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USING SUPERVISION

Supervision is a process of critical reflection in which youth workers discuss ongoing work and professional development issues with another practitioner, such as a manager, a practice tutor or a peer in order to identify clarity about roles, and the relationships between values, practice and development. This chapter identifies the essential skills required for effective provision and use of managerial, professional and/or educational supervision and goes through the stages of supervision, from understanding and agreeing the type of supervision being undertaken, to establishing the supervision relationship and examining practice through supervision sessions and then moving on through evaluation and exit.

Supervision, like youth work, can be a process of dialogue and problem-posing with both parties working together and learning from each other to deepen understanding. A developmental approach based on mutual respect can enable both supervisor and supervisees to learn from each others' perspectives in a relationship that is both supportive and challenging. Good supervision can provide a structure for professional youth work practice where supervisees reflect on recent work and plan future developments that are consistent with youth work principles. Challenging discussions about practical and ethical dilemmas are required to assist a youth worker to maintain focus for participative and anti-oppressive practice. Freire (1972) describes this as 'praxis', reflection and analysis of issues arising from practice to identify and plan transformative action. Without this 'liberating education' (see below), both youth workers and youth work can become forces for domestication rather than liberation.

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information ... Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist ... The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn whilst being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all

grow. In this process, arguments based on 'authority' are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other. (Freire, 1972: 79-80)

Plans for good practice, professional development and organisational change can be positive outcomes of stimulating and challenging discussions. Monitoring changes and development in individuals and groups, as well as relationships and issues related to power, can lead to increased understanding and awareness of a situation and ways forward. A core focus of sessions can be to identify the levels of participation by young people to ensure that relevant interests and needs are addressed. A review of projects or activities may be used to question whether alternative strategies may be appropriate. Additionally, supervision often leads to a consideration of ways to implement any organisational change necessary to address barriers to participation caused by particular structures or practices within the workplace.

HAVING A PLANNED APPROACH TO SUPERVISION

A planned approach to supervision requires attention to the periods before, during and after the supervision relationship. Prior to starting supervision sessions, both supervisor and supervisee seek clarification and agreement about the type of supervision and what they bring to the relationship. The relationship and meetings are established with agreements about structure and any recording. Once the focus of the sessions is on practice, supervision includes reviews of ongoing work and discussion of relevant issues. Plans to address the issues through work and professional development are made and then reviewed in subsequent sessions. Exiting from a supervision arrangement can include a number of methods for ensuring that the supervisee continues to develop professionally. The stages in a planned approach are suggested in Box 13.1.

Box 13.1 A planned approach to supervision

- | | |
|---|--|
| Preparing for supervision | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding the type of supervision required• Locating self in relation to identity, skills and experience, and boundaries |
| Establishing the supervision relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exchanging information about the above• Making practical arrangements to meet• Structuring the sessions• Record-keeping |

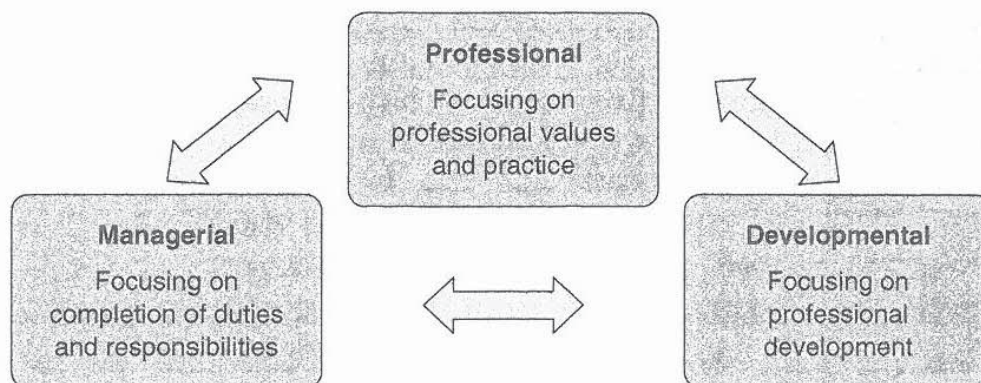
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Examining practice	• Listening and valuing experience • Providing critical feedback • Reviewing practice • Identifying issues
Moving on	• Action planning • Reviewing what has been achieved • Identifying learning outcomes • Allowing the relationship to end

