Using supervision to promote excellent outcomes and enable staff development

Effective Supervision

Child Centred Practice

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Foreword

This training pack has been developed to support managers to provide effective supervision to practitioners that is both challenging and enabling.

The pack has been put together from research, practice knowledge and a number of colleagues work over a period of several years. Wherever possible Child Centred Practice acknowledges the sources - some are now lost in the mists of time and I apologise in advance to those people. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the work done by Tony Morrison, who trained Jo Fox as a trainer in effective supervision. This work continues to be developed by the CWDC and others but stands the test of time.

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1 Supervising effectively

1.1 The four functions of supervision

- Accountability
- Development
- Support
- Mediation

1.2 Three types of supervision

- **Active Intrusive** – direct, ensure keys tasks carried out, little attention to feelings or worker-client relationship
- **Active Reflective** – engage practitioner in reflective process, attention to worker-client dynamic, use observation to inform assessment of practice strengths and areas for development
- **Passive Avoidant** – worker decides if supervision needed, supervisor has abandoned worker therefore organisation unable to take responsibility for the work

1.3 Positive supervision cycle

1.4 Negative supervision cycle
1.5 Key messages

- Supervisors and supervisees are powerfully influenced by their experiences of supervision.
- Supervisors need to reflect on what shapes their approach to supervision.
- Careful sharing of the workers supervision history provides a strong foundation for the supervisory relationship.
- The supervisee’s stage of development has to be taken into account in planning the most appropriate response.
- Experienced staff are more likely to miss out on supervision than newer staff.
- Individuals have a preferred learning style which needs to be acknowledged.
- Organisational culture may have a constraining effect on maximising benefits of different styles.

1.6 Supervision is …

- Supervision is a process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another worker in order to meet certain organisational professional and personal objectives. These objectives or functions are:
  - Competent accountable performance/practice
  - Continuing professional development
  - Personal support
  - Engaging the individual with the organisation


- Effectively managing and supervising staff to support effective practice and good conduct and supporting staff to address deficiencies in their performance.

  (General Social Care Council handbook)

1.7 Effective support and supervision

- Working to ensure children are protected from harm requires sound professional judgements to be made. It is demanding work that can be distressing and stressful.

- All of those involved should have access to advice and support from, for example, peers, managers, named and designated professionals. Those providing supervision should be trained in supervision skills and have an up to date knowledge of the legislation, policy and research relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

1.8 For many practitioners involved in day-to-day work with children and families:

- Effective supervision is important to promote good standards of practice and to supporting individual staff members. The arrangements for how supervision is organised and delivered will vary from agency to agency but there are some key essential elements. It should:
  - Help to ensure that practice is soundly based and consistent with LSCB and organisational procedures.
  - Ensure that practitioners fully understand their roles, responsibilities and the scope of their professional discretion and authority.
  - Help identify the training and development needs of practitioners, so that each has the skills to provide an effective service.
1.9 Good quality supervision can help to:

- avoid drift
- keep a focus on the child
- maintain a degree of objectivity and challenge fixed views
- test and assess the evidence base for assessment and decisions
- address the emotional impact of work

1.10 It is particularly important that social workers have appropriate supervision

- The recent report ‘Building a safe, confident future: the final report of the Social Work Task Force’ emphasised that supervision is a critical aspect of the support that employers should provide to social workers. It identified three specific functions of the supervision which must be in place to support effective practice:
  1. Line management;
  2. professional (or case) supervision; and
  3. and continuing professional development.

- Working Together 2010 – national standards for supervision being developed in line with SWTF

1.11 Supervision enables

- Both supervisor and supervisee to reflect on, scrutinise and evaluate the work carried out, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the practitioner and providing coaching, development, and pastoral support.
- Supervisors should be available to practitioners as an important source of advice and expertise and may be required to endorse judgements at certain key points in time.
- Supervisors should also record key decisions within the child’s case records.

