: what can we learn?* A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews (2003-2005). Nottingham. Research Report DCSF-RB023.

Dale P, Green R and Fellows R (2002) *Serious and Fatal Injuries to Infants with Discrepant Parental Explanations: Some Assessment and Case Management Issues*. Child Abuse Review 11, 296-312

Holland S (2000) *The Assessment Relationship: Interactions between Social Workers and Parents in Child Protection Assessments*. British Journal of Social Work 30, 149-163

Horwath J (Ed) (forthcoming) *The Child's World: Assessing Children in Need*. 2nd Edition. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Reder P, Duncan S, Gray M (1993) *Beyond Blame: Child Abuse Tragedies Revisited*. London. Routledge

Chapter 5:
Supervising assessment work: framework, tasks and tools

This chapter

This chapter introduces the supervision assessment cycle and explores:

5.1 The purpose of assessment.

5.2 Pre-assessment reflection and preparation.

5.3 Information gathering.

5.4 Feelings and dynamics.

5.5 Critical analysis.

5.6 Planning and reviewing outcomes.

5.7 Supervisory assessment questions.

Activities in this chapter

Activity 1: Practitioner preparation tool.
For NQSW.

Activity 2: Cultural review (Appendix 3).
For supervisors and NQSW focusing on experience.

Activity 3: Focusing on experience (Appendix 3).
For supervisors.

Activity 4: Using the resilience matrix (Appendix 5).
For NQSW.

Activity 5: Focusing on analysis (Appendix 3).
For supervisors.

Activity 6: Supervising assessment questions: a tool for interrogating the cycle.
For supervisors and NQSW focusing on analysis (Appendix 3).

Activity 7: Supervising assessment practice: Self-evaluation tool
For supervisors.

Introduction

As we saw in the last chapter, the supervision of assessment includes how workers engage and communicate with service users; how they collect and analyse information and use this to formulate plans; how they carry out and review interventions; how they work with partner agencies; and how they reflect on, and learn from, these experiences.

This chapter focuses on the practical supervision of these activities, introducing the six-stage supervision assessment cycle with tasks, tools, questions and relevant reading for each of these stages.

The supervision assessment cycle (see figure 22) describes six key elements in the effective supervision of assessment practice. The interlocking circles show that this is a continuous and cyclical process rather than a linear one. Actions or responses in one area can trigger a reaction in any or all of the others.

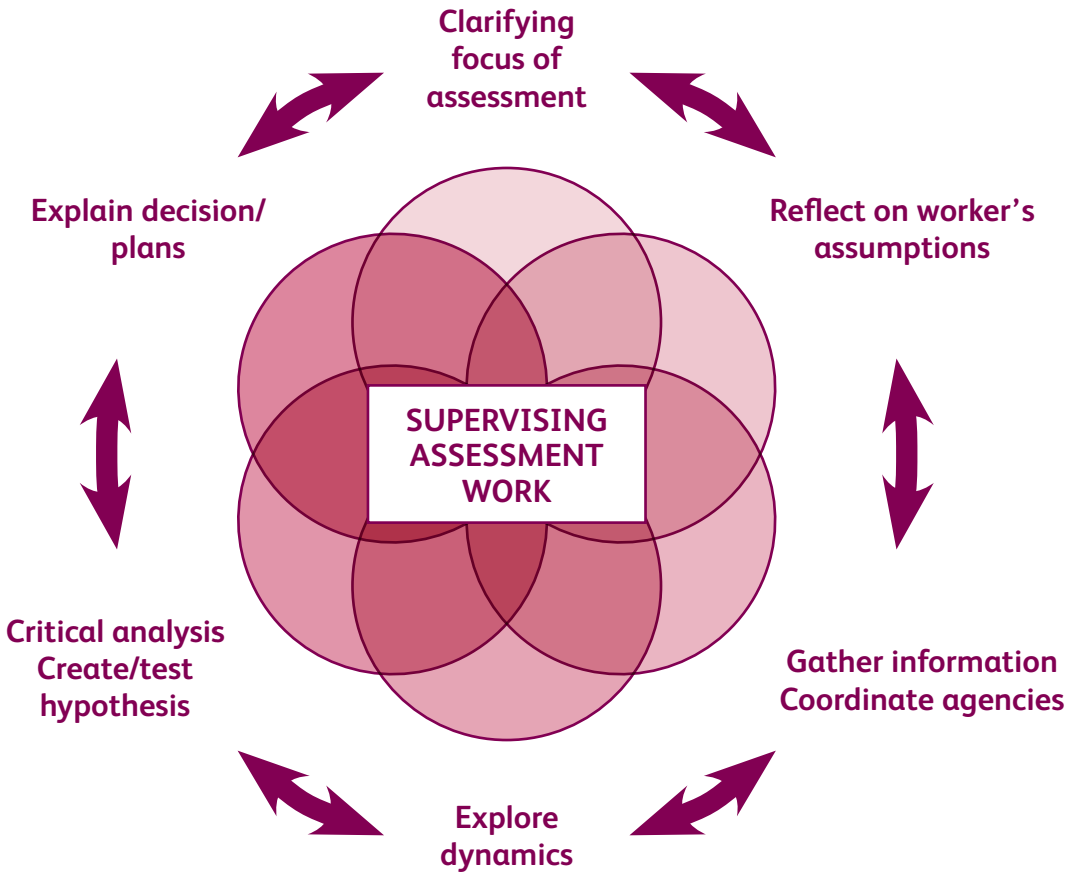


Fig 22: The supervision assessment cycle

This model can be seen as an expansion of the supervisory cycle (experience, reflection, analysis and planning) described in Chapter 3. It includes the same four stages, but in a slightly different order. The supervision assessment cycle starts not with experience (the information gathering stage) but with clarifying the purpose and focus of the assessment. This is one of the new elements. This cycle also divides reflection into two sections: preparatory reflection on the worker's initial assumptions and views about the case is separated from an exploration of worker-family relationship. The analysis and planning elements are the same as for the four-stage cycle.

Subsequent sections in this chapter introduce the supervisory tasks and tools and useful questions for each of the six stages of the cycle. You may find it useful to look at these as you read about each stage. They should make this cycle practical and easy to use.

Link with pages 142-146, Supervisory assessment questions

5.1 Clarifying the purpose and focus of the assessment

The main tasks for the supervisor here are:

- Clarifying the purpose and scope of the assessment.
- Ensuring that the NQSW is clear about their role in the assessment.
- Keeping the direction and focus of the assessment under review.
- Identifying the practitioner's readiness to undertake the assessment.
- Identifying the support required from the supervisor/others.
- Agreeing the purpose, focus, scope, ingredients and possible outcomes of the assessment.

Whatever assessment framework is used, the way we approach an assessment will vary according to the type of problem, the parties involved and the circumstances, age, readiness and availability of the people being assessed.

Each assessment needs a plan that addresses the sorts of questions described in Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families[77]. However, as the assessment unfolds, the supervisor will need to be involved in further decisions about its direction and focus. In the initial stages it's likely that the NQSW's role will be as an assessment co-worker, and therefore it is important to clarify this role, their contribution to the assessment process and which elements they will be responsible for.

Finally, it's important that the supervisor identifies at this stage how confident the NQSW feels about undertaking an assessment. The practitioner preparation tool (on the next page) will help the practitioner identify the different tasks involved in an assessment and how prepared they feel to carry them out. The tool might be completed by the NQSW alone or jointly with a supervisor or co-worker. The ratings can also be revisited once an assessment has been completed to highlight what the worker has learnt from their experience and how it might increase their confidence.

77 Department of Health (2000) *Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families*

Activity 1: The practitioner preparation tool

The tool offers seven statements, which are rated using a scale of 'readiness', to be completed by the practitioner, either in preparation for supervision or jointly with the supervisor/co-worker. Ask the practitioner to rate her/himself against each statement using the four rating points. Then ask the practitioner to identify the support they need from their supervisor/colleagues during the assessment. Make sure you revisit the tool after an assessment has been completed to see what learning and confidence the practitioner has gained.

Notes

1. It is appropriate to my role for me to undertake this assessment.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐
2. I am clear about my role and responsibilities for assessment in this case.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐
3. I understand the roles of other professionals in contributing to the assessment.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐
4. I am aware of what I am likely to find challenging about this assessment.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐
5. I know what I need to do to plan this assessment and coordinate with other professionals.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐
6. I believe that how I approach this assessment can make a big difference to the engagement and openness of family members.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐
7. I understand what my assessment report needs to contain and how to structure it.			
Strongly disagree ☐	Partly disagree ☐	Partly agree ☐	Strongly agree ☐

Now think about what practical support you need to increase your confidence levels:

What do you need from your supervisor to assist you in this assessment?	
What do you need from your team colleagues or co-workers to assist you?	
What would you consider to be a success for you in this assessment?	

5.2 Pre-assessment reflection: reflecting on the worker's beliefs and values

The three main tasks for the supervisor here are:

- To help the worker reflect on the values and assumptions (and the resulting bias) they bring to the assessment.
- To help the worker think about the potential impact of assessment on the user.
- To help the worker identify the knowledge and skills they bring to the case.

As already mentioned, there is a natural human tendency to form powerful impressions very early on and look for conclusions that confirm our own beliefs. So the supervisor needs to be active from the outset in listening for and eliciting the worker's early thoughts and assumptions about the case. One way of doing this is by using a cultural review devised by McCracken[78].

78 McCracken G D (1988) *The Long Interview*. Beverley Hills. Sage

Activity 2: Cultural review

Use these focused questions to help the practitioner think about:

- What do I know about families in this situation?
- Where does my knowledge come from?
- What prejudices might I bring?
- What do I know/expect about a child this age?
- What might surprise me about this family and why would it be a surprise?
- How might this family, the parents, the child, siblings and community perceive me?
- How might the assessment and my agency be perceived?
- How might I as an NQSW be perceived?
- What impact might the assessment have on this family: the parents, the child, siblings and community?
- What agency norms and practices do I take with me on an assessment? (For example, views about risk, thresholds and standards of 'good enough' parenting.)
- How can I use supervision to keep my beliefs and assumptions about this case under review?

Notes

5.3 Information gathering and multi-disciplinary collaboration

The supervisor's role here falls into five areas:

- Guiding the worker about the key information that needs to be extracted.
- Identifying potential sources of information and how to access these.
- Communicating effectively with other agencies contributing to the assessment.
- Evaluating the quality of information.
- Helping the worker organise and record the information they have collected.

Broadly speaking, assessment frameworks specify the types of information to be sought, and in some cases offer specific tools to help collect this information, such as the family questionnaires and scales[79]. However, the exact nature of the information required is dependent on the nature and circumstances of the case, information available from other agencies and from previous records and reports.

From the point of view of assessing risk, Munro[80] highlights the importance of the first stage: what is or has been happening? The point is made for two reasons. Firstly, the best guide to future behaviour is past behaviour. Secondly, professionals are rarely criticised for making poor predictions per se, but for making poor assessment about what is or has been happening.

Chronologies

It is therefore essential that supervisors make sure that workers are fully aware of previous information about the case, and that a chronology is compiled. A chronology is a sequential listing of the significant events in the child's life and the ways in which agencies responded to these events. It allows practitioners to build a picture of the child's development over her/his life and the quality of care available to them.

It is helpful in highlighting patterns of concern, showing what efforts agencies made to respond, and whether these efforts were effective. However, it is not only the facts of the child's life or the professionals' involvement that are important. The analysis is also crucial. What does the chronology reveal about the balance of protective and risk factors for the child and the ability of both family and agencies to engage effectively with each other? What positive or problematic patterns exist and how easily could these be changed? How did the parents respond to life stage changes such as pregnancies, losses, house moves or adolescence?

79 Department of Health (2000) *Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families*
80 Munro E (2007) *Effective Child Protection*. London. Sage

Asking these questions as the chronology is being compiled, which of course can involve the parents as well, begins to build a picture of family life for both the children and the parents. Appendix 4 contains a copy of the template for constructing family chronologies from the Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews[81].

A significant part of the assessment information needs to be obtained from other agencies. The supervisor therefore has to make sure that the NQSW knows how to contact the appropriate staff in partner agencies and what sort of information to request. Multi-disciplinary communication is a complex and sometimes difficult process, one where it's all too easy for miscommunication and misunderstandings to occur, sometimes with serious consequences.

Interpreting the meaning of assessment information from another agency is therefore just as important as receiving it. This was well illustrated in the discussion in Chapter 4 about the five types of discrepancy of information. Many factors can obscure and distort the meaning of the information, rendering it unreliable or even misleading.

Reder and Duncan[82] state that information needs decoding at five levels:

- Content - clarity of the information and level of evidence to support it.
- Meaning - interpretations, value judgements or assumptions that either party places on the information, or each other's professional status and credibility.
- Emotions - feelings affecting either the sender or the recipient.
- Context - organisational pressures influencing the sender and the recipient.
- History - experiences of previous communication between the parties.

Multi-disciplinary information cannot be taken at face value, so the supervisor needs to help the NQSW evaluate the content and the meaning of it. Remember, information is rarely self-explanatory, whether it's coming from family members, other agencies, your own agency or from the practitioner.

Equally, the supervisor should oversee the NQSW's communication of information to other agencies. In summary, Reder and Duncan argue that supervision is an ideal opportunity for practitioners to review how they communicate with others by thinking systemically – bearing in mind other professionals who are involved in the case.

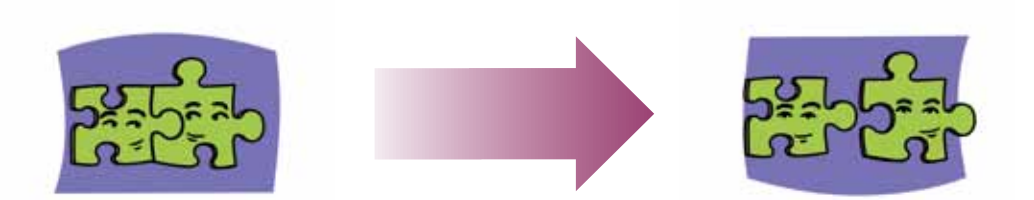
81 Brandon M, Belderson P, Warren C, Howe D, Gardner R, Dodsworth J, Black J (2008). *Analysing Child Deaths and Serious Injury through Abuse and Neglect: what can we learn?* A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews (2003-2005). Nottingham. Research Report DCSF-RB023

82 Reder P and Duncan S (2003) *Understanding Communication in Child Protection Networks.* Child Abuse Review 12, 82-100

Finally, the supervisor needs to think about the impact their own style and way of asking questions will have on the NQSW's ability to retrieve and interpret information. This applies particularly when discussing information that has been gathered directly by the NQSW from family members. The type of information fed back from these interviews is strongly influenced by the supervisor's manner and type of questions.