UNDERSTANDING THE TYPE OF SUPERVISION REQUIRED

While the primary function of youth work supervision is to focus on the core values of youth work in order to maintain, support and develop professional practice, some supervision arrangements may provide more focus on the related managerial and developmental functions, which can affect the process, content and outcomes of supervision. (See Box 13.2 for a diagram about the functions of supervision.) Supervision provided by a line manager, for example, would tend to address professional values and practice within the context of the organisational aims and resources. The supervisee's job description and workload would be taken into consideration and a priority put on the successful completion of duties and responsibilities. A manager's responsibilities for quality assurance, resources, services and personnel may assist supervision to address key concerns in practical ways. However, free discussion of issues arising may be more impractical, particularly if supervision records might be used to monitor performance or to carry out disciplinary procedures. Similarly, supervision undertaken as part of an educational curriculum tends to emphasise the professional development function with the specific learning objectives, standards and requirements defined by the training provider. The sessions may include instruction on how to approach certain tasks, recommendations for reading and research and evaluation of learning. The supervisor's role in assessment of the supervisee's learning outcomes could significantly obstruct reflection on practice or the questioning of whether young people's needs were addressed. As an individual youth worker could receive managerial supervision from a line manager; non-managerial supervision for a specific project; external supervision from a colleague in another organisation; and, if undertaking training, student supervision from the educational agency, clarification from the outset of an arrangement, particularly with regards to whether the supervision is managerial or non-managerial, reported or confidential, can help both parties to utilise the sessions appropriately.

Box 13.2 Functions of supervision in youth work

Youth workers may need to seek out supervision in situations where there are gaps or unevenness in the provision or functions of supervision. Without adequate managerial supervision, individuals can be unsupported or unclear about how to prioritise or carry out their work. Some supervision may focus on control and containment to minimise resource use or change and miss out on facilitating the development of professional practice or professionalism. Alternative or additional arrangements for peer supervision, co-supervision and consultancies from within or external to the organisation may be sought out to address any gaps in available supervision. Co-supervision arrangements can provide an equal relationship without hierarchy, which may be particularly attractive to an individual feeling that their existing supervision is constrained by over-powerful managerial or assessment functions. Supervision from within the organisation can bring familiarity with the context, the available resources and organisational aims, culture and procedures. External supervision, arranged with someone who is unconnected with the supervisee's organisation, can provide a new perspective unconstrained by organisational culture. A colleague or youth worker met at a conference or networking event could provide useful peer supervision with feedback and support based on experience of similar responsibilities and challenges. Alternatively, an organisation without experience of youth work may seek out external supervision for their youth work employees to ensure that appropriate managerial and professional decisions are made. Consultancies, or short- and fixed term external supervisory arrangements, can provide access to particular knowledge or experience, particularly when lacking within an organisation.

LOCATING SELF

Preparation for supervision could also include participants taking time to identify their hopes and fears with regards to supervision, as well as any strengths or limitations that may affect the supervisory relationship or agenda. 'Location of self'

or reflection on previous personal, political and work experiences to analyse and evaluate any acquired skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that may be relevant to the supervision, is a useful starting point. This reflection can enable supervisors to be clear and open about what they are able to offer as well as any gaps. Similar reflection and preparation by supervisees can enable them to articulate their needs and interests and to take a more active role in setting an agenda for supervision that will address them. (See Practice Example 13.1 which illustrates 'location of self' and Box 4.3 in Chapter 4 contains some additional examples): The process can be developed into ongoing 'self supervision', which Hawkins and Shohet (2006:42) say requires individuals to monitor and confront their ways of working.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE 13.1

A supervisor's 'location of self'

An experienced practitioner was asked to supervise a recently qualified youth worker who was starting a group aiming to raise young women's educational and career aspirations. Before meeting the supervisee, the supervisor reflected on her own experience in order to 'locate' her perspective and identify relevant strengths as well as gaps. The supervisor had not worked with a young women's group before, but had a good understanding of starting and developing mixed gender projects, and of some of the issues faced by young women. For example, she was aware that homeless young women in the area were exchanging sex for a place to stay and personal experience of sexism enabled her to make links between societal attitudes and the young women's perceived and genuine options.

To address the identified gaps, the supervisor visited a couple of young women's projects proactively involved in specific anti-sexist activities and staff training, carried out some reading about challenging sexism and discussed methods of promoting positive images of women and girls with colleagues. She focused on her own current practice and involved young women in developing some peer education materials and activities on sex working to build their confidence, assertiveness and enquiry skills. These various forms of professional development enhanced the direction and feedback she could provide for the new youth worker and enabled her to suggest up-to-date reading material and contacts.