1.12 Supervision will be both educative and supportive

- It will facilitate the supervisee to explore their feelings about the work and the family.
- Effective safeguarding supervision needs to be regular and provide continuity, so that the relationship between supervisor and supervisee develops.
- Each session should include agreeing the agenda, reviewing actions from previous supervision, listening, exploring and reflecting, agreeing actions and reviewing the supervision process itself.

1.13 Stop Start Stay

How does current practice map against CWDC developments & the Local Authority’s policy?

2 What works?

2.1 Range of settings supervision can take place

- Formal
- Planned
- Ad hoc
- Informal
- Telephone
### 2.2 The most important tool

```
I mean, the very fact that you've scheduled my supervision at the end of the day suggests to me that you don't take it seriously.
```

### 2.3 Stages of development (Hawkins & Shohet 1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on supervision</td>
<td>Fluctuates between autonomy and dependence</td>
<td>Increased professional confidence</td>
<td>Professional maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious about being evaluated</td>
<td>Over-confident v overwhelmed</td>
<td>Sees wider context in which user’s needs exist – ‘helicopter skills’</td>
<td>Can articulate professional knowledge and insight to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffidence about making professional judgements</td>
<td>Less simplistic, engages with complexity</td>
<td>Can generalise and reflect on learning and skills</td>
<td>Able to supervise or teach others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-focus on content, task and detail</td>
<td>Tailors interventions to users</td>
<td>Supervision more collaborative and challenging</td>
<td>Increased self-awareness of strengths and gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory needs</td>
<td>Supervisory needs</td>
<td>Supervisory needs</td>
<td>Supervisory needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Freedom to test out</td>
<td>Freedom to initiate</td>
<td>To be given wider responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Space to learn from mistakes</td>
<td>Further professional development</td>
<td>To have their experience utilised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Reflection on realities and constraints</td>
<td>To be stretched and challenged</td>
<td>Less frequent supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive and regular feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td>Danger: boredom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2.4 Stages of professional development

- As a supervisor, you will have preferences as to which stages you find easier or harder to address.
- Supervisors have different tolerances across these stages.
- In times of pressure or in a crisis a worker could revert to an earlier stage or level.
- Clear supervision contracts support supervisors to meet the needs of the supervisee at any stage of their development.
- What stage are your supervisees at in their professional development?
- How do you take this into account in supervision?
- What stage are you at as a supervisor in your development?

2.5 Learning styles

- **Activist** – immersed in here and now, learn by doing. Reflection not a strength.
- **Pragmatist** – keen to test – does it work in reality? Can be impatient with theory and reflection. Learning is about solving problems.
- **Theorist** – Adapt, analyse and integrate observations into complex but logical theories, think systematically. Like things to be ‘right’ and logical - how does this fit with that? Can be detached/objective about anything subjective, emotional or generated from lateral and creative thinking.
- **Reflector** – stand back, observe, collect data, consider all angles before acting. Can result in over cautiousness and delay. Listens to others before contributing. Pay close attention to emotional content of the situation.

2.6 Top tips

- **Activist** - Ensure they consider other people’s feelings, different perceptions, rationale for action, theory, research, and plan carefully before acting. Value their energy and enthusiasm.
- **Pragmatist** - They may contribute many good solutions. Beware of allowing them to cut too many corners & minimising/avoiding a proper consideration of facts, feelings, responsibilities, or real dilemmas.
- **Theorist** - Value and utilise analytical skills that theorists bring. Ensure that they are clear about the role, responsibility and accountability and fulfil their teamwork role properly. Theorists need to translate analysis into practical actions and commitments.
- **Reflector** - Value and listen carefully to their observations, especially about feelings. Ensure they do not avoid action, participation, or responsibility and that they move ahead with plans and tasks.