As described in Chapter 3, information isn't an objective collection of data. It is determined by the nature of the dialogue between the supervisor and worker. However, because of the difference in power and experience of the two parties, the focus of the supervisor's questions about the information obtained by the worker will largely decide what the worker tells the supervisor.

This means that if the supervisor does not ask about a certain area, the information may be lost. The NQSW quickly learns what information their supervisor usually favours, which may impact on both the type of information the worker then seeks from the family, and how they seek it, as we see in figure 23. This is why it is so important that the supervisor accesses all six parts of the supervision assessment cycle.



Supervisor and worker **Worker and service user**

Fig 23: The parallel process

Activity 3: Focusing on experience

In addition to the supervisory assessment questions starting on page 142, you could also use questions from 'Focusing on experience' in Appendix 3. These are particularly relevant when debriefing a worker from a session with a family or child.

Notes

5.4. Exploring feelings and dynamics

The main tasks for the supervisor here are:

- To monitor the quality of the worker's relationships and interactions with the service user during an assessment.
- To help the worker reflect on their interaction with the service user and its impact on the assessment.
- To identify and assist the worker with the emotional impact of the case and its effect on the assessment process.

Attitudes, assumptions and the interpretation of information are strongly linked to interactions, relationships and emotions. That's why it is vital that the emotional aspects of the assessment process are brought into the supervision process. There are three reasons for this.

Firstly, emotions lie at the heart of the gut feelings and intuitive judgements that play such a significant role in professional analysis. If these reactions can't be discussed and remain suppressed, this can undermine the assessment process.

It may result in the supervisor missing vital clues about risks to children which are picked up subconsciously in the worker's own responses to the family dynamics. Inexperienced workers in particular can be drawn into such dynamics which may lead to them to becoming enmeshed with the family, unable to see the dangers for children and drawn into an alliance with powerful or intimidating family members. Reder, Duncan and Grey[83] provide a helpful analysis of how unresolved care and control issues within the family can be replayed in the interactions between workers and families. Supervisors need to keep a watchful eye out for any evidence that the worker appears to be over-identifying with a particular family member, or acting out one family member's script.

Secondly, the quality of relationships between family members and social workers is crucial to the outcome of the assessment[84]. In order to create a climate where family members can engage with the process and be open about problems, the relationship skills of the worker are essential.

The quality of the worker's relationship also has a big impact on the family's likelihood to change. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the supervisor is to monitor the worker-family relationship and to be aware of signs of confusion, conflict, coldness, collusion or fear. These might be picked up in a number of ways:

83 Reder P, Duncan S, Gray M (1993) *Beyond Blame. Child Abuse Tragedies Revisited*. London. Routledge
84 Brandon M et al. Ibid

- Noticing how the worker talks about different family members, in particular the children.
- Noticing how the worker talks about different sorts of risks and harm to children.
- Noticing how the worker talks about family members from different cultures.
- Being alert to what the worker does NOT talk about.
- Noting discrepancies in the worker's or family member's accounts.
- Comparing the way that co-workers react to family members.
- Reading reports and noting the language used by the worker.
- Observing the worker's interaction with family members.
- Asking the worker to reflect on their interactions.

Lastly, the needs, perceptions and concerns of children are often brought to the surface by exploring feelings. This is especially the case if children are very young or have communication difficulties. Consider how these questions can bring the child into the supervision process:

- If the baby could tell the story of the first three months of her life, what do you think she would say and what would be her strongest feelings?
- How does the child's story support or challenge the parent's/carer's story?
- How does each parent talk about the different children?
- How much do you know about what he/she feels about living at home?
- If the child was given a magic wand and invited to change one thing about her family, what do you think she would choose?

Talking about feelings and dynamics

In addition to the list of supervisory assessment questions for this stage (see page 142), you could also use the 'Focusing on reflection' questions in Appendix 3. These are questions to prompt a discussion about the worker's interactions with family members, or those occurring between family members. Asking workers to use metaphors, pictures or parallels is often very revealing, for instance:

- If you had to describe your interaction with this family in terms of a tug of war, who would be pulling who, where and why?

- Name the strongest feeling you have in relation to each of the children?

Using drawings, play figures or other projective exercises can also help a worker bring to life their hunches or experiences of family dynamics in a way that simple discussions sometimes can't. Asking a worker to use play figures with hero, victim and monster characters can be a powerful way of helping them express their feelings about the family dynamics, especially if a figure to represent the worker is included.

In summary, without information about the quality of a worker's interactions with those being assessed, the supervisor's capacity to evaluate the quality of the assessment is impaired. Under these circumstances, it is less likely that the needs and concerns of disadvantaged or victimised family members will be properly heard or fully understood.

5.5. Critical analysis

The main tasks for the supervisor are:

- To help the NQSW develop an evidence-based view and formulation of the problem, its likely causes, impact on the children and potential solutions.
- To ensure the worker has explored how family members, especially the children, see the problem and its impact.
- To help the worker express their formulation and consider alternative possible explanations.
- To identify what further information is required to test or deepen the analysis.

A worker's hypothesis or explanation of what is going on draws on four sources of knowledge[85]:

- Family members' explanations.
- Workers' understandings gained from practice and personal experience.
- Research knowledge.
- Formal theories.

Unfortunately, it's often these analytical elements that are weakest in assessments.

The key is to analyse how the child's current development strengths, risks and future prospects have been shaped by the interaction of the parents, environmental factors and factors within the child.

However, a full understanding of the parent's capacities and vulnerabilities under stress can't be achieved without good information about their own development and relationship history. This includes not only the facts, but also the meaning of these experiences for the parent and how this helps or hinders their ability to be mindful of their child.

Helping the worker to engage parents in this task is one of the most important ways the supervisor can improve the quality of the worker's assessment.

85 Holland S (2004) *Child and Family Assessment in Social Work Practice*. London. Sage

Four tools for analysis

'Going analytic' does not require the supervisor to become a part-time academic. However, there are some tools to support analysis. Any tool that transfers information and interpretation from inside the worker's head to an external description of events, patterns and possible explanations will improve the quality of analysis. It will also help the worker and supervisor explore together the information and its interpretation.

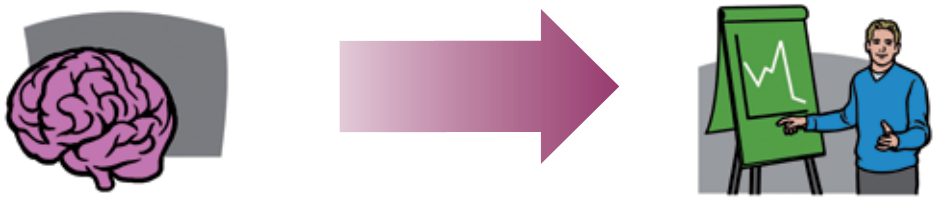


Fig 24: From the internal to the external

Note: All of the tools mentioned below could also be used by co-workers.

Genograms

Alongside chronologies, genograms are the single most useful tool for identifying inter-generational patterns of care and exploring how these influence the meaning, role and expectations of children for their parents.

They also focus the supervision firmly on the family and the child's needs. Genograms help workers develop a picture of the child and parents in a broad historical and relationship context in a way that can be easier than using computerised recording systems.

Decision trees

Munro[86] describes the use of decision trees as a means of organising, reasoning and analysing a problem. Decision trees include the use of rating scales to estimate the likelihood and desirability of different consequences. The process involves working through seven steps and recording the responses carefully for each step:

- What decision is to be made?
- What are the options?
- What information is needed to help make the choice?
- What are the possible consequences of each of the main choices?
- How probable is each consequence? (Rate each on a 0-1 scale where 0.5 is a 50% chance; 1 is 100% certainty; and 0.1 is only 10% likely).

86 Brandon M et al. Ibid

- What are the pros and cons of each consequence? (Rate on a 0-10 scale where 10 is the most desirable).
- The final decision.

Resilience and vulnerability matrix

The resilience and vulnerability matrix is another effective way of analysing the information. In the diagram overleaf, a number of factors for each domain have been added. Its value lies in the way the matrix integrates information about the child, the family and environment in a dynamic way to focus on the overall impact on the child. It also leads very easily to action planning around four key questions:

- How do we reduce the child's vulnerabilities?
- How do we increase the protective factors?
- How do we strengthen those factors that promote resilience?
- How do we lessen the impact of factors creating adversity?

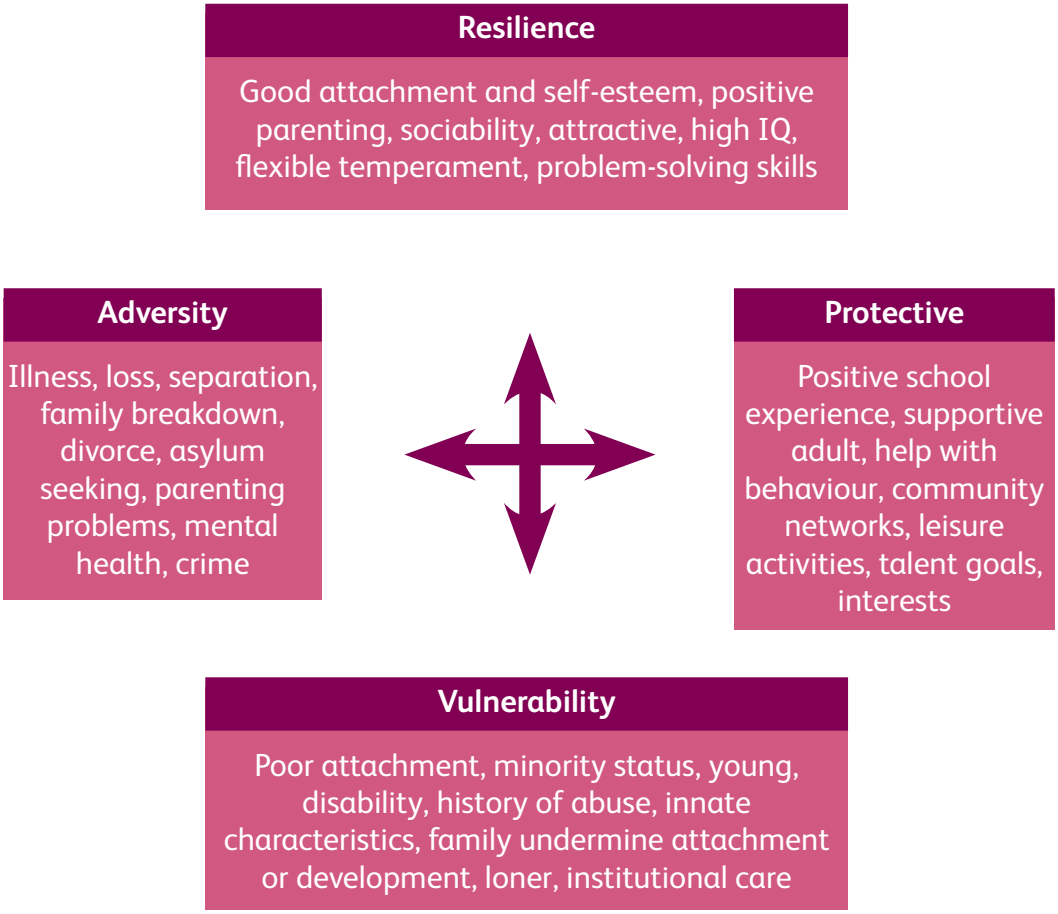


Fig 25: Resilience and vulnerability, adapted from The Child's World training pack[87]

87 *The Child's World training and development pack* (2002) NSPCC and University of Sheffield

Activity 4: Using the resilience matrix

Appendix 5 contains a worksheet on the resilience and vulnerability matrix for use by practitioners.

Finally, be aware of a pitfall where the supervisor ends up doing all the analysis work. Recall the short circuit in Chapter 3 where the supervision moves directly from the problem to the solution. Using some of these analysis tools during the NQSW period will help to prevent both supervisor and worker falling into this routine, establishing the professional's responsibility to develop evidence-based judgements from the very start of their career.

Notes

Activity 5: Focusing on analysis

In addition to the supervisory assessment questions on page 142, you could also look at the questions under 'Focusing on analysis' in Appendix 3.

Notes

5.6. Planning and reviewing

The key tasks at this stage are:

- Discussing and agreeing assessment recommendations/decisions with the worker.
- Clarifying review processes and contingences should the child's situation deteriorate.
- 'Quality assuring' assessment reports, including identifying clear outcomes.
- Supporting the worker at multi-agency meetings or in explaining contentious recommendations/decisions to family members.

The quality of the plan is largely determined by the quality of the assessment. A good plan needs to address the issues that have been identified by the assessment and engage all parties in specific tasks with measurable outcomes.

Plans to simply offer support or to monitor do not achieve this. It is also essential that the report and the plans have been discussed as fully as possible with family members before the meeting.

The supervisor must oversee the report itself to ensure its quality. Some NQSWs may need additional help learning to write good reports, which could be organised with the mentor.

Reports need to be clear and coherent, using accessible and sensitive language that is non-blaming and evidence-based. They should also produce conclusions that are forward-looking and solution-focused. This doesn't mean avoiding difficult issues but framing them in a way that offers possible solutions, while being clear about the essential requirement to keep children safe from harm.

A significant influence on plans, decisions and recommendations is the assessment of the parents' ability and motivation to engage in services and be able to make changes. Recall the earlier reference to the dangers in the most risky cases of disguised compliance[88] and the need to be clear about the difference between engagement, cooperation and compliance.

88 Brandon M et al. Ibid

This is an area of judgement that is particularly vulnerable to subjectivity and bias, which can result in either over-optimistic or over-pessimistic forecasts. This is not surprising, as predicting human behaviour is extremely difficult. Nonetheless, the supervisor needs to find out the evidence the worker is relying on to make these judgements. Munro lists five factors that should be considered:

- How long has the concerning behaviour persisted?
- In how many different contexts has it persisted?
- What is your hypothesis about why the parent behaves in this way?
- Does this give any indication of what factors might lead the parent to change?
- Are any of these factors likely to occur naturally in the near future?