The identification of boundaries in relation to practical arrangements for supervision is also a significant part of preparation and location of self. Box 13.3 lists some relevant topics for consideration, such as preferences for scheduling and venues as well as style and/or approaches to supervision. While some supervisory situations have less flexibility, arrangements to suit the individuals concerned can often be accommodated. Communication and establishing a common understanding about practicalities, expectations and ways of working can assist the supervisory relationship to flourish. Discussion of these key points could provide an opportunity for participants to get to know each other, clarify arrangements and reach agreement on the function and nature of the relationship.

Box 13.3 Identifying boundaries for supervision

Arrangements

Contacts, timing and dates	When and where do I wish to be contacted or can messages be left? What time do I have available for supervision sessions? Can I allocate an interruption-free time slot on a specific day and time? How long do I think the meetings should be and how frequent? Would it be better to arrange (and diary) several meetings in advance? How long can I commit myself for? When do I think I would like to review the arrangements? Would I prefer an open-ended or fixed term agreement?
Venue	Can I travel to meetings or do I need them to be held at my workplace? Where can we meet undisturbed? Is the venue appropriate in relation to privacy, safety, atmosphere and comfort?
Approach to supervision	Do I prefer or need formally recorded and structured meetings or more free-flowing discussion? Do I have flexible approaches to practice or a preference for clear ground rules and boundaries?
Records	What records will be kept and who will have access to them? Do I need my own records of the sessions? What records does the organisation require and what is their purpose? Who is responsible for the records? Do I have any control over them?
Ethical boundaries	What issues would raise ethical questions for me? What issues would I report to a manager, a training agency, the social services or the police? What personal, political or professional information do I consider to be relevant or irrelevant for these sessions?
Cancellations and punctuality agreements	How much notice do I need for cancellations? How have I responded to previous cancellations? How would I prefer cancellations to be handled? How strongly do I feel about punctuality? How have I responded to late arrivals in the past? What arrangements would I like to establish in relation to time-keeping?
Own development needs	What do I expect from the other participant in relation to experience, issues or areas of work? What support, information or learning do I need to make this arrangement useful or work well?
Other issues to consider	What problems have I encountered previously in relation to supervision? What issues have been raised in feedback? How have I reacted to challenges or advice?

KEEPING APPROPRIATE RECORDS

Records of sessions reflecting the supervisees' language and ideas can show that a supervisor values the supervisee's experience and perspective. A record can remind both parties of the issues discussed to provide continuity between sessions, monitor development, identify patterns in issues arising and, in student supervision, assist in the completion of assessment forms. Going through a record of a session together to check accuracy can establish mutual understanding of key issues and any action for subsequent sessions. Sometimes minimal records are sufficient. Summarising the points at the end of a session can preclude the need for taking extensive and intrusive notes during the sessions.

Reaching agreement on the purpose and content of the records is essential. Clarity about any monitoring or reporting requirements and whether these could be used as evidence in appraisal or promotion, disciplinary matters or assessment must be established prior to recording. A manager may be required to follow established procedures for quality assurance. Student supervision may have particular forms for assessment purposes. Shared understanding about what happens to records could help to reduce problems arising from unexpected demands made at a later date. (See Practice Example 13.2 which illustrates the importance of having clarity about supervisory roles and records.)

PRACTICE EXAMPLE 13.2

Conflicting roles and records

A youth worker, who was also a part-time student, asked her manager for suggestions about how to extend her experience of supervision. The manager arranged for her to provide *internal non-managerial supervision* for an individual from another team. A series of sessions was negotiated for the purpose of mutual learning. The supervisee used the sessions to raise and discuss some difficulties he was experiencing with his manager.

After a while, the supervisees' manager contacted the student to make enquiries about her opinion of the supervisee's practice and what information she had about why the supervisee had missed a particular work session. As the student and supervisee had agreed previously that the records would only be used to provide a reminder of issues raised, the student said that the information was confidential. The manager stated that it was the organisation's usual practice to use supervision recordings as evidence in disciplinary matters.

The student had not been provided with the policies, procedures or authority within the organisation to carry through issues raised within supervision and had not understood that she would be taking on a formal supervisory role. She had initiated and negotiated a more supportive type of peer supervision, which she felt was being compromised by demands for records for formal disciplinary procedures. She had learned a useful lesson about the importance of clarity about roles and records.

STRUCTURING THE SESSIONS

Supervision can take place within a series of regular and structured two-way meetings to ensure that professional values are maintained through continuous critical reflection; other arrangements may be much more ad hoc.