2.7 Styles can be changed

- These styles are not cast in stone.
- “Intelligence and ability are not fixed and general but variable and particular” Brotherton (1991)
- How a person performs and their ability to learn is highly influenced by the context and the security of the learning environment.
- Learning styles can be deliberately modified or improved so that, for example, an activist can practise ‘reflective’ skills by spending time observing rather than doing.
2.8 Competence Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conscious Competence</th>
<th>Conscious Incompetence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I know and can do</td>
<td>Areas of openly acknowledge gaps or weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear transferable skills</td>
<td>Challenge zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be explained to others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm ground zone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconscious Competence</th>
<th>Unconscious incompetence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I know or can do without being conscious of how I know it</td>
<td>Things which I am unaware I don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to explain to others</td>
<td>Others may see these gaps or weaknesses but I do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be lost in conditions of turbulence or disruption</td>
<td>Roots of performance problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development zone</td>
<td>Danger zone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 What does the ideal supervisor look like?

3.1 Effective supervision contracts

Effective contracts have three elements:

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

3.2 The best contract is:

- Arrived at through negotiation – how much room to negotiate when standard contracts are used?
- Addresses issues and how they will be managed
- Co-signed and dated
- Copied for both supervisor and supervisee
- Reviewed at least annually

3.3 Benefits of a written contract

- Reflects the seriousness of the activity
- Positive modelling of partnership behaviour
- Responsibilities and roles of both parties clear
- Clarity about authority and accountability
- Basis for reviewing and developing supervisory relationship
- Benchmark so supervision quality can be audited by agency
• Demonstrates quality of supervision offered and accepted
• Demonstrates use of supervision for ongoing development
• Agency can demonstrate to service users quality of supervision

3.4 When negotiating contracts – mandate
• On what authority is this supervision based?
• What is negotiable?
• What responsibilities does each person have?
• What are the boundaries around confidentiality? What records are maintained and where are they kept?
• Who sees them?

3.5 When negotiating contracts – engagement
Where a supervisee is reluctant to enter a contract, consider:
• Acknowledging skills and contribution made by the worker
• How the power differential between the supervisor and supervisee might be seen
• Clarify perception of roles and accountability
• Clarify the organisational requirements to engage purposefully in supervision.
• Explore perception of supervision and seek to clarify what is agreed, unclear or disputed.
• Supervisor to be aware of own feelings of frustration and anger

3.6 Taking a supervision history – potential benefits
• Identifying positive motivation for supervision
• Identifying significant gaps in training and confidence
• Being alerted to possible blocks for the supervisee, particularly around issues of power, race, gender etc
• Unpicking problems in the supervisory relationship
• Building supervisee commitment towards supervision
• Identifying consultancy need for the worker
• Understanding the significant professional influences and experiences that shape the workers values, motivation and style.

3.7 How do you record supervision?
Need to distinguish between:
• Case material discussed in supervision – needs to be on case file, evidences decision making, accountability, quality assurance
• The supervision session – “nuts & bolts”; progress, welfare, key information, frequency, focus, concerns; storage and accessibility
• Information belonging in personnel file – qualifications, disciplinary record, appointment documents
• Supervisee’s own reflections – reflective or learning diary held by supervisee
4 Reflective supervision

4.1 Kolb’s experiential learning cycle

4.1.1 Experiencing
- Learning is triggered by experience – a problem to be solved; a situation that is unfamiliar; or a need that must be satisfied.
- May be intellectual, emotional physical demands or needs
- Cycle is triggered by the worker experiencing a problem

4.1.2 Reflecting
- Often by processing feelings, a richer layer of observations is revealed.
- Reflection explores feelings, patterns and connections arising from the experience.
- It promotes the skill to recognise common elements in different situations by reference to the extensive memory bank of cases and experiences that the worker has built up over time – this is crucial.
- Acknowledges and helps process the strong emotional and moral responses that are generated by the social work task.
- It is important to understand what feelings belong to the situation and which to the worker

4.1.3 Analysis
- Reflection needs to lead to analysis
- Lessons learnt from one situation can be applied to others
- Tests hypothesis/theories against research and evidence
- Helps safeguard anti discriminatory practice

4.1.4 Action planning
- Translate the analysis into planning and service delivery
- Analysis and learning tested out in action
- Examining the possible outcomes of actions allow for contingency planning and outcome focused planning
4.2 The functional learning environment

This sits in the middle of the Kolb cycle.