Miller and Rollnick[89] state that a person will change when they are willing, ready and able. Morrison[90] adapted Prochaska and DiClemente's model of change and described seven elements of motivation:

- I accept there is a problem.
- I have some responsibility for the problem.
- I have some discomfort about the impact, not only on myself, but also on my children.
- I believe things must change.
- I can be part of the solution.
- I can make choices about how I address the issues.
- I can see the first steps to making the changes/I can work with others who will help me.

The supervisor can use this framework, for instance, by asking a worker to identify where parents are in relation to the seven elements of motivation. It may be that each parent is at a different stage. The seven-step model allows the supervisor to help the worker confirm or revise their judgement about the parent's willingness to make changes.

Finally, the seven-step model also fits well with the vulnerability and resilience matrix. As parents start addressing the concerns and become more willing to make changes to improve the life of the child, the adversity factors decline and protective factors increase.

89 Miller W and Rollnick S. (2002) *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*. London. Guilford Press
90 Morrison T (forthcoming) Assessment of Parental Motivation to Change In (Ed.) Horwath J *The Child's World: Assessing Children in Need*. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

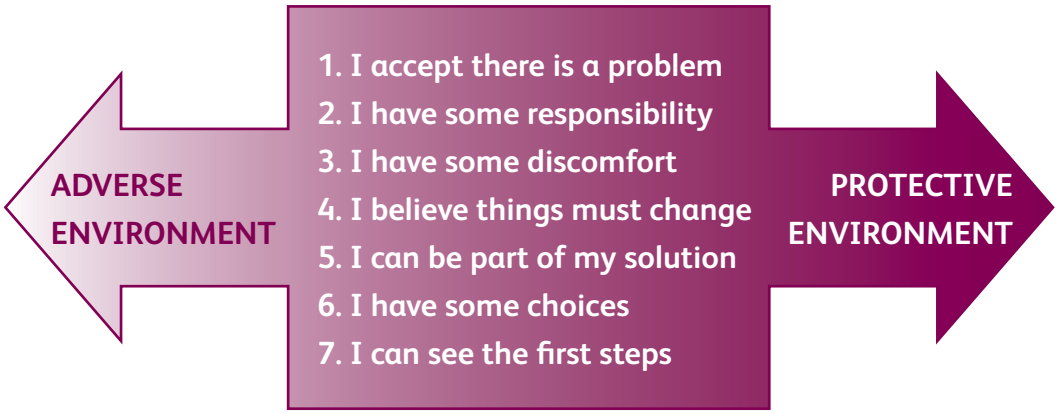


Fig 26: Building protectiveness by engaging and motivating parents

Finally, the supervisor needs to decide which multi-disciplinary meetings to attend with the NQSW (in some cases a co-worker may undertake this task).

It is essential that supervisors attend meetings where there is likely to be conflict over plans or decisions. Problems arise if the worker returns from multi-disciplinary meetings with recommendations that the supervisor subsequently overturns or refuses to support. There are also times when the supervisor needs to share the job of explaining difficult decisions to families, especially where aggressive responses could arise.

Activity 6: Supervising assessment questions: a tool for interrogating the cycle

Here are some suggested questions to help you focus your supervision with the practitioner at each of the six stages of the supervision assessment practice cycle.

Although they are set out here in a linear fashion, they can equally well be used flexibly as new information arises or circumstances change during the process. For instance, if a new concern arises, there may be a need to return to stage 1 and review the purpose and focus of the assessment.

If you think the questions are helpful, you may wish to share them with practitioners and invite them to select questions they find particularly relevant to a current case. In this way, the tool can be used to develop shared responsibility for reflection and analysis.

Notes

1. Clarity, focus and mandate of the assessment

- What is the assessment task in this situation?
- What is the purpose of this assessment?
- What questions need to be answered by this assessment?
- How clear are you about the assessment framework and protocols you should be using? (Rate on a 0-5 scale where 5 = very clear)
- What are my assessment roles and responsibilities, and who has lead responsibility?
- Which parts of the assessment process will be more challenging for you?
- How do you balance intuition and analysis in assessment work?
- What are the possible outcomes of this type of assessment?
- What are the limits to this assessment, for example, what can it not cover, what risks can't be predicted?
- What support and guidance do you need from your supervisor?

2. The worker's initial views, assumptions and knowledge base

- What questions do you have about this assessment?
- List three assumptions you might have formed on the basis of the information in this case.
- If you had any bias in this case, what would it be?
- What beliefs do professionals already have about this family/person?
- What cultural or gender issues might arise in this assessment?
- What knowledge do you bring to this case? Where does it come from? Are there gaps in your knowledge?
- What previous experience do you have of assessment work in these cases? How do you think that might influence your approach?
- What was the outcome last time you worked with a similar child/family?
- How might you engage the user in this assessment, especially if this is a child/young person? Are there any barriers of language, access etc. that need to be considered?

- What questions/feelings might the user have about the assessment process?
- How often have they been assessed?
- What information does the user need to give informed consent to the assessment?
- What do you think will be the most challenging aspects of the assessment for the service user?
- How could you support their engagement?

3. Information gathering

- What are the key pieces of information required in this assessment?
- What do we already know?
- What don't we know?
- Where and who are the agency sources for this information?
- Who knows the family/person best?
- Which other agencies/services need to be involved in this assessment?
- What multi-disciplinary assessment policies/protocols apply here?
- How might other agencies see your role in this family?
- Is any agency likely to be difficult to engage? How might we address this?
- Would there be any benefit in undertaking some/all of the assessment on a co-worker basis or a multi-disciplinary basis?
- What contact and information from other agencies do you need?
- Which family members and friends need to be involved and in what order/grouping?
- How will the information be recorded?
- What is your role in evaluating the quality of the information from other agencies?
- What discrepancies in information exist?
- How do we test or resolve these?

- What contradictions have you/other professionals observed in the parent's behaviours to the child?
- What information do we need from other agencies that we still don't have?

4. Worker-service user dynamics

- How would you describe your approach to assessment?
- What would I notice about it?
- How do you think Mrs X would describe your approach and style? If you had to describe the dynamics between you and the family/individual, would it be more like 'cat and mouse', 'pulling teeth', 'a shared voyage of discovery', 'just another assessment' or something else?
- How does your interaction with the user help/hinder the assessment?
- What is easy/hard to talk about in this assessment?
- Which family members are harder to reach in this assessment?
- What, if any, contradictory/confusing signals have you picked up in the interaction between family members and yourself/other professionals?
- Who or what does this assessment remind you of?
- What has most surprised/concerned you about the family/person?
- To what extent does your experience of the family mirror the experience of individual family members - and if so, why? What might this tell you about what is going on in this situation?
- What is your gut reaction about this family/individual? Where does this come from?

5. Worker's analysis

- What is becoming clearer? What is becoming less clear? What is unknown?
- What positive or concerning patterns are emerging?
- How long-standing are these patterns?
- To what extent does the information gathered confirm or challenge your initial impressions?
- What pieces of information are still not making sense or are ambiguous? How can we clarify these? What needs further assessment?

- How does the information gathered most likely explain the causes and consequences of the current concerns?
- What alternative explanations need to be considered?
- How do other agencies understand the situation? What are their concerns?
- What is the user's explanation for the situation they are in?
- What do you think is the meaning of this situation to the parents/child?
- What risk and protective factors exist for the children/victims in this case?
- What might other agencies/the service users make of how we are thinking about this assessment and its implications?
- How can we test which explanation is likely to be more robust?
- What knowledge, theory, research, values and experience can help explain this situation and how it might develop?
- What specific outcomes for the child and the parents do we need to be seeing in order to address the issues identified?
- If there is no professional intervention, will things be better, worse or the same in six months' time? Think about the different family members involved.

6. Recommendations, decisions and plan

- What decisions do we need to make at this point?
- What options are there?
- To what extent do we have the information to make a decision at this point?
- What might be the pros and cons of different decisions? Who gains and who loses?
- What is negotiable and non-negotiable about this situation in relation to our agency's duties and responsibilities?
- To what extent is there agreement between agencies about the main concerns and how each agency will contribute to addressing these?
- What would a safe environment look like for this child?
- What one thing would the child ask us to address for her/him to feel safe?
- What services or interventions are required to address this child's health or development needs?

- What specific outcomes have been or need to be identified in the plan for the child/parents?
- To what extent would these outcomes make sense to the child/parents in the light of the analysis and the assessment process? Will they come as a bolt out of the blue?
- How clear are your/others' roles and specific tasks in helping these outcomes become a reality?
- What evidence exists about the willingness and ability of the user to understand, engage with and address the concerns?
- What is motivating the family to cooperate?
- Where might the parent's motivation or capacity to change be weaker?
- What efforts have been made to aid change and with what success? Does this provide any grounds for optimism?
- How does the plan provide for monitoring and review against the intended outcomes?
- What is the contingency plan if these aren't achieved?
- How clear are you about the framework for writing an assessment report?
- Where in your report would it be helpful to draw explicitly on theory/research?
- How fair, clear, balanced and evidence-based is the report? Is it clear how the decision/recommendation was arrived at?
- What is your plan for sharing the report with family members?

Activity 7: Supervising assessment practice: a self-evaluation tool for supervisors

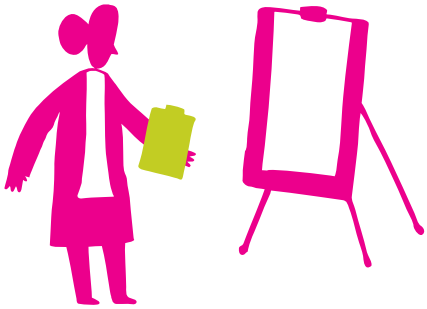
As this chapter has shown, supervising assessment practice is a complex and challenging area for supervisors. Appendix 6 lists tasks described within the supervision assessment cycle in a framework for you to review your own strengths and areas for improvement.

Notes

Conclusion

The influence of the supervisor's role on assessment has been recognised for some time, but to date there has been little specific guidance to assist her/him in this crucial role. This chapter has aimed to fill some of that gap by presenting a six-stage framework for the supervision of assessment work with key supervisory tasks at each stage. Practical tools, key questions and other resources have been identified to help the supervisor at each stage.

5.7 Key messages from this chapter



There are six elements to the supervision of assessment: clarifying the focus; preparing the worker; identifying what information is required; exploring the worker's interaction with the user during the assessment; critically analysing the information; and translating this into plans, recommendations and reports.

Activity: Practitioner preparation tool

Activity: Cultural review

Tools that can assist critical analysis include chronologies, genograms, decision trees and the resilience matrix.

Activity: Using the resilience matrix (Appendix 4)

One of the most important ways to help the practitioner to analyse is by asking questions of the practitioner.

Activity: Supervising assessment questions: a tool for interrogating the cycle. For supervisors and NQSWs focusing on analysis (Appendix 3)

The seven-step model of motivation can be helpful in assessing a parent's readiness to change.

The supervisor's greatest influence on outcomes for children lies in their supervision of assessment work.

Activity: Supervising assessment practice: Self-evaluation tool for supervisors.

Notes

5.8 Further reading

Assessment

Brandon, M., Belderson, P., Warren, C., Howe, D., Gardner, R., Dodsworth, J., Black, J. (2008). *Analysing Child Deaths and Serious Injury through Abuse and Neglect: what can we learn?* A Biennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews (2003-2005). Nottingham. Research Report DCSF-RB023

Dale, P., Green, R., and Fellows, R. (2002) *Serious and Fatal Injuries to Infants with Discrepant Parental Explanations: Some Assessment and Case Management Issues*. Child Abuse Review 11, 296-312

Holland, S. (2000) *The Assessment Relationship: Interactions between Social Workers and Parents in Child Protection Assessments*. British Journal of Social Work 30, 149-163

Horwath, J. (Ed) (forthcoming) *The Child's World: Assessing Children in Need*. 2nd edition. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Reder, P., Duncan, S., Gray, M. (1993) *Beyond Blame: Child Abuse Tragedies Revisited*. London. Routledge

Genograms

McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R., Petry, S. *Genograms: Assessment and Intervention* (2008) 3rd edition. Norton Professional Books

Decision trees

Munro, E. (2008) *Effective Child Protection* 2nd edition Chapter 7. London. Sage.

Resilience and vulnerability matrix

Blincow, D. and Hart, A. (2007) *Resilient Therapy: Working with Children and Families*. Routledge. This very useful and practical book starts from the idea that resilience is a property of the system around a child rather than of the inherent capacities of the child. Resilience is thus about the commitment, care and coordination of all those in the child's life.

Analysis

Dalzell, R. and Sawyer, E. (2007) *Putting Analysis into Assessment: Undertaking Assessments of Need – a Toolkit for Practitioners*. National Children's Bureau. One of the most useful recent tools that can be used by trainers, supervisors and mentors.

Planning and reviewing

Morrison, T. (forthcoming) Assessment of Parental Motivation to Change. In (Ed.) Horwath, J. *The Child's World: Assessing Children in Need*. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Chapter 6:
Creating the secure environment for practice: emotion, power and anxiety

This chapter

6.1 Describes why emotions are so important.

6.2 Identifies how emotional competence contributes to practice.

6.3 Explores power and authority issues in supervision.

6.4 Explains the importance of creating a secure environment for supervision.

6.5 Considers strategies for creating team resilience.

Activities in this chapter

Activity 1: Responding to emotion.
For supervisors.

Activity 2: Reflecting on power and authority in supervision.
For supervisors.

Activity 3: My team's strengths.
For supervisor and team.

Activity 4: Exploring the red cycle.
For supervisors.

Activity 5: NQSW supervision feedback form.
For NQSW and supervisor.

Activity 6: Team audit (Appendix 7).
For team.

Introduction

This handbook has consistently highlighted the importance of emotion and relationships in children's social care practice. This chapter focuses in more detail on the impact of emotion on practice, professional/power relationships, and the practitioner's own health and welfare.

There are implications for supervisors here, and this chapter outlines strategies for bolstering emotionally competent practice and the resilience of the practitioner. The underpinning assumption is that emotions are fundamental to communication, relationships and to problem solving. The chapter is therefore particularly relevant to NQSW outcome statement 7 on Communication, and statement 8 on Relationships.

6.1 What are emotions and why are they so important?

Emotions are fundamental to our capacity to be human, enabling us to know what is important, where are our values lie and how we attach meaning to our experience[91]. They are also vital to our capacity to develop, adapt and survive. According to the neurologist Panksepp[92], emotional systems in the brain coordinate behavioural, physiological and cognitive responses to problems such as stress or life stage changes.