Supervision carried out at regular intervals and within a format that is suitably structured to ensure that sufficient time is allocated for key issues and planning can be particularly effective. While a formal agenda is not essential, the establishment of a pattern for the supervision sessions can encourage focused and useful discussion. Agreements about the structure of the sessions and other protocols can clarify the power relationship and responsibility for the issues raised, and their prioritisation can be shared. Supervisees can become involved in planning the session and actively addressing their own learning needs by raising any topics of concern. The agenda in Box 13.4, for example, encourages the supervisor to take responsibility for moving the session on and the supervisee to be responsible for identifying relevant issues. The supervisee can be asked to prioritise points within the time constraints of a particular session. This dialogical approach encourages the development of plans that are realistic and practical.

Box 13.4 A supervision agenda

Agenda items	Supervisor's prompts	Supervisee's actions
1 Share news	• Tell me what's going on... • Any good or positive developments at work since we last met?	Reflects on recent practice prior to the session to identify positive as well as negative practice issues for discussion
2 Set the agenda	• What do we need to talk about during this session? • Is there anything left over from the last session? • Can we make a list?	Brings along any records of work, such as a diary or notes from the last session. Reviews these prior to the session and identifies any matters arising.
3 Review ongoing work	• Let's look at how your work is going with the 'xyz' project. • How have your work plans with 'abc' been progressing?	Raises any issues that have caused concern or second thoughts. Passes on sufficient information for the supervisor to understand the context.

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Agenda items	Supervisor's prompts	Supervisee's actions
4 Focus on issues	Let's focus on the issues/items on the list in more detail.	Attempts to recall accurate details of the circumstances surrounding events, such as exact words used, emotions felt and expressed and relevant contributory factors.
5 Plan	- What plans can we make to address the issues arising? - What new plans do you have for the 'abc' and 'xyz' projects?	Makes sure to raise any issues that would make plans unrealistic.
6 Confirm next meeting	When should we meet again?	Confirms satisfactory arrangements. Raises any concerns.
7 Agree record	Can we agree that these notes are an accurate record of the important points raised?	Checks for accuracy.

Both parties are responsible for ensuring that the sessions address relevant youth work issues and practice – although a supervisor who is supervising a student takes ultimate responsibility for this. The purpose of supervision is to challenge and develop practice rather than resolve personal issues. While some individuals need time to settle into a session through greetings and chat about family, health or holidays, both need to make sure that this does not take up much time in the session. If someone appears to need extra time to discuss domestic arrangements or emotional responses to situations or if an individual appears overly distressed or depressed, the supervision session should be brought to an end. Communicating continued interest in providing support for a supervisee's professional development through supervision can be separated from signposting the individual to useful alternative means of support for their emotional health.

LISTENING

Supervisors strive to provide an appropriate balance between stimulating reflection, listening and feedback. Attentive listening can enable a full exploration of issues and feedback should assist progression towards understanding of how they can be addressed. Initially, supervisees are encouraged to outline their recent work experiences

and a supervisor listens attentively to hear the supervisees' perspective on what has taken place. As supervisees recall and articulate their experience, they begin to explore their roles and responsibilities, the consequences of their actions and other influences on situations. Paying attention to the detail in what supervisees are saying, both verbally and non-verbally, about particular circumstances and feelings generated can assist a supervisor to gain a full picture and understanding of a supervisee's experiences. Careful listening also allows a supervisor to recall information later in the session or in subsequent sessions, and to focus on the supervisee's account and agenda. According to Egan, good attending in counselling enables the:

'helper to listen carefully to what clients are saying, both verbally and nonverbally. Total or complete listening involves three things: (1) observing and reading the client's nonverbal behaviour – posture, facial expression, movement, tone of voice and the like; (2) listening to and understanding the client's verbal messages; and (3) listening in an integrated way to the person in the context of both the helping process and everyday life.' (1986: 79)

Supervisors, as well as counsellors, have identified that responses conveying a listener's interest and demonstrating that information has been heard can encourage further exploration of an issue. Active listening techniques (Rogers, 1969 and Egan, 1986), such as 'paraphrasing the feelings and content' can convey interest and 'clarifying and summarising', can convey understanding. However, attempting empathy or 'thinking in someone else's terms', such as in the active listening approach used by counsellors and described by Rogers and Farson below are likely to be beyond the remit of youth work supervision.