For it to operate effectively, it is necessary to create a positive organisational culture that will support effective supervision.

Dysfunctional learning environment – reduces effectiveness of supervision

4.2.1 A functional learning environment requires:

- Clear agency values and goals
- High quality leadership
- Strategic planning and reviewing systems
- Policies, procedures and standards
- Clear thresholds and eligibility levels for service
- A robust performance management framework
- An effective staff development function – constructive processes
- Structures for interagency working
- Feedback from staff and service users

4.3 Using Kolb’s cycle in problem solving

4.3.1 Managing emotional content

- Emotional awareness
- Empathy
- Self-management
- Interpersonal skills

5 How does our value base affect our responses?

5.1 Green Cycle
5.2 The impact of organisational anxiety on supervision

5.2.1 Features of Green Cycle

- Uncertainties and anxieties of continuous change openly acknowledged
- Recognition that simple or prescribed solutions to complex problems are rare, so innovation and creativity are valued
- Power relations explicit, diversity valued, roles and responsibilities clarified
- People not expected nor allowed to “go it alone” – learn from experience and develop innovative solutions – confidence and skill to take on new challenges are increased

5.2.2 Benefits

- Respectful attitude/concern for service users
- Roles/responsibilities clear
- Staff demonstrate sense of belonging/mutual support/shared responsibility
- Clear & open communication
- Positive engagement with external agencies
- Commitment to conflict resolution, internally & externally
- Feelings acknowledged and utilised to explore practice
- Difference acknowledged and valued
- Supervision a priority
- Theory & research used to aid practice
- Staff commitment to L&D
- Positive use of team meetings

Again our thanks to Tony Morrison for the use of materials from his book Staff Supervision in social Care, Pavilion Publishing, 2001
# Exercises

## 5.1 Asset and Gaps Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSET</th>
<th>GAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency values and policies that clearly recognise the importance of staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear definition of supervision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision performance indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency based selection of supervisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of supervisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisee induction and preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision for the supervisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation/consultation support for difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditing of supervision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate time within management role to carry out supervision functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Tony Morrison Supervision Training Manual 2001.
### 5.2 Competence indicators for supervisor – self check list