Caruso and Salovey[93] describe the 'survival value' of five basic emotions as follows:

- Fear: act now to avoid the consequences.
- Anger: fight against wrong and injustice.
- Sadness: ask others for help and support.
- Disgust: you cannot accept something.
- Surprise: focus on the unexpected.

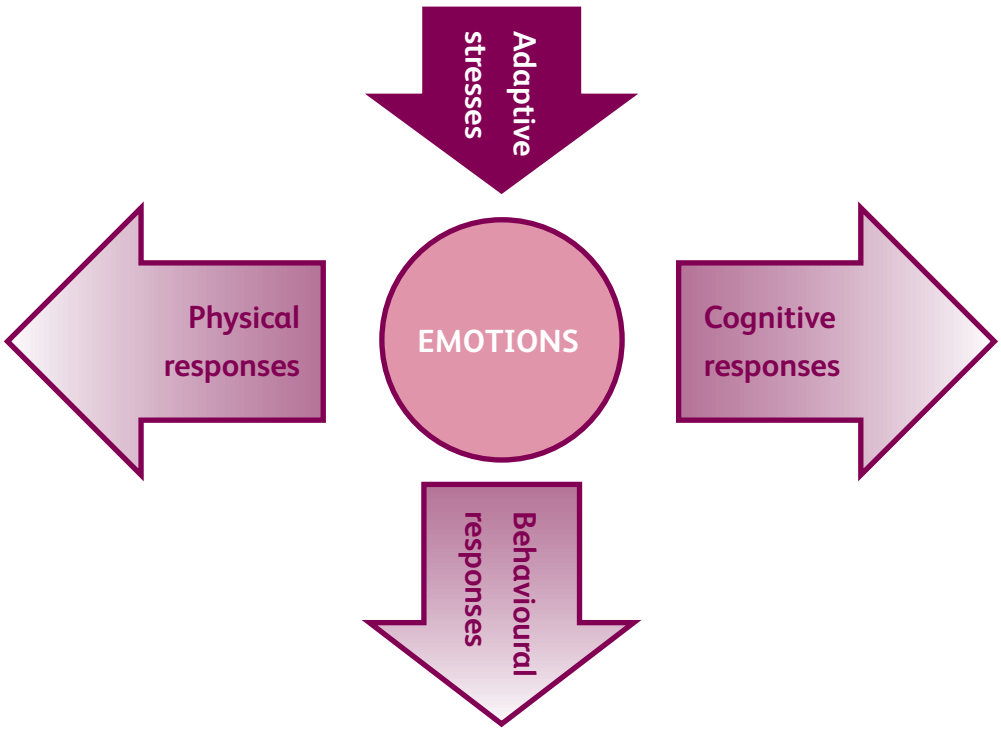


Fig 27: Emotions – the brain's high-pressure switchboard

91 Fineman S (2003) *Understanding Emotion at Work*. London. Sage
92 Panksepp J (2000) Ch 9. Emotions as Natural Kinds Within the Mammalian Brain. In Lewis M and Haviland-Jones J (2000) *Handbook of Emotions 2nd edition*. Guilford Press
93 Mayer J D, Salovey P and Caruso D R (2004) *Emotional Intelligence: Theory, findings and implications*. Psychological Inquiry 15, 197-215

Emotions propel action, especially when we are anxious. They pull us towards people, ideas or actions and help us overcome obstacles or achieve goals. They are the basis for effective group processes and act as the gateway between our internal and social worlds. Above all, emotions allow us to share meaning and experience and connect ourselves to others.

One way in which emotions connect us to others is Goleman's concept of resonance and dissonance[94]. This helps us understand the contagious nature of emotions. How often have you come into a meeting - such as a supervision session or training course – in one mood, and suddenly realised that your mood has changed? But how does this happen? Emotional contagion occurs through a process of mirroring, where emotions spread among people who are in proximity to each other. This leads not only to a sharing of mood but also to an alignment of body posture and even heart rates. Goleman's research found that cardiac patients who were nursed by staff with a depressed mood had a mortality rate four times higher than expected.

The person who is most emotionally expressive transmits his or her mood to those around. Positive resonance occurs when two people's moods align around positive feelings, which promotes optimism, mental efficiency, fairness and generosity. In contrast, dissonance occurs when one person is out of touch with the feelings of another, putting that person off balance and on guard.

Power, status and emotions

If you think about experiences where your mood has suddenly changed in a group setting, to what extent did that have something to do with power and status going on around you?

Kemper[95], a social psychologist, argues that emotions are most likely to occur in situations where there are power and status differences. This has profound implications for practitioners in their work with service users as well as for managers' leadership and supervision styles. Both need to constantly be aware of whether their emotional state and behaviour are generating resonance or dissonance. It also suggests that emotional awareness is crucial in anti-discriminatory practice.

94 Goleman D, Boyatzis R and McKee A (2002) *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston. Harvard Business School Press

95 Kemper T (2000) Social Models in the Explanation of Emotions In Lewis, M. and Haviland-Jones, J. (2000) *Handbook of Emotions 2nd edition*. Guilford Press

6.2 How emotional competence contributes to effective practice

Given the importance of emotion in our lives, what contribution does emotional competence make to effective practice? Also termed 'emotional intelligence', it's a way of using thinking about feelings to guide our decision-making. According to Goleman[96] it has four interrelated elements:

- Emotional awareness about one's own feelings and the sources of these feelings.
- Empathy – the ability to understand what another person is or might be feeling.
- Self-management – the ability to manage one's emotions to achieve one's goals.
- Interpersonal skills – the ability to relate to others in a purposeful and thoughtful manner.

Another aspect of emotional competence is the 'value base', which has been added as an underpinning element to our work. Values shape the purpose and outcomes of how emotional competence is used.

To take an extreme example, a sophisticated psychopath might have the emotional skills to manipulate our emotions, but with the intent to deceive or hurt us.

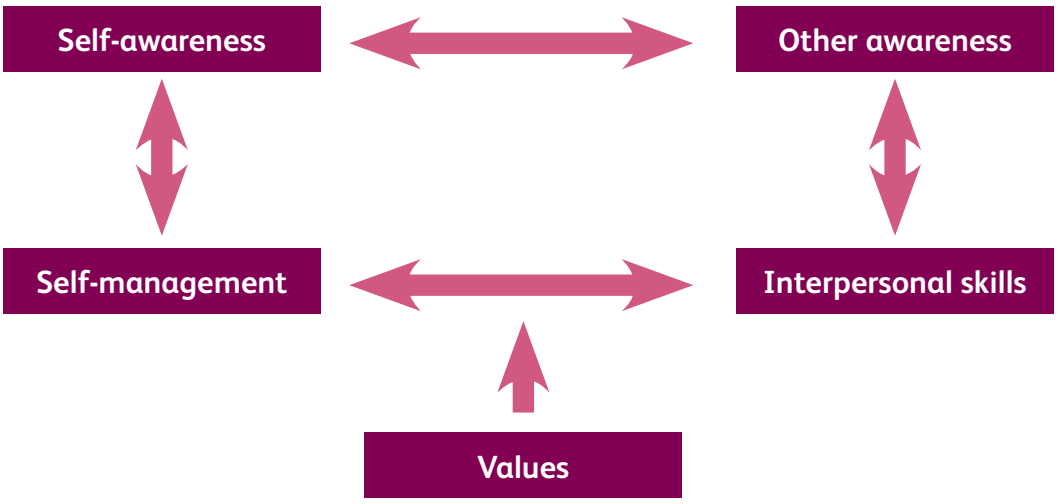


Fig 28: Five elements of emotional intelligence

96 Goleman D Ibid

The arrows in figure 28 indicate how the five elements interrelate, in particular the links between self-awareness and empathy as a basis for managing self and relationships.

Emotional competence is important because the quality of relationships is crucial to the effectiveness of services. Trevithick[97] states that relationship-based practices underpin a range of social work tasks including assessment; help and care for people experiencing difficulties; relating to self and others; advocacy and mediation for people experiencing discrimination; holding and containing anxiety in times of transition or crisis; and creating a foundation for capacity building.

Similarly, The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce[98] stresses the intra- and interpersonal skills required of practitioners, including listening and building empathy; understanding the effects of non-verbal communication; self-awareness about how working with children (service users) may affect workers emotionally; and how to seek help.

Now that we have established the idea that emotional competence is at the centre of good practice, let's look in more detail at the links between this and five core social work tasks: engagement, observation, assessment, decision-making and working with others.

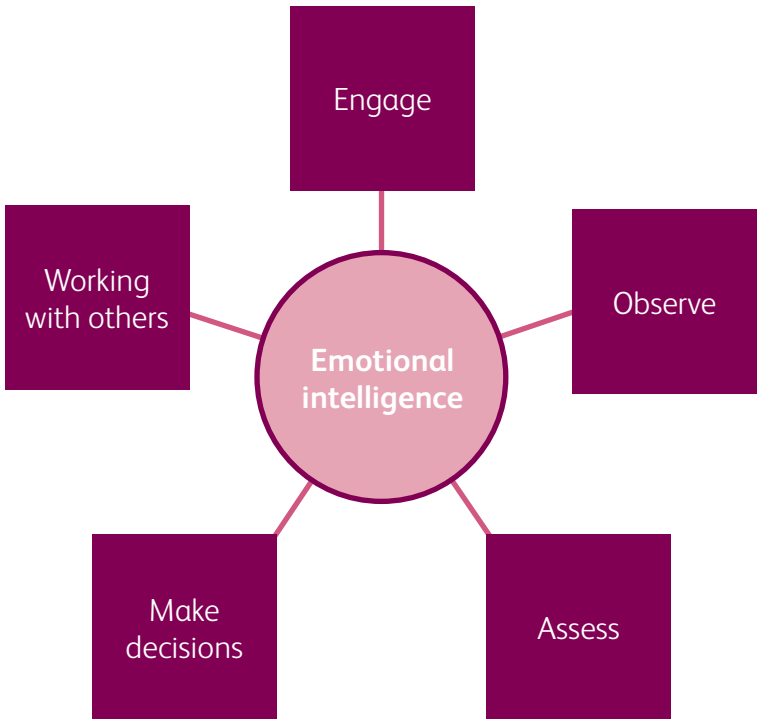


Fig 29: Emotional competence and five core social work tasks

97 Trevithick P (2003) *Effective Relationship-based Practice: a Theoretical Explanation.* Journal of Social Work Practice 17(2), 163-176

98 Department for Education and Skills (2004) *The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce.* London. The Stationery Office

Engagement of service users

Assessment is commonly described as the first stage of the care or intervention process. But it can't be effective unless attention has first been paid to a process of engagement and rapport building with the service user.

This is particularly important in communicating with children. Spratt's[99] research clearly highlighted the positive effect of empathy when he examined 12 parents' experiences of their first contact with the social worker:

Irrespective of the nature and source of referral and the families' previous attitude to social workers, it was their relationship with their particular social worker that parents were to return to again and again... in particular, their ability to empathise and communication skills.

Observation

Assessment requires both accurate observation and accurate recall. Research shows that recall about emotional events is reduced when we try to suppress emotion[100]. Suppressing this information can come from role confusion, personal discomfort or organisational cultures that devalue the role of emotions.

Attachment theory suggests that discomforting emotions provide signals of possible danger, which require attention and appraisal. A lack of self-awareness or suppression of emotion may result in observations being missed, either about the presence of external dangers or about the impact of the worker's unresolved personal experiences, which may compromise the assessment process. The ability to accurately identify our own and others' emotions also helps us to spot false emotions in others[101].

Assessment

There is a clear link between the relationship skill of the worker and the quality of assessment. This is particularly true in relation to any matters that are morally or emotionally charged, such as trauma, loss or problematic behaviours such as excessive drinking or offending.

Service users, and particularly children and young people, become quickly aware of a worker who is not in tune with their emotions. Therefore, the ability of the assessing worker to build the necessary emotional rapport and trust, allowing for a collaborative assessment, is critical to the quality of assessment. Remember that nearly three-quarters of the change effort is accounted for by the interrelated activities of assessment and relationship building (see Chapter 2).

99 Spratt T and Callan J (2004) *Parents' Views on Social Work Interventions in Child Welfare Cases.* British Journal of Social Work 34, 199-224

100 Richards J and Gross J (2000) *Emotional Regulation and Memory: The Cognitive Costs of Keeping One's Cool.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 79, 410-424 quoted in: Caruso D and Salovery P (2004) *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager.* San Francisco. Jossey Bass

101 Ekman P (1985) *Marketplace, Politics and Marriage.* New York. Norton

Decision-making

Emotions also play a significant role in decision-making[102].

Emotion is integral to the processes of reasoning and decision making… Well targeted and well deployed emotion seems to be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly.

In other words, rather than seeing emotions as being against reason, emotions are positioned here as being part of the whole reasoning process. Of course, there is a big difference between being aware of feelings and what they are telling us, and states of high emotion that can't be explored and reflected upon.

Isen[103] found that positive emotion is associated with a range of mental capacities that have a direct impact on judgement and decision-making, such as:

- Creative thinking.
- The ability to link between different sources and types of information.
- Increased elaboration of information.
- Greater flexibility in negotiation situations.
- Improved diagnostic/assessment ability.

Howe[104] argues that emotional awareness helps us deal with uncertainty and new situations by rapidly processing information, a skill that would certainly be of assistance to NQSWs. Emotions also help us predict the future by imagining potential consequences either for ourselves or others, such as the likely impact of our interventions on service users.

Because emotion is a bridge between the known and the unknown, emotional competence plays a central role in decision-making. Thinking without emotional knowledge is as problematic as emotion without thought.

102 Damasio A (2006) In Munro E (2007) *Effective Child Protection*. London. Sage
103 Isen A (2000) Positive Affect and Decision Making. In Lewis, M. and Haviland-Jones, J. (2000) *The Handbook of Emotions. 2nd edition*. Guilford Press
104 Howe D (2008) *The Emotionally Intelligent Social Worker*. Basingstoke. Palgrave

Working with others

Social work is a collaborative practice. It is not enough for social workers to be able to work individually with their service users if they are unable to maintain healthy relationships with colleagues and partner agencies.

Social workers operating in statutory settings will act as key workers responsible for coordinating multi-disciplinary assessment and planning processes. However, the environment in which social workers have to form and sustain these relationships is complex and demanding. Unhealthy organisational cultures can affect how feelings in the workplace are expressed and managed, a point which we will return to later. In these types of environment, emotional competence is vital.