*Scale = High (10-7) Medium (6-4) Low (3-0)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR (1-4)</th>
<th>SCALE</th>
<th>EVIDENCE / ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands purpose and key task of supervision (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands and can explain the department/professions supervision policy (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Understands and can explain the boundaries of supervision (as compared to consultation, counselling and appraisal) (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands and can explain the task involved in the managerial, educative, supportive and mediating elements of supervision (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands and can explain the elements for an effective supervision contract, including which elements are non-negotiable (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can explain the purpose of supervision to supervisees (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Can negotiate a mutually agreed and clear contract (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDICATOR (1-4)</td>
<td>SCALE</td>
<td>EVIDENCE / ACTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can ensure that supervision sessions take place as agreed in the contract (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can establish and maintain an appropriate agenda, and maintain appropriate boundaries (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can set a supervision climate that is empathic, genuine and safe (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can deliver, over a three month period, all four functions of supervision (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can record supervision appropriately (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can ensure that there is clarity about follow up action and delegated responsibilities at the end of a session or case discussion (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can ensure that the supervision process maintains the needs of services users at the centre of its process (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INDICATOR (1-4)</td>
<td>SCALE</td>
<td>EVIDENCE /ACTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can give feedback in a way that is clear, owned specific and balanced (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can focus on both content and process (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can appropriately facilitate the expression of feelings (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can enable the supervisee to identify and explain evidence, risks, needs strengths, values, attitudes, feelings policies, and professional knowledge underpinning their practice and decision making. (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can identify both for him/herself and the supervisee parallel processes. These refer to how the dynamics occurring between the worker and service users can be mirrored in the supervisory process particularly with reference to the use of power and authority. (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can identify and analyse poor or blocked behaviour and establish a strategy to address the issues (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can highlight and challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviour (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDICATOR (1-4)</td>
<td>SCALE</td>
<td>EVIDENCE /ACTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can enable the supervisee to analysis their own developmental needs, and establish and monitor a personal development plan? (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Can assist a supervisee to explore their supervision history (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates commitment to the role of supervision (4)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is fully aware of how his/her own supervision history influences his/her approach to supervision (4)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is clear about and comfortable with the authority of the supervisory role (4)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can encourage, motivate and carry appropriate optimism for the supervisee (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is sensitive to individual differences due to age, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, class and religion and demonstrates awareness of the impact of his/her own behaviour on supervisees (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDICATOR (1-4)</td>
<td>SCALE</td>
<td>EVIDENCE /ACTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates sensitivity to stage of development, personality and previous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>experiences of supervisee (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates capacity to use own supervision constructively (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks feedback from supervisees, peers and managers and is aware of own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisory strengths and weaknesses (4)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Tony Morrison Supervision Training 2001
5.3 Overall assessment of competency in the key areas

1. Knowledge of supervision task

2. Supervision management skills

3. Supervision intervention skills

4. Supervisor attitudes and qualities
5.4 What works?

1. Think of a time when you knew you were worried about your direct work with a child or family and your supervisor helped you move on and improve your practice. Perhaps you were aware that fears were preventing you from doing more than skimming the surface, or you realised that due to worries about making a mistake, you were moving to a risk-averse authoritarian position.

2. What was it about your supervisor’s demeanour and style that enabled you to bring your concern to supervision?

3. What did the supervisor do to help you identify what was worrying you?

4. What impact did that have on how you handled the case?

5. Find a partner and a space in the room and share your story.
5.5 Reflecting on your supervision history

AIM: To help you reflect on the influence of previous experiences of supervision on your current approach to supervision.

TASK:

1. Using the format provided, write out a list of previous supervisors. These may include significant figures outside social care, previous employers and managers or even school teachers.

2. Beside each one, make a brief note about their impact on you in terms of whether and how they helped or hindered your development. Use the two columns to distinguish between helpful and hindering responses. The same supervisor may have responded in both helpful and unhelpful ways. Focus on those who had greater impact, and consider what it was about their style, focus, understanding, knowledge, skills, values, and use of authority, empathy or any other factors that affected you. Consider whether factors of gender, race, etc. were significant.

3. Now reflect on how you responded to them: what responses did their approach generate in you?

4. Our responses to positive and negative experiences of supervision are different. Where supervision is poor or undermining we may arrive late, be guarded about certain types of information and reluctant to expose ourselves or take risks. Finally, analyse the degree to which your approach as a supervisor now is influenced by any or some of these experiences. What good models are you seeking to apply? What bad models are you seeking to avoid?

Adapted from Tony Morrison – Supervision training, 2001

5.5.1 My supervision history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous supervisor (1)</th>
<th>What helped?</th>
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<th>What hindered?</th>
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<th>Response at time</th>
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<tr>
<th>Influence on me now</th>
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<td>Previous supervisor (2)</td>
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<td>What helped?</td>
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<td>What hindered?</td>
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<td>Response at time</td>
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<td>Influence on me now</td>
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<th>Previous supervisor (3)</th>
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<td>What helped?</td>
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<td>What hindered?</td>
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<td>Response at time</td>
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<td>Influence on me now</td>
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<td>Previous supervisor (4)</td>
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<td>What helped?</td>
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<th>Previous supervisor (5)</th>
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<td>Influence on me now</td>
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5.5.2 Summarise the major influences on your approach to supervision:
5.6 Supervision contract

Between

Agency expectations

Arrangements agreed for supervision including

Frequency

Length

Location

Recording of supervision

Purposes for which record may be used

Storage of records

Agreement of agenda

 Interruptions allowed in what circumstances

Content of supervision

Focus of supervision

What is expected of the supervisor?

What is expected of the supervisee?

Permissions that we have agreed

How to deal with difficulties working together

Signed

Dated
5.7 Your organisation’s functional learning environment

**SELF CHECK LIST**

*Scale = High (10-7) Medium (6-4) Low (3-0)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clear agency values and goals</td>
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<td>High quality leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic planning and reviewing systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies, procedures and standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear thresholds and eligibility levels for service</td>
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<td>A robust performance management framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>An effective staff development function</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structures for interagency working</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback from staff and service users</td>
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5.8 Supervision of supervisors: Using the KOLB Cycle

5.8.1 Focusing on Experience

Here the emphasis is on facilitating an accurate and detailed recall of events. A partial description of the situation will undermine the rest of the cycle. Supervisees can be assisted to recall more than they think they can recall if the right questions are asked. In these lists ‘you’ is the supervisee.

1. How are you today - what’s your day been like so far?
2. What happened before the ‘event’ ‘issue’ ‘situation’ started?
3. What was your role in this situation?
4. What was your aim? What planning did you do?
5. What did you expect to happen?
6. What happened?
7. What did you say? What did you do?
8. What did the other people involved say, do or display?
9. What reactions did you notice to what you said/did?
10. What surprised or puzzled you? Who behaved differently?
11. What stuck out for you? What were the key moments?
12. What words, non-verbals, sounds, images struck you?
13. What did you notice about yourself, and the others involved?
14. What do you think others would have noticed about you?
15. If others involved had been describing this event, how similar or different to your account would their description have been?
16. What didn’t you notice? What or who was hard to observe?
17. What observations or concerns do other agencies have?
18. What went according to plan? What didn’t happen?
19. What changes or choices did you make?
20. What did you say, notice or do immediately after the situation?
5.8.2 **Focusing on Reflection: Supervising Supervisors**

Here the emphasis is on eliciting feelings, and patterns. These may bring out further information, or may reveal the supervisee’s underlying attitudes. They may also give clues to other personal factors complicating the supervisee’s experience. Reflection helps the supervisee make links between the current situation and his/her prior experiences, skills or knowledge.

1. What did you feel at the start of the situation?
2. What feelings did you bring into this situation?
3. Describe the range of feelings you had during the episode?
4. What physical sensations were you experiencing? Heart beat etc.
5. What did the situation/your feelings remind you of?
6. What previous work, processes, skills, knowledge are relevant?
7. What patterns did you see in this situation? Are these familiar?
8. Where have you encountered similar processes?
9. Describe a time when you last experienced that -what happened?
10. Who/what does the other people in this situation remind you of?
11. What did you think the other person(s) was feeling?
12. What feelings might you be carrying on behalf of the user/victim/other workers, e.g.: what transference or projection might be occurring?
13. What other factors might influence how you or the other people involved felt or reacted, e.g.: gender, race?
14. Where and when did you feel most or least comfortable?
15. Who seemed least or most comfortable - at what points?
16. What thoughts went through your mind during this situation?
17. What ideas came to you during the situation?
18. What are the continuities or discontinuities between this situation and the pattern of what’s been happening before this situation began?
19. What did you tell yourself about what was happening, e.g. what was the ‘self-talk’ inside your head?
20. What feelings were you left with - is this familiar in these sorts of situations
21. What metaphor or analogy would describe your experience of this situation?
22. What was left unfinished?
5.8.3 Focusing on Analysis: Supervising Supervisors

Here the emphasis is on analysis and explanation, probing the meanings that the supervisee and others involved attribute to the situation. This includes consideration of other possible explanations, the identification of what is not known or understood, and areas for further exploration or assessment.