Isen[105] found that positive emotion reduces inter-group hostility and discrimination, enables people to identify commonalities, and makes it more likely that members will treat other groups as members of their own. Wells[106] identifies a positive association between emotional intelligence and openness to differences.

The work of both these researchers shows that emotional competence has implications for practitioners' ability to practise and work with other agencies in an anti-discriminatory manner. Values and knowledge about discrimination must be integrated with interpersonal skills if practitioners are to be able not only to identify, but also to challenge these factors appropriately.

105 Isen A Ibid

106 Wells K (2004) *Emotional Intelligence as an Ability and its Relationship with Openness to Difference.* Dissertation ISSN: 0419-4217. San Diego. Alliant International University

Activity 1: Responding to emotion

This task invites you to reflect on how you respond to emotion in staff and the ways in which you could enhance their morale. Consider the following questions:

- How do you think your staff would describe your emotional style: are you a hot, cool or balanced person emotionally?
- How good are you at noticing the emotional tone and daily hassles that staff experience?
- To what extent are you proactive in providing emotional encouragement and support, or do you tend to wait for staff to seek out your support?
- Which emotions do you find more difficult to respond to? Anger, sadness, fear, excitement, helplessness or anxiety?
- Which emotions do you find it easier to respond to?
- To what extent do your answers to (4) and (5) depend on who you are thinking about, or other aspects such as level of competence, stage of development or social factors such as gender?

Notes

Comment

This activity is about noticing your responses to emotion in the workplace. New staff quickly pick up how attuned their supervisors are to the demands and daily hassles of the job.

However, staff also vary in their own emotional style, reflecting individual differences in attachment styles, temperament and coping strategies. Some can be temperamental, some are cool and avoid emotions, while others are emotionally hot and preoccupied.

As a result, each of us will respond differently in difficult situations. Regardless of individual style, workers who are anxious, distressed or overwhelmed need supervision that is secure, responsive and knowledgeable.

6.3 Power and authority issues in supervision

Earlier we noted that status and power can be primary triggers of emotion. Supervision is an authority relationship, and negotiating issues around control, conflict, difference and power are a key part of this process.

The same issues apply to relationships between practitioners and service users. Supervisors can therefore model an approach incorporating these power and status issues that is transparent, ethical and reflective. This doesn't mean that the supervisor will get it right every time, rather that an effective supervisor is mindful about the use and possible abuse of their authority and is willing to learn from their experience.

The way these issues are handled is particularly important for NQSWs, who are more dependent on, and therefore more easily influenced by, the authority of the supervisor. At the same time, the NQSW is also negotiating changes to their authority and accountability including:

- Moving from developmental to performance management-focused supervision.
- Moving from student to qualified status and accountability.
- Moving from partial to wider professional responsibility and authority.
- Moving from knowledge-based to practice-based authority.

This is why it is essential that there is a clear contract in which the nature and source of the supervisor's authority and responsibilities are made clear. However, the nature of authority is complex, combining a number of elements beyond what is initially set out by the agency.

An important distinction exists between power and authority. Authority is the sanctioned use of power, whereas power is the ability to implement the rights of authority[107].

Hughes and Pengelly[108] identify three sources of supervisory authority:

- Organisational role authority over people, finance and resources.
- Professional authority based on competence, knowledge, skills and credibility.
- Personal authority based on how the individual manages her/his attitude to authority.

107 Coulshed V (1990) *Management in Social Work*. British Association of Social Workers. Basingstoke. Macmillan
108 Hughes L and Pengelly P (1997) *Staff Supervision in a Turbulent World*. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

In contrast, French and Raven[109] identify different types of power base:

- Reward power – ability to give and withdraw praise, resources, funding, promotion.
- Coercive power – ability to punish and reprimand.
- Legitimate power – the right of one's position or office.
- Expert power – the use of superior knowledge and skills.
- Referent power – where other's seek the leader's approval.
- Information power – ability to give, withhold or filter information.
- Connection power – the access to influential people.
- Ascribed power – attributions of power ascribed to the supervisor.

The best role models combine organisational, professional and personal authority in a way that helps staff to achieve their tasks. This legitimises the role of the supervisor and is expressed by the fairness of their actions[110].

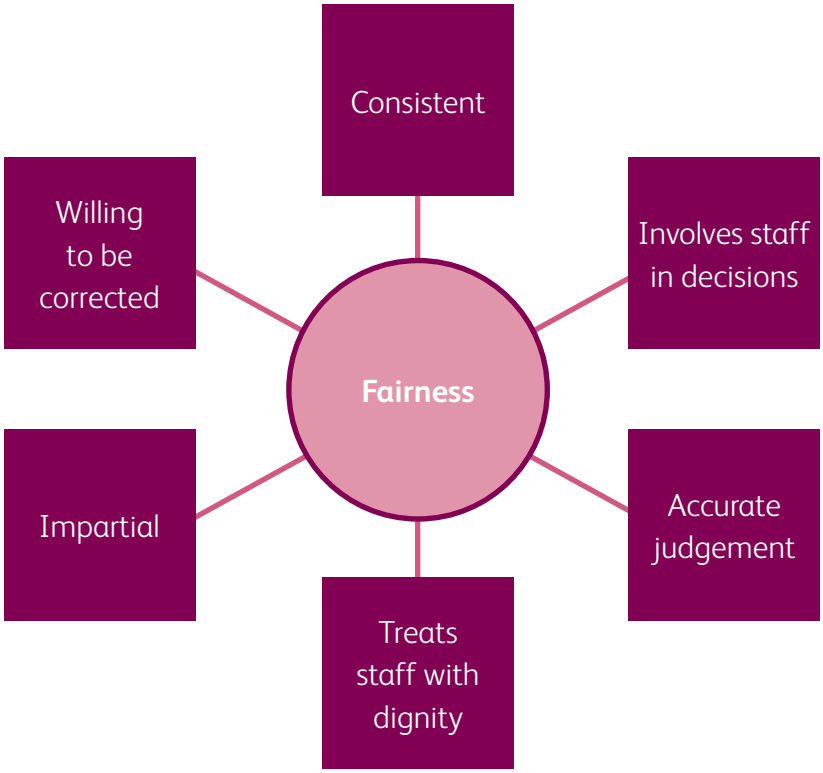


Fig 30: The supervisor's legitimacy

109 French J and Raven B (1959) The Basis of Social Power In Cartwright, D. (ed) *Studies in Social Power*. Ann Arbor
110 Paternoster et al. (1997) *Do Fair Procedures Matter? The Effect of Procedural Justice on Spouse Assault*. Law and Society Review 31, 163-204

By contrast, supervisors who over-rely on their organisational authority and who lack professional and personal authority will have problems establishing a supervisory relationship with the worker. In circumstances where rules and authority are unclear or inconsistent, distrust and conflict will undermine the supervisory process.

How do supervisees perceive their supervisor's power?

It wouldn't be right to complete this discussion without mentioning how supervisees perceive or assign power to supervisors. In other words, however clear the supervisor may be, staff, and especially less experienced workers, may still project negative or unrealistic perceptions of authority onto the supervisor.

Authority may be seen as either all bad, resulting in mistrust, inability to engage and conflict, or idealised, leading to dependency and unwillingness to take appropriate responsibility. For NQSWs who are moving from a tutor-tutee relationship to an employer-employee relationship, this is a time when they can unwittingly take on either of these attributes under the pressure and shock of their new environment.

Fantasised 'bad' supervisor

Fantasised 'good' supervisor

The complexities around power and authority are increased where there are differences in gender, ethnicity, culture, language, class, sexuality or disability. In these circumstances, the misuse of authority by either the supervisor or the practitioner can result in marginalisation and discrimination. Fears about this affect both parties and may result in:

- Supervisors who relinquish their authority because they fear it will be seen as discriminatory.
- Supervisees who are unwilling to respect their supervisor's legitimate authority.
- Supervisors who abuse their authority through not accepting differences, which may result in over-management and over-representation of ethnic minority staff in grievance and discipline procedures.
- Supervisors who ignore differences and pretend they treat everyone the same, which leads to others being expected to adapt to the belief system of the dominant group.
- Supervisors who avoid supervision on the grounds that the supervisee needs someone special, leading to the worker losing the support and guidance they are entitled to, affecting their ability to achieve and increasing their marginalisation.

Supervision has such a vital role to play in this context to promote anti-discriminatory values and practices through:

- Highlighting the role of supervision within contracts to promote anti-discriminatory practice and ensuring the agency's policies are made explicit and are owned in supervision.
- Creating a climate where it is possible to explore values, assumptions and differences in attitudes in relation to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, class, religion or nationality.
- Reviewing the use of power and authority by the worker and by the supervisor.
- Making sure there is a framework that allows disagreement or concerns to be addressed, for instance through the role of the NQSW's mentor.
- Identifying the support needs of minority ethnic staff and other groups who are more likely to suffer discrimination.
- Promoting and monitoring how the user is being involved as a partner in assessment, planning and decision-making.
- Identifying how to get feedback about the user's experience of the service.
- Challenging discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.
- Identifying who may act as an advocate for the user, either in relation to your agency's services or to other agencies.

Activity 2: Reflecting on power and authority in supervision

This task invites you to examine the role of supervision in promoting anti-discriminatory practice by exploring these questions:

1. How could you talk to NQSWs about the role of supervision in promoting anti-discriminatory practice? How can these be reflected in supervision agreements with NQSWs?

2. How do you try and ensure your legitimacy as a supervisor?

3. What opportunities can you provide to discover how staff experience your authority?

4. Do you try and gauge whether your staff feel that you enable and challenge them to look at values, power issues and partnership practice?

5. How could you know whether you were treating some staff differently based on their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, language or religion?

Notes

6.4 Creating a secure environment for supervision

So far, we have focused mainly on the supervisory process. However, this sits within a wider context of team, organisational and inter-agency dynamics. The structures and cultures of these wider networks influence the supervisory process.

Remember the idea, mentioned at the start of this chapter, that emotions are contagious? In order to support staff, especially new workers, and to provide a safe, predictable and focused supervisory process, it is important to be aware of how wider organisational and inter-agency forces can impact supervision.

This section provides a model for understanding this by looking at the impact of anxiety, change and uncertainty on organisational behaviour.

The impact of organisational anxiety and uncertainty on supervision

Anxiety and uncertainty are common realities in children's social care, given the complex and often uncertain nature of the work, the continuous change and the extensive scrutiny. This can't be eliminated through procedures or training, so the question is: how do organisations, not just individuals, address anxiety and uncertainty?

Managing anxiety and uncertainty is a crucial task in our work. Figure 31 overleaf shows two very different ways in which organisations can respond to anxiety. In the red (outer) cycle there is the compromised environment, and in the green (middle) cycle there is the collaborative environment. In the blue (central) cycle, we see the supervision cycle described in Chapter 3.

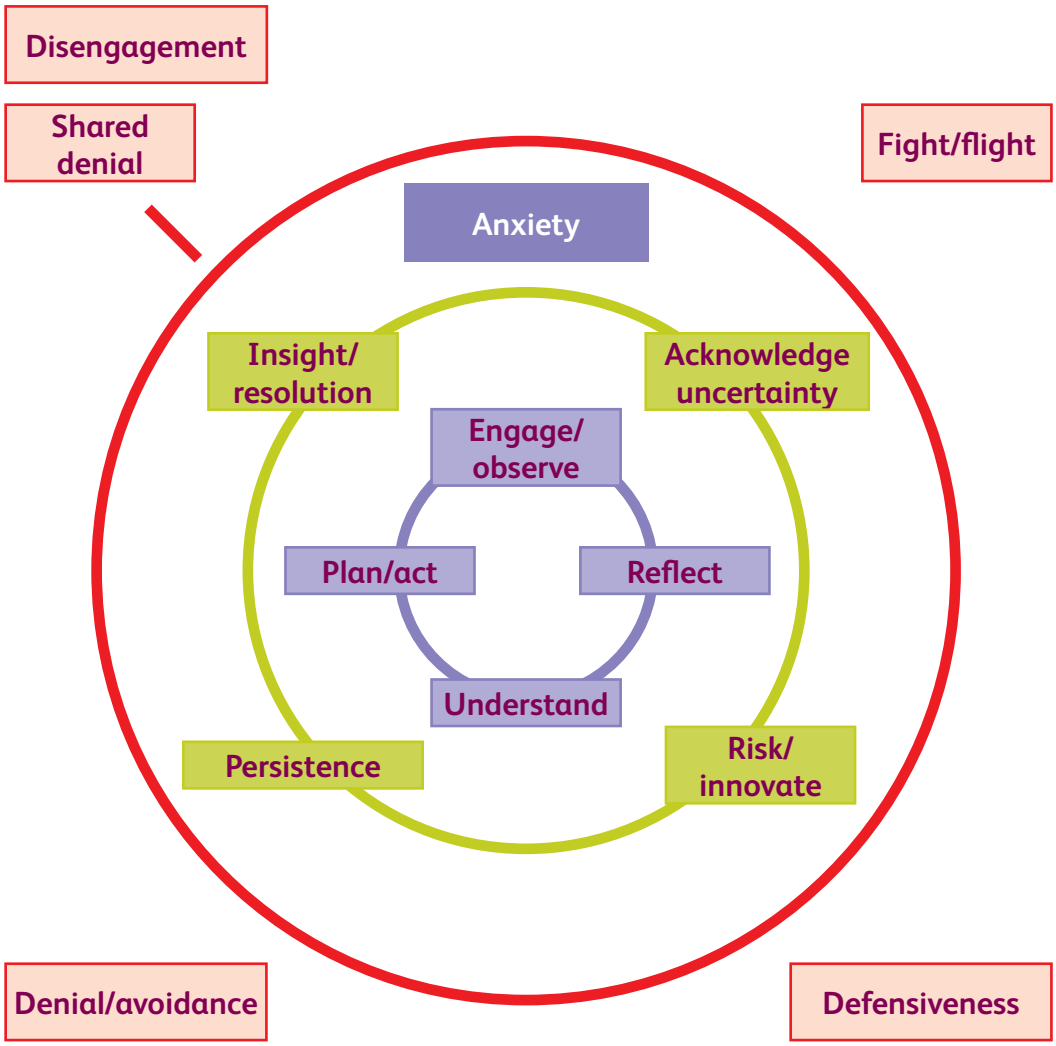


Fig 31: The impact of organisational anxiety on supervision

Understanding the three cycles

We now explore the red and the green cycles and their impact on the four parts of the supervision cycle. In other words, we look at how two very different types of organisational culture impact on the quality of observation, information gathering, reflection, analysis and planning.

6.5 The green cycle: the collaborative organisational environment

Fig 32: Where do anxiety and uncertainty lead in a green environment?

Figure 31 shows the supervision cycle located within the green cycle, which we can also think of as the collaborative organisational environment. In order to create the clarity and security needed for supervision to operate at its best, we need to support supervision through a positive organisational culture.

The collaborative organisational environment provides this through:

- Clear agency values and goals.
- Positive and engaged leadership.
- Clear policies, procedures and standards.
- A robust performance management framework.
- Effective workforce development and training.
- Open communication within the organisation.
- Active participation with and from service users.
- Positive structures for inter-agency work.

In the green cycle, the uncertainties and anxieties associated with continuous change and the nature of children's social care are openly acknowledged. This is a culture that values the expression of healthy uncertainty, feelings and difference. It is an environment where problems and mistakes are grasped as opportunities for learning rather than punishment.

The culture recognises that there are rarely simple or prescribed solutions for managing complexity and risk, so creativity and innovation are valued. It's possible for workers to take a risk and express doubts, reveal difficulties and share practice, as well as try out new approaches.

Power relations are made explicit, diversity is valued, and roles and responsibilities are clarified. Difficult problems are openly acknowledged, and there is a shared commitment to grapple and persist with these issues.

People are also not expected or allowed to go it alone. In such a climate, staff are able to learn from their experience, deepening their practice and developing creative and sometimes unexpected solutions. As a result, confidence and skills to tackle new challenges are increased.

Twelve features of the green team environment

- Respectful attitude and concern for service users.
- Roles and responsibilities are clear.
- Staff show sense of belonging, mutual support and shared responsibility.
- Clear and open communication.
- Positive engagement with external agencies.
- Commitment to resolve conflicts, including those with other agencies.
- Feelings acknowledged and used to explore practice.
- Difference acknowledged and valued.
- Supervision seen as a priority.
- Theory and research used to assist practice.
- Staff committed to learning and development.
- Positive use of team meetings.

Activity 3: My team's strengths

We can see how this green environment will support supervision and a commitment to reflection and analysis. Think about which of the green team elements are present in your team and how the team could build on its strengths.

Notes

6.6 The red cycle: the compromised organisational environment

Anxiety ▶ fight/flight ▶ defensiveness ▶ denial/avoidance ▶ shared denial ▶ disengagement

Fig 33: Where do anxiety and uncertainty lead in a red environment?

In sharp contrast, the red cycle depicts an environment in which anxiety is seen as a sign of weakness and a threat to the agency that can't be acknowledged. In this culture, workers are expected to be professionals and to cope, regardless of the pressure of work or organisational change.

As a result, problems and uncertainties are suppressed. Initially this is through fight or flight mechanisms, such as conflict, grievances, sickness and high staff turnover. There is a transfer of internal conflict onto external relationships with other agencies. The lack of spaces within the organisation where uncertainty and difference can be explored leads to defensiveness and avoidance.

Working parties fail to complete their tasks and issues remain unaddressed. There is a fear of exposing practice, often based on real experience that the only time practice is audited is when something has gone wrong and there is a search for a scapegoat. In such environments, it is neither safe to expose practice or to declare problems, doubts or uncertainties.

Social defence systems

Workers in this environment tend to defend themselves and ward off painful realities by denying uncomfortable information and opinions. Difference is perceived as a threat and is rejected in favour of the dominant group's frame of reference. This becomes institutionalised through 'social defence systems'[111] in which denial becomes part of workplace relations and processes, leading to a form of organisational or shared denial.

Characteristics of this include:

- Depersonalisation.
- Detachment and denial of feelings.
- Rigid and narrow definition of task – just following procedures.
- Constant counter-checking and lack of trust.

111 Menzies I (1970) *The Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety.* London. Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

- Redistributing responsibility through projection and blaming.
- Reframing and minimising the true nature of concerns.
- Clinging to the familiar even when it has stopped being functional.

If this is left unchallenged, these processes may eventually result in disengagement, with the agency preoccupied solely with its own survival. Service user needs become lost and external partners experience the agency as a fortress with its drawbridge up.

The result is real tension between what the agency says it is doing, what the staff think they are doing and what staff are actually doing[112].

What you can expect to see in a red cycle environment is:

- Absence of trust both between individuals and towards the agency.
- Lack of leadership, strategy or planning.
- Poor communication within the agency.
- Lack of clear policies, standards and systems.
- Low involvement and participation by the service-user.
- High levels of defensiveness, blame and finding scapegoats.
- Absence of supervision or frequent cancellations.
- High level of staff turnover and/or sickness.
- Feelings acted out or denied.
- Staff becoming more and more dependent on their managers.
- Inappropriate or discriminatory humour.
- High number of staff safety incidents and staff working in unsafe settings.
- Users seen as demanding and threatening.
- Unpredictable service responses.

112 Hughes L and Pengelly P (1997) *Staff Supervision in a Turbulent World*. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Consequences for supervision of the red cycle environment

In such an environment, it will become less safe for supervisors or supervisees to reflect and analyse. Instead, we need security and predictability in our procedures and systems.

The focus is restricted to the problem in hand and going straight for the quick fix to avoid looking below the surface at what is really going on. Supervision may become something to avoid, or to get involved with only on a bureaucratic level.

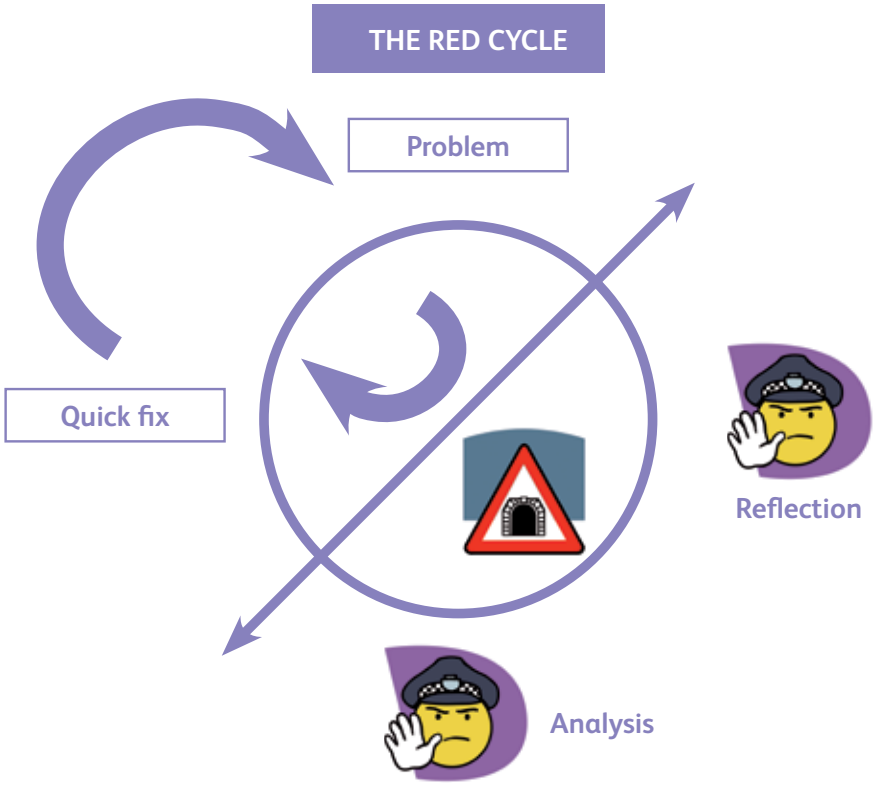


Fig 34: Symptoms of a red cycle compromised environment

Such environments are especially damaging for new staff and may leave them cautious about engaging with supervision in the future, and generally distrustful of organisational authority. Oppressive processes also go unchallenged, and power structures become personalised.

When organisations stop operating in a mindful way, there are consequences for staff and service users. While workers will try hard to make sure that their work is unaffected, some reduction in good practice is almost bound to occur.

This may vary from the obvious to the more subtle. Workers may unwittingly mirror organisational processes by failing to listen, not attending to the user's concerns, becoming an adversary or being drawn into inappropriate or collusive relationships.

6.7 Punching above your weight

Fortunately, few organisations are outright 'red'. More often, organisations go through red and green phases, and different parts of the organisation have different strengths and weaknesses.

What is certain is that in all but the most dire organisational environments, frontline managers and supervisors have a remarkable ability to punch above their organisational weight. In doing so, good supervisors keep at bay the worst aspects of the organisation's functions and create a green space where staff can continue to work well. What is noticeable about these supervisors is that they:

- Believe in the value and importance of their service.
- Hold high professional standards.
- Help staff understand broader policy and professional contexts.
- Help staff identify and value their good practice.
- Involve staff in problem solving, such as developing green cycle team strategies.
- Connect with staff and their concerns.
- Develop a strong team and learning ethos.
- Model respectful behaviour to staff, service users and partners.
- Show persistence and optimism in the face of difficulties.
- Develop positive relationships with partners.
- Make supervision a priority.

Activity 4: Exploring the red cycle

This is to help you consider the implications of the compromised cycle for supervision.

1. Identify an example of how supervision has been affected by becoming involved in a red cycle process. These often trigger strong feelings: a loss of focus, especially on the user and their needs; deterioration in the quality of information exchanged; role confusion; unclear decisions; and power struggles within supervision.

Think of a case discussion or other issue brought by a supervisee and look at:

- What happened?
- What triggered the red cycle process?
- What feelings were generated for each person during the process?
- What happened to the original issue – did it get distorted or lost?
- What did each person become preoccupied by as the process unfolded?
- What did you notice about power and authority in this situation?
- What was the outcome of this incident? Did it have any longer-term impact?

2. Now look back on the example and think about what you might do next time, either to prevent it or to interrupt it so you could have a better outcome. One of the most important ways the supervisor can interrupt 'red cycle' processes is by getting feedback on their supervision. It's as important to know what is working for staff in tough environments as it is to highlight areas for improvement. The NQSW feedback form overleaf provides a tool to do this.

Notes

Activity 5: NQSW supervision feedback form

This feedback form is one way the supervisor can evaluate the effectiveness of their supervision and consider ways in which it can be strengthened. It might be helpful to use this form after the NQSW has been in post for about three months and then again at the end of their first year.

Notes

Supervision:	Usually	Some	Never	One thing I would like my supervisor to do more of
1. Is regular	☐	☐	☐	
2. Is uninterrupted	☐	☐	☐	
3. Is based on a written contract	☐	☐	☐	
4. Is structured and collaborative	☐	☐	☐	
5. Clarifies my role/ responsibilities	☐	☐	☐	
6. Helps me to be organised and make plans	☐	☐	☐	
7. Helps me identify and reflect on my values and assumptions	☐	☐	☐	
8. Increases my professional knowledge	☐	☐	☐	
9. Provides me with opportunities to develop practice skills	☐	☐	☐	
10. Includes observation of my practice	☐	☐	☐	
11. Provides evidence-based feedback	☐	☐	☐	
12. Helps me hear and understand the voice of children and their needs	☐	☐	☐	
13. Facilitates me in communicating and working with other agencies	☐	☐	☐	
14. Helps me to reflect openly on my strengths and weaknesses	☐	☐	☐	
15. Is a safe place to address feelings	☐	☐	☐	
16. Identifies my progress on the 11 NQSW outcome statements	☐	☐	☐	
17. Identifies actions to improve my practice	☐	☐	☐	
18. Is appropriately recorded	☐	☐	☐	

6.8 Team strategies for creating a secure environment for practice

Although the supervisor is central to forming a secure environment for the practitioners, the support of team colleagues and co-workers is equally important. NQSWs will learn best in a team culture that offers both support and opportunities for shared practice learning. Effective teams have skills in three main areas:

- Taking the task forward.
- Building relationships.
- Confronting and handling conflict.

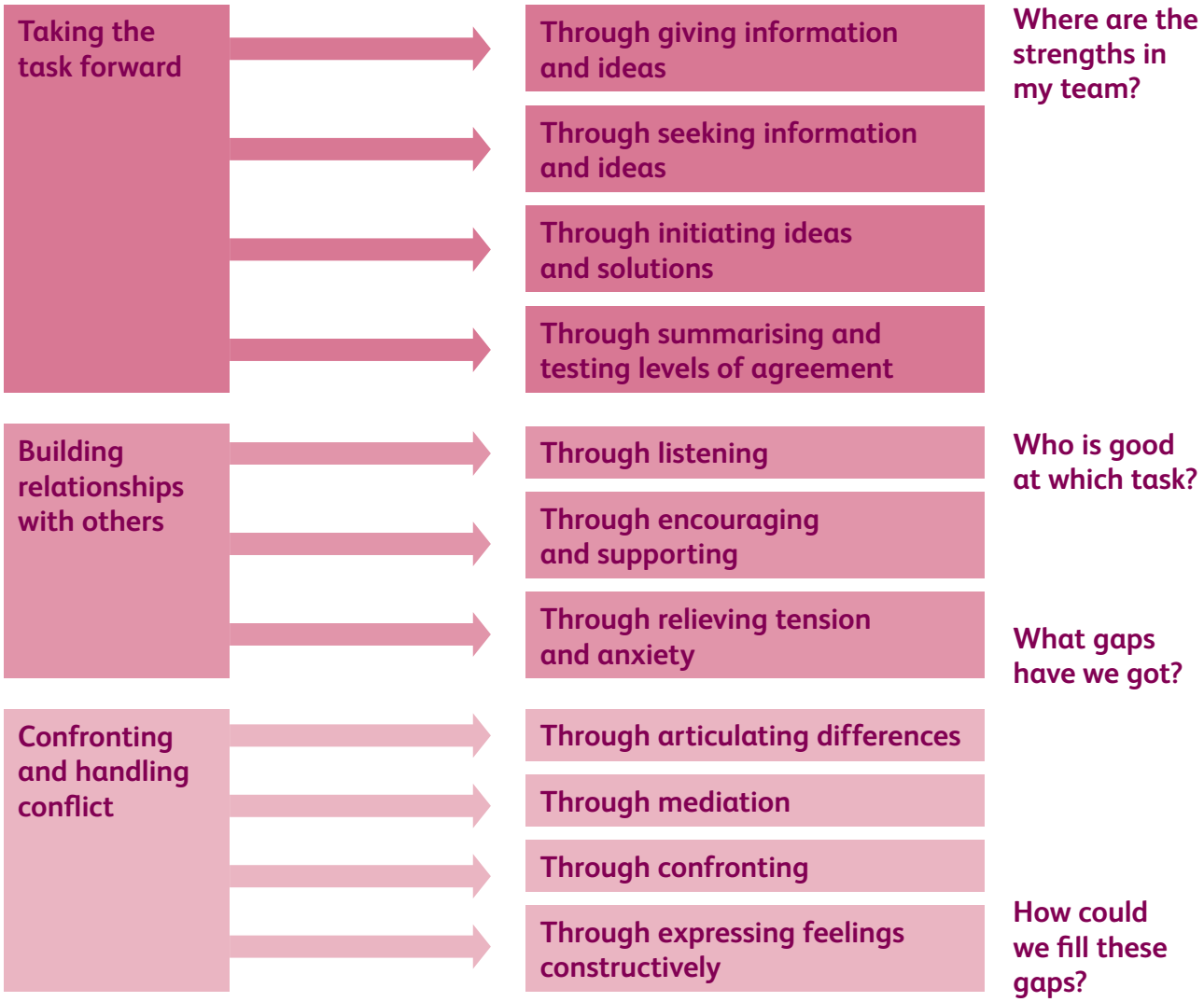


Fig 35: Adapted from Quality: Change Through Teamwork[113]

113 Chaudhry-Lawton R, Lawton R, Murphy K, Terry A, (1992) *Quality: Change Through Teamwork*. The Sunday Times Business Skills

Activity 6: Team audit

Appendix 7 provides a team audit that has been adapted from a useful and practical book on teamwork by Susan Wheelan (1999) entitled Creating Effective Teams. (Sage, London).