1. List three assumptions you/others might have brought into the situation?
2. How would you/others explain or understand what happened in that situation? How else could you explain what happened?
3. How would the situation have been seen differently if you had been male/female; black/white; able bodied/disabled etc.
4. Who are the shareholders for this situation?
5. What tasks or responsibilities in this situation were or were not addressed?
6. What other, possibly unexpected outcomes, did the situation produce?
7. What was the nature of the power relations during this situation?
8. Did power relations shift during the situation - if so why?
9. How far did this situation confirm or challenge your previous understanding?
10. What are the current strengths, needs, risks for the different stakeholders in this situation?
11. What new information emerged?
12. What was the critical moment?
13. What went well, and why?
14. What did not go well and why?
15. How else might you have managed the situation?
16. What bits of theory, training, research, policy, values might help you make sense of what was happening in this situation?
17. What is not known?
18. What conclusion are you drawing from this situation so far?
19. How do you define your role in this situation?
20. How do others define your role in this situation: e.g. supervisee, other workers, user or other agency?
21. What would the organisation say your role is in this situation?
22. How clear is the organisation about its expectations in this situation?
5.8.4 Focusing on Strategies and Action Plans: Supervising Supervisors

The focus here is on translating the analysis into planning, preparation and action. This includes identification of outcomes and success criteria as well as consideration of potential complications and contingency plans.

1. In the light of the reflection and analysis we’ve done, what’s your overall summary of where things are at, and what needs to be done next?
2. Can you identify what you are and are not responsible for in managing this situation?
3. What training, supervisory, mentoring and support needs have been raised for you?
4. What information needs to be obtained before proceeding?
5. What are your aims in this next phase of work?
6. What is urgent and essential?
7. What would be desirable?
8. What is negotiable and what is non-negotiable in this situation?
9. What would be a successful outcome to the next situation from your perspective?
10. What would be a successful outcome for the next situation from the perspective of the other key shareholders?
11. What do you need to do more of?
12. What do you need to do less of?
13. What do you need to start doing that perhaps you have been putting off?
14. What are the different ways in which you could approach this?
15. What might be your strategy for the next situation?
16. What are the possible best or worst outcomes?
17. How can the other key shareholders be engaged?
18. What contingency plans do you need - what is the bottom line?
19. Who else needs to be involved (other staff, other agency)?
20. What would you like from them?
21. How well equipped do you feel to undertake this?
22. Where do you feel more or less confident?
23. How can you prepare for this - mental rehearsal, flip chart map?
24. What can I do that would be helpful at this stage?
25. What and when does feedback and debriefing need to take place?
26. Are there any safety/ethical issues for you or others?
27. What can be done to minimise any dangers?
5.9 Red and Green Cycles Exercise (Allow 1 hour)

Aim: to understand the effects of anxiety on supervision

5.9.1 Red and Green Cycles Exercise Part 1

1) In small groups identify someone to act as a 'red supervisor', someone' to act as a 'green supervisee' and the other members to be non-participant observers.

2) The supervisee should then quickly identify a case issue which they wish to bring to the supervisee; the supervisee might be presenting from any point in the green cycle: uncertain, anxious about taking a risk, with a new idea etc.

3) Role play only the first 5 mins of the discussion between supervisor and supervisee. The red supervisor should adopt one of the positions along the red cycle, without going over the top, e.g. something not completely untypical. Note: it can be hard for the person playing the supervisor to stay in role but please do as it will help the learning. The task is not to complete the discussion but simply to see what happens in the first few minutes of this supervision session.

4) Observers to stop the role play after 5’ wherever it’s at. Debrief as follows:
   - What range of feelings did the supervisor/ee each have?
   - What happened to the quality of information exchanged?
   - What happened to the original issue/case brought by the supervisee?
   - What would have happened if the session had continued for another 20’?
   - How would this session affect the supervisee if he/she was going straight from this to interview a client?
   - What would have been the effect of this supervision session on their next supervision session?

Make headline notes of the above please.

5.9.2 Red and Green Cycles Exercise Part 2

1) Repeat the exercise but this time selecting a 'green' supervisor and 'red' supervisee.

2) Swap the roles around the small group. Again don't play the 'red' role over the top.

3) Debrief as above

4) Now compare what happened in the two exercises:
   - Was the process or outcome different?
   - The differences may not have been dramatic so look for small clues: level of empathy, eye contact, focus on the issue, addressing feelings;
   - If so, why?

5. Feedback the headlines from your experience, focusing not on the detail of each process but on the contrast in outcomes between the two exercises. Look for small details: differences in the use of language, quality of listening, focus on task, attention to feelings, clarity of communication and likely outcome over time. You are not looking at whether the whole issue was resolved but the degree to which an effective problem-solving process can be established depending on who has the red and green roles.
5.10 Problem-Solving Exercise using Kolb’s Cycle

Aim: The aim of this exercise is to practice using the four parts of the Kolb cycle in a problem solving situation.

1) In your small group, identify someone willing to bring a real issue around supervision that they will work on with the group for 30’. This could be about a worker’s performance, or a case-based issue. The interviewee should give a brief outline only of the issue to be brought. Confidentiality is emphasised.

2) Then allocate the remaining 4 members to one part of the Kolb cycle each, e.g. one to focus on ‘experiencing’, one on ‘reflecting’, one on ‘conceptualising’, one: active experimenting. The task of each interviewer is to use their role to assist in exploring the problem, e.g. the reflector will be exploring feelings, or patterns, whilst the conceptualiser will be helping the interviewee to analyse the problem etc. It may be useful to take a role with which you feel less confident.

3) The four interviewers to spend 10’ preparing: use the Reflective Questions as a prompt. Think about where to start: exploring the facts (experience), or exploring the feelings (reflection) etc.

4) Discussing the problem: 25’. Using the 4 different problem solving roles, work together with the interviewer to explore the issues and develop problem solving strategies. Don’t worry if the problem is not solved in 3D’, the aim is to provide your colleague with 30’ problem solving assistance. Please try and stay within your problem solving roles.

5) At the end of 25’, each of the interviewers should summarise back to the interviewee what you have heard, e.g. the reflectors will summarise what they heard in terms of feelings.

6) Debrief the exercise:
   - What did you notice about the way those different questions, or the sequence in which they were asked, elicited different types of information and response?
   - What was the effect of this structure on the problem solving process? What advantages or disadvantages did it bring?
   - What did you learn about the types of questions you ask less often?
   - What might be the potential benefits of this structure for group supervision?
5.11 Giving Critical Feedback

**Aim:** to prepare a critical feedback statement and to rehearse giving the statement. This exercise is not a role play.

In your small group:

1. Each person on their own, without discussion to think of a real, preferably current situation in which you as a supervisor need to give critical feedback to a supervisee about their performance or practice, e.g. poor record keeping, lateness, judgmental attitude etc.

2. Imagine you have planned to address this issue at the opening of the next supervision session. Now write down an opening statement in which you explain your concerns to the supervisee by giving them specific feedback. Pay attention to the items listed on page 191 of the Supervision book. Take max 10 mins to do this.

3. Having prepared the statements, each person in the group takes turns to very briefly explain the context in which the statement is being given, and then reads their statement out. Please read this slowly and repeat it if necessary.

4. The other members of the group listen to the statement and then comment on:
   - what was good about it in terms of its specificity, ownership, clarity, and message to the supervisee;
   - whether any bits were unclear, or ambiguous
   - any ways in which the statement might be improved.

5. Each statement and the commentary on it should take no more than about 5 mins to read and discuss.