Notes

Organisational support

Finally, there are wider organisational and inter-agency factors that play a part in the ability of supervisors and practitioners to assess, plan, intervene and review. These factors are shown here as the four critical conditions which organisations must address:

- Clarity of agency and practitioner purposes and roles.
- Competence enhancement and confidence-building of workers.
- Collaboration between agencies.
- Containment supervision and support of workers.

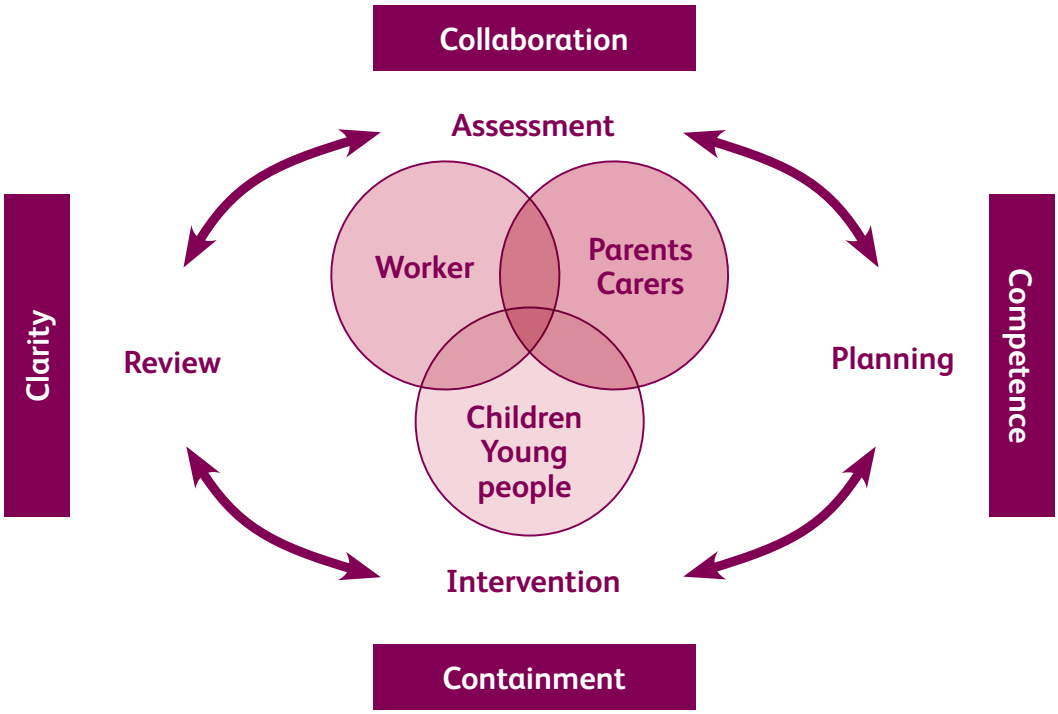


Fig 36: The four critical conditions

Practitioners – especially NQSWs – cannot achieve their potential solely through their own effort and the support of supervisors and team colleagues. Their development must be grounded in a clear purpose, child-centred outcomes and active engagement with staff, service users and external partners.

Conclusion

Effective practice in children's social care requires both analytic and intuitive thinking. Above all, it must sit within a relationship-based practice that is firmly embedded in a supervisory system. This will ensure that practitioners remain child centred and family focused.

Given the complexities of the families that social workers deal with, this is inevitably often emotional work. If supervision can't support practitioners to engage on both task and emotion levels, the chances of good outcomes are significantly reduced. On the other hand, there is no greater opportunity to help NQSWs develop these skills than in the supervision they receive during their first year of qualified practice.

The human encounter in the helping professions is inherently stressful. The stress aroused can be accommodated and used for the good of our clients. But our emotional responsiveness will wither if the human encounter cannot be contained within the institutions in which we work. By contrast, if we can maintain contact with the emotional reality of our clients and ourselves, then the human encounter can facilitate not only a healing experience, but also an enriching experience for them and for us[114].

114 Tonnesmann M (1979) in Hawkins P and Shohet R (1989) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*. Open University Press

6.9 Key messages from this chapter

Emotions are fundamental to the meaning and sharing of experience. Emotional competence is an essential requirement for leaders, supervisors and practitioners. Emotional awareness and skills affect the quality of observation, engagement, assessment, decision-making and collaboration with others.

Activity: Responding to emotion

Power and status interactions are a primary source of emotion. Supervisor and practitioners need to be aware of the use of power and authority.Fairness is crucial. Supervision has a central role in promoting anti-discriminatory practice.

Activity: Reflecting on power and authority

Supervision is influenced by organisational systems, cultures and dynamics, and in particular how uncertainty, anxiety and change are managed. Two models of organisational response to anxiety and change are the compromised environment (red cycle) and the collaborative environment (green cycle), each of which has a different impact on supervision.

Although the red cycle environment makes reflection and analysis more difficult, supervisors often punch well above their organisational weight in maintaining positive practices and green cycle processes at the team level.

Activity: My team's strengths

Activity: Exploring the red cycle

The most important green cycle intervention that the supervisor can make is through the quality of supervision.

Activity: NQSW supervision feedback form

Team functioning is crucial in creating a supportive and learning environment.

Activity: Team audit (Appendix 7)

Clear organisational purpose, values, leadership, and engagement with staff, service users and partnerships are crucial to the successful development of all staff, NQSWs in particular.

Notes

6.10 Further reading

Emotional intelligence

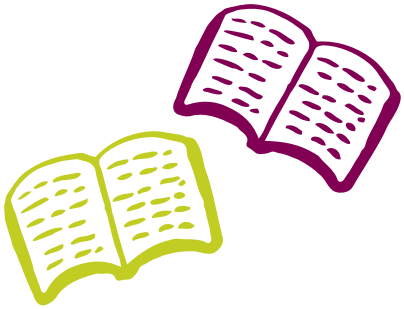
Howe, D. (2008) *The Emotionally Intelligent Social Worker*. Basingstoke. Palgrave

Morrison, T. (2007) *Emotional Intelligence, Emotion and Social Work: Context, Characteristics, Complications and Contribution*. British Journal of Social Work (2007) 37, 245-263

Red and green cycles

Morrison, T. (1997) Emotionally Competent Child Protection Organisations: Fallacy, Fiction or Necessity. In eds: Bates, J., Pugh, R., Thompson, N. (1997) *Protecting Children: Challenges and Change*. Aldershot. Arena

This paper describes the red and green cycle model and another model for understanding the impact of stress on staff, together with strategies for working with your team to combat and reduce the impact of stress.



Appendix 1
Core skills and knowledge for supervisors

From Providing Effective Supervision CWDC/Skills4Care (2007)

Managing human resources

- Theories, models and techniques.
- Purpose and functions of supervision.
- Techniques for mediation and negotiation.
- Approaches to assessment of performance.
- Importance of effective communication and feedback.
- Approaches that enable workers to develop reflective and critical practice.
- Understanding motivation.
- Appraisal and performance development review.
- Approaches to anti-discriminatory practice and managing diversity.
- Effective supervision in multi-disciplinary teams.
- Problem-solving techniques.
- Approaches to managing risk.
- Time management.
- Supervisor as role model, educator and enabler of others.
- Understanding of workforce development.

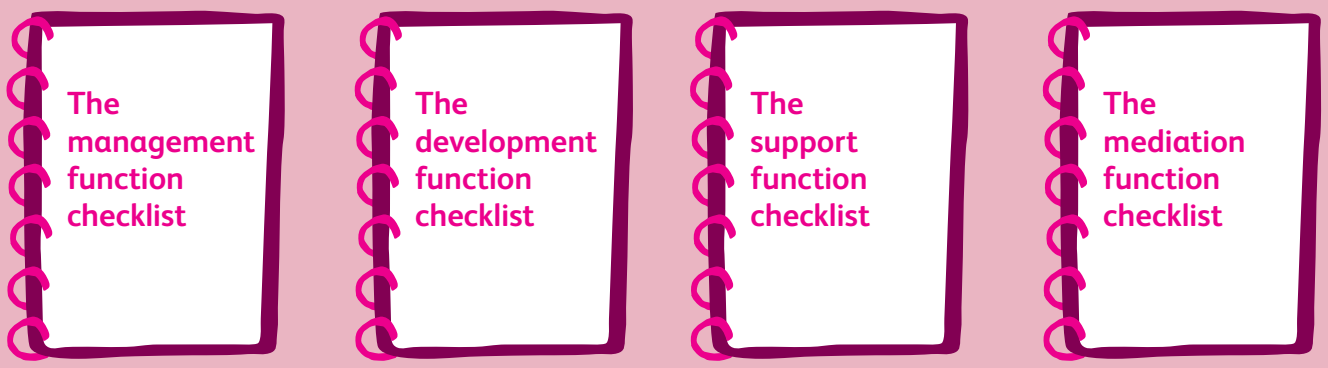
Legislation, policy and guidance

- Relevant legislation, policy and guidance.
- Key initiatives as applicable:
  - Regulation of services, and service standards.
  - Codes of practice.
  - Recruitment and retention, and workforce strategies.
- Agency policies and standards for supervision, practice and performance.
- Guidance on supervision in multi-disciplinary settings.
- Approaches for promoting independence, choice and control for service users.
- Approaches to risk management for workers and service users.
- Employer's duty of care.
- Lessons learned as they apply to supervision from inquiries, reports and inspections.

Operational management

- Principles, methods and techniques relating to:
  - Managing performance.
  - Managing allocation and workloads.
  - Developing a safe, positive, reflective environment to encourage creative practice.
  - Managing resistance to change and development.
  - Managing change and conflict.
  - Risk assessment and management to enable best practice.
  - Worker and team development.
  - Group supervision.
- How to develop and use supervision agreements.
- Approaches to workforce development and continuing professional development.
- Importance of good recording practice.
- Uses of management information systems.
- Impact of work pressures on organisational, individual and team performance.
- Factors that may encourage staff to take undue risks, including organisational culture and stress.

Appendix 2
The four function checklist



The management function checklist

The aims of the management function are to ensure that:

- The worker understands her/his role and responsibilities.
- Agency policies and procedures are understood and appropriately followed.
- The worker is clear as to the limits and use of their personal, agency and statutory authority.
- The purpose of supervision is clear.
- Work is reviewed regularly in line with agency and legal requirements.
- Action plans are formulated and carried out within the context of agency functions and statutory responsibilities.
- The basis of decisions and professional judgements are clear to the supervisor and the workers, and made explicit in agency records.
- Records are maintained according to agency policies.
- The worker knows when the supervisor expects to be consulted.
- The worker is given an appropriate workload.
- Time management expectations of the worker are clear.
- The worker understands the functions of partner agencies and his/her role and responsibilities in working with them.
- The overall quality of the worker's performance is assessed in relation to the 11 NQSW outcome statements.

The development function checklist

The aims of the development function are to assist the development of:

- The worker's professional competence, skills, knowledge and understanding.
- An understanding of the worker's value base in relation to race, gender etc. and its impact on their work.
- An understanding of the worker's preferred learning style and blocks to learning.
- An assessment of the worker's learning and development needs, and how these can be met.
- The worker's capacity to set professional goals.
- Access to professional consultation in areas outside the supervisor's knowledge and experience.
- The worker's ability to reflect on their work and interaction with users, colleagues and partner agencies.
- Regular and constructive feedback to the worker on all aspects of their performance.
- The worker's commitment to on-going professional development.
- The worker's capacity for self-appraisal, and the permission to learn from their experiences or difficulties.
- A relationship where the worker provides constructive feedback to the supervisor and both can learn from each other.

The support function checklist

The aims of the support function are to:

- Create a safe climate for the worker to look at their practice and its impact on them as a person.
- Clarify the boundaries between support, counselling, consultation and confidentiality in supervision.
- Debrief the worker and give them permission to talk about feelings.
- Help the worker to explore emotional blocks to their work.
- Explore discrimination issues in a safe setting.
- Support workers who suffer any form of abuse, either from users or from colleagues, whether physical, psychological or discriminatory.
- Monitor the overall health and emotional well-being of the worker, especially with regard to the effects of stress.
- Clarify when the worker should be advised to seek external counselling, and the relationship this has with performance monitoring.

The mediation function checklist

The aims of the mediation function are to:

- Brief more senior management about gaps in or issues with resource.
- Allocate resources in the most efficient way.
- Represent staff needs to senior management.
- Negotiate and clarify the team's role and responsibilities.
- Initiate, clarify or contribute to policy formulation.
- Consult and brief staff about organisational developments or information.
- Act as an advocate between worker or team and other parts of the agency/ outside agencies.
- Help the worker resolve difficulties in workplace or partner relationships.
- Represent or accompany staff in work with other agencies.
- Involve staff in decision-making.
- Deal sensitively, but clearly, with complaints about staff.
- Assist and coach staff, where appropriate, through complaints procedures.

Appendix 3
Questions around the supervisory cycle

1. Focusing on experience

These questions aim to support accurate and detailed recall of events. A partial description of the situation will cause problems later in the cycle, but the right questions can help workers recall more detail, more accurately. In these lists 'you' refers to the supervisee.

- What was your aim? What planning did you do?
- What happened before the interview/visit?
- What was your role?
- What did you expect to happen?
- What happened?
- Identify different perceptions of co-workers.
- What did you say and do?
- What methods or interventions did you try?
- What did the user say, do or show?
- What reactions did you notice to what you said/did?
- What surprised or puzzled you?
- Who behaved differently?
- What stuck out for you?
- What were the key moments?
- What did you notice about yourself, the user, your co-worker?
- What words, non-verbal signals, interactions, sounds, images or smells struck you?
- What do you think the service user would have noticed about you?
- What or who was hard to observe?
- What observations or concerns do other agencies have?

- What went according to plan?
- What didn't happen?
- What changes to your plan or choices did you make?
- What did you say, notice or do immediately after the session?

Use other methods to support these questions, such as video or audio recording, observation by co-worker, live supervision, learning diaries, incident logs and process recording.

2. Focusing on reflection

These questions aim to draw out feelings, partly because they may bring out further information or may reveal the worker's underlying attitudes. They may also give clues about other personal factors complicating the worker's responses.

Reflection helps the worker make links between the current situation and his/her prior experiences, skills or knowledge.

- What did you feel at the start of the interview/visit?
- What feelings did you bring to the interview/visit?
- Describe the range of feelings you had during the session.
- What did the session feelings remind you of?
- What patterns did you see in this visit? Are these familiar?
- Where have you encountered similar processes?
- Describe a time when you last experienced this process. What happened?
- Who/what does this user remind you of?
- What did you think the user was feeling? Based on what?
- What feelings might you or your co-worker be carrying on behalf of the user/victim/other workers? What projection of feelings or emotions might be occurring?
- What other factors might influence how you, the user or the co-worker felt or reacted, for example, in relation to gender or race?
- Where and when did you feel most or least comfortable?
- Who seemed least or most comfortable? At what points?

- Who found it hardest to express their feelings?
- What thoughts/ideas went through your mind during the session?
- What are the similarities/differences between this contact and your previous contact with the service user?
- What did you tell yourself about what was happening, or about your feelings?
- What metaphor or analogy would describe your experience of working with this situation?
- What was left unfinished?

Other methods to help reflection are role play, sculpting, art work to draw feelings and perceptions, and genograms and ecograms to draw out patterns, context and roles.

3. Focusing on analysis

These questions help with analysis by probing the meanings given to situations by the supervisee and user, prompting consideration of other explanations. They may help you identify what is not known or understood and lead to areas for further assessment.

- List three assumptions you, the co-worker or the user brought into the session.
- How do you define your role in this situation?
- How does 'x' agency define your role in this situation?
- How do the user and their family define your role?
- What expectations does this agency have of your role?
- What aims/outcomes for this session were or were not achieved?
- What went well, or not well, and why?
- What family or community behaviours in this situation are acceptable to you?
- What behaviours or norms in this situation are acceptable to the family or community?
- What norms/standards do other agencies expect in this situation, and why?
- What do you understand this agency's standards/norms to be in this situation?
- What other, possibly unexpected outcomes, did the session produce?

- How would the user explain what was happening in that session?
- How else could you explain what happened?
- How would you describe the power relationship during this session?
- Did power shift during the session? If so, why? What might this tell you about assumptions around gender, race, sexuality and so on?
- How far did this session confirm or challenge your previous understanding or hypothesis about this situation?
- What new information emerged? What was the critical moment?
- What bits of theory, training, research, policy or values might help you make sense of what was happening in this session?
- How else might you have managed the session?
- What are the current strengths, needs, risks for the different users?
- What is not known?
- What areas of further assessment are required?
- What conclusion are you drawing from this work so far?

Other methods to assist analysis are sharing articles, references, identifying resources from the web, case presentations, external speakers, attending training as a team, presentations by staff who have been on training, group supervision and action learning sets.

4. Focusing on action plans

These questions help translate the analysis into planning, preparation and action by identifying outcomes and success criteria as well as considering potential complications and contingency plans.

- In the light of the reflection and analysis we've done, what's your overall summary of the needs, strengths and risks for the service users in this situation?
- What are you responsible for in managing this situation?
- What training, supervisory, co-work and support needs have been raised for you?
- What information needs to be obtained before proceeding?
- What are your aims in this next phase of work?
- What is urgent and essential?
- What would be desirable?
- What is negotiable and what is non-negotiable in this situation?
- What would be a successful outcome of the next session from your perspective?
- What would be a successful outcome of the next session from the user's perspective?
- What are the different ways in which you could approach this?
- What might be your strategy for the next session?

- What are the possible best or worst responses from the user?
- How can the user be engaged? What does she/he need from you?
- What contingency plans do you need? What is the bottom line?
- Who else needs to be involved (co-worker, supervisor, other agency)?
- What would you like from them?
- On a scale of 0-5, where 5 is total confidence, how confident are you with this case?
- How can you prepare for this? Mental rehearsal, planning, reading?
- What can I do that would be helpful at this stage?
- What and when does feedback and debriefing need to take place?
- Are there any safety issues for you or others?
- What can be done to minimise any dangers?

Other methods include role play, co-work planning, case planning and contacting other professionals involved.

Chapter 5 presents a six-stage framework for supervising assessment work which is supported by a shorter list of questions that can be used for each of the stages. You may want to cross reference to these additional questions (see page 142).

Link with chapter 5, pages 142-146

Appendix 4
Chronology template

Adapted from Analysing Deaths and Serious Injuries[115]

- Brief summary of family history.
- Child's history, profile, characteristics and behaviour.
- Mother's or carer's history, profile and parenting capacity.
- Father's history, profile and parenting capacity.
- Family environment.
- Characteristics of professional involvement.

115 Miller M and Corby B (2006) *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families - a Basis for a 'Therapeutic' Encounter?* British Journal of Social Work 36, 887-899

Family events and environmental issues (including family strengths)	Timescale	Professional activity/ involvement
	Early family history (including parents, childhood and birth of siblings)	
	Pregnancy of subject child	
	Birth of child	
	Child's first year	
	Age 2-5 years	
	Age 6-9 years	
	Age 10-15 yrs	
	Age 16+ years	

Appendix 5
Using the resilience matrix

Record the information you have about the child, their family and the environment under the four headings, and consider for each why you have identified this factor. Then consider what actions can be taken to increase protective factors or reduce adverse factors that create risk.

1. Vulnerability factors that increase the child's vulnerability.

What can be done to reduce the child's vulnerability by our agency, other agencies, the family or community?

2. Adversity factors in the child's family or environment that place the child at risk of significant harm or of impairment of their health and development.

What can be done to reduce these factors by our agency, other agencies, the family or community?

3. Protective factors around the child that promote a safe and nurturing environment enabling the child's developmental needs to be met.

What can be done to increase these factors by our agency, other agencies, the family or community?

4. Resilience factors that increase the child's adaptability, problem-solving and survival capacity.

What can be done to increase these factors by our agency, other agencies, the family or community?

Appendix 6
Supervising assessment practice: a self-evaluation tool

This exercise provides an opportunity for you to reflect on your strengths and challenges in supervising assessment work.

The self ratings work as follows:

1 = I am not confident about this element

2 = I do this sometimes

3 = I do this regularly

Supervision of assessment tasks	1	2	3	One thing I can do to improve my supervision of assessment
Clarifying assessment purpose	☐	☐	☐	
To clarify the purpose type and scope of the assessment	☐	☐	☐	
To ensure that the NQSW is clear about their role in the assessment	☐	☐	☐	
To keep the direction and focus of the assessment under review	☐	☐	☐	
To identify the support needed from supervisor/co-workers during the assessment	☐	☐	☐	
Reflecting on worker's knowledge, values and assumptions	☐	☐	☐	
To help the worker reflect on the values assumptions and potential bias they bring to the case	☐	☐	☐	
To help the worker think about the potential impact of assessment on the user	☐	☐	☐	
To help the worker identify the knowledge and skills they bring to the case	☐	☐	☐	
Information gathering	☐	☐	☐	
Guiding the worker about the key information to be sought	☐	☐	☐	
Identifying potential sources of information and how to access these	☐	☐	☐	
Communicating effectively with other agencies who can or should be contributing to the assessment	☐	☐	☐	
Evaluating the quality of information and assisting the worker to do same	☐	☐	☐	
Ensuring the worker organises and records the information appropriately	☐	☐	☐	

Exploring dynamics	☐	☐	☐	
To monitor the quality of the worker's relationships and interactions with the service user during an assessment	☐	☐	☐	
To help the worker reflect on their interaction with the service user and its impact on the assessment	☐	☐	☐	
To be aware of and assist the worker with the emotional impact of the case and its effect on the assessment process and conclusions	☐	☐	☐	
Critical analysis	☐	☐	☐	
To assist the NQSW in developing an evidence-based hypothesis about the problem, its likely causes, impact on the children and potential solutions	☐	☐	☐	
To ensure the worker has explored how family members, including the children, perceive the problem and its impact	☐	☐	☐	
To help the worker articulate their formulation and be aware of alternative explanations	☐	☐	☐	
Help the worker identify what further information is required to test or deepen the analysis	☐	☐	☐	
Making decisions and plans	☐	☐	☐	
To discuss and agree recommendations with the worker arising from assessments	☐	☐	☐	
To clarify review processes and contingences for the plan should the child's situation deteriorate	☐	☐	☐	
To quality-assure assessment reports	☐	☐	☐	
To support the worker at multi-agency meetings or in explaining contentious recommendations/decisions to family members	☐	☐	☐	

Appendix 7
Team Audit[116]

Stage 1 Self-assessment questionnaire

The questionnaire can be completed either individually (and anonymously if required) or collectively by the team. If the questionnaire is completed individually and anonymously, you will need someone to collate the ratings into a combined score sheet.

Please read the statements below. Circle the number that most accurately describes your response to the statement. Use the following key to respond to each statement:

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree to some extent
3. Agree to some extent
4. Agree strongly

1. Members are clear about team goals

1	2	3	4

2. Our tasks require us to work together

1	2	3	4

3. Members are clear about their roles

1	2	3	4

4. Members accept their roles

1	2	3	4

5. Member tasks match their abilities

1	2	3	4

6. The team leader's style changes when necessary to meet emerging group needs

1	2	3	4

116 Adapted from Wheelan S (1999) *Creating Effective Teams: A Guide for Members and Leaders*. London. Sage

7. We have an open communication structure that allows all members to participate

1	2	3	4

8. The team gets regular feedback about its performance

1	2	3	4

9. Members give each other constructive feedback

1	2	3	4

10. The team uses feedback about its effectiveness to make improvements in how it is functioning

1	2	3	4

11. Members also spend time planning how they will solve problems and make decisions

1	2	3	4

12. Team meetings are valued and members make good use of them

1	2	3	4

13. The group implements its solutions and decisions

1	2	3	4

14. Group norms encourage high performance, quality and reflective practice

1	2	3	4

15. Group norms encourage innovation - we are willing to try new things

1	2	3	4

16. There are positive relationships with outside agencies

1	2	3	4

17. The group is highly cohesive and cooperative

1	2	3	4

18. The group uses effective conflict management strategies

1	2	3	4

19. People work for the good of the team rather than doing their own thing

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

20. People in this team are proud to belong to it

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

21. Morale in the unit is high because of the level of achievement and job satisfaction

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

22. Staff are generally forgiving and ready to start again

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

23. Staff are able to express their views equally and feel heard

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

24. In this team, we always look for the good things that happen

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

25. In this team, we know the value of fun for our well-being

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

26. People in this unit tend to think, 'What can I do about this?'

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

27. Staff in the team model resilience and self-esteem

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

28. People work hard to maintain good working relationships, even when things get tough

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

29. People say supportive things behind your back

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

30. Supervision is taken seriously

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

31. Concern for the need of service users is at the centre of all we do here

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

32. We are a 'learning' team

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

33. Team members work together with colleagues from other teams on practice issues

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

34. We undertake specific team development activities

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

35. On the whole, we can talk to each other about personal and professional matters

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

36. The importance of feelings and emotional states is part of our team culture

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

37. There is a respect for difference and each other's cultural values

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

38. In this team, mistakes are seen as an important part of learning

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

39. I will say what I'm thinking, knowing that people will listen

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

40. We can accommodate people who have different ways of working

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

Overall scores for each rating, e.g. total of 1s, 2s etc.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**

Grand total = (Maximum 40 x 4 = 160)

Stage 2 Combined team scores

Use the table overleaf to collate the ratings from your team audit. This can be done as a shared exercise or anonymously by asking one person to collate the ratings sheets.

Question	Team member 1	Team member 2	Team member 3	Team member 4	Total
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					

21					
22					
23					
24					
25					
26					
27					
28					
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35					
36					
37					
38					
39					
40					
TOTAL					

Stage 3 Analysis and action

Now that the team has combined all the individual ratings into a team rating, the next stage is to make sense of the ratings and decide how to strengthen the team.

1. Review the ratings and identify the team's top five strengths.

2. Review the ratings and identify the team's five key improvement areas.

3. Now develop an action plan paying attention to three levels:

   - Actions that the whole team can take.

   - Actions to be requested/negotiated with the organisation.

   - Actions that individual team members can take.

4. Finally, imagine that the team hibernated for six months and then awoke to find that these actions were in progress. What would be the first things that you would notice about how the team had changed? Now come up with some fun ideas about how you would like to celebrate that success.

Our team's five most important strengths

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Our team's five key improvement areas

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What we want to do to strengthen our team

1.

2.

3.

What we will see happening as a result is:

The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

For more information please call **0113 244 6311**
or visit **www.cwdcouncil.org.uk**

Or write to CWDC, 2nd Floor, City Exchange
11 Albion Street, Leeds LS1 5ES
email info@cwdcouncil.org.uk
or fax us on 0113 390 7744

Contact us to receive this information in a different language or format, such as large print or audio tape.

SC62/1009