Active listening carries a strong element of personal risk. If we manage to accomplish what we are describing here – to sense deeply the feeling of another person, to understand the meaning his experiences have for him, to see the world as he sees it – we risk being changed ourselves. For example, if we permit ourselves to listen our way into the psychological life of a labor leader or agitator – to get the meaning which life has for him – we risk coming to see the world as he sees it. It is threatening to give up, even momentarily, what we believe and start thinking in someone else's terms. It takes a great deal of inner security and courage to be able to risk one's self in understanding another. (1987: 327)

A supervisor may use other counselling skills, such as avoiding interpretative statements and asking relevant open questions rather than probing, to allow the supervisee to explore issues and incidents on their own terms, provide their own emphasis and identify meaning that is significant to them.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK

A supervisor responds to what supervisees say about their practice with positive and critical feedback, as well as suggestions for further thought.

Highlighting a supervisee's description of good practice can affirm and confirm positive developments, as well as identify and value the particular skills and knowledge underpinning their actions. Positive feedback will ensure that supervisees are aware of how to continue this approach. Building on good practice and making further plans to extend young people's involvement or participation can further enhance supervisees' professional development.

Supervisors are also required to provide an alternative perspective and more challenging or critical feedback in relation to professional values and practice. A supervisor should not ignore or collude with poor practice. If a supervisee describes inappropriate, dangerous or oppressive practice, a clear professional perspective is required. Critical feedback may be necessary when supervisees use inappropriate language, express oppressive attitudes or tell the supervisor about situations where mistakes have been made without any apparent intention of addressing the consequences. A supervisor is responsible for ensuring that supervisees recognise bad practice, learn from their mistakes and develop ways to address them.

In order to stimulate supervisees to look at their practice in new ways, feedback can provide new frames of reference to alter a supervisee's way of looking at a situation (see Box 13.5 for some 'framing' techniques). Using metaphors or a contrasting situation, for example, can assist in a change of perspective. Supervisors need to monitor their responses to make sure that a relevant tool provides insight rather than gets in the way of communication. If a framing technique is over-used, the method can lose meaning or if misused or misapplied, the frame is only confusing. For example, a supervisor may identify a tradition or pattern of behaviour within an organisation that in her mind illuminates the organisational culture. Partial evidence could lead to an inaccurate analysis, and continuous reference to 'organisational culture' as a catch-all explanation for issues arising could become unhelpful.

Box 13.5 'Framing' techniques

Metaphor: using a parallel example or symbol to highlight themes that may be similar to the current topic.

Jargon and catchphrases: using familiar language or slogans that relate to a subject.

Contrast: providing a definition of a situation in terms of what it is not.

Spin: talking about various aspects of a subject, such as the positive or negative implications.

Stories: using as an anecdote, myth or legend, to engage attention and emotion.

(Adapted from Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996: 101)

The provision of appropriate feedback requires a supervisor to be able to assess and understand supervisees' responsibilities and roles. A supervisor needs clarity about the level of control or power that a supervisee can exert in the context of the work setting. An awareness of available resources, potential for change and a clear view

of the type of work that a supervisee should be carrying out also enhances appropriate feedback or direction. Effective supervisors are able to provide positive, constructive and informative reactions and suggestions. When thinking is stimulated and debates are carried out on a level that is understood, supervisees can be encouraged to continue to develop their awareness and practice. This 'conversational learning', as described by Baker et al. (see below), can enable learners to construct meaning and transform experiences into new knowledge. The reference to 'ontological resource' highlights the value of dialogue in developing a deep understanding of self and others, which supervision can provide.

Taking the time to hear other perspectives through the telling of each other's stories can often provide a path for returning to the questions or decisions at hand in ways that are easier to hear. In storytelling and in recursive conversations, new ways of framing can be grasped – apprehended – and the ontological recourse informs the learning. (Baker et al., 2005: 420)

REVIEWING THE SUPERVISEE'S PRACTICE

Reviewing practice and applying principles to practice are the essential ingredients in professional supervision. A supervisor assists youth workers to focus on different aspects of practice. A review could include looking at the overall programme of work, a particular work responsibility or session, any developments since the last supervision session, recent events or issues arising. The process can involve reviews of work records and other relevant documents for problem-solving, planning and/or evaluation. Recording forms, diaries and evaluation sheets can be useful bases for discussion. The review can then relate to whether the practice meets the requirements of the post or placement, addresses professional values and principles, makes practical sense in relation to the time and resources available, and involves sufficient variation, change and development for both the young people involved and the youth worker.

Supervision can assist youth workers in making sense of organisational or managerial targets. The process of an overall review of a programme of work can start with an analysis of how supervisees actually spend their time in comparison with the needs of the young people and their communities, the job description, project brief or student placement requirements. The needs of the young people may be contradictory. An organisation's expectations may not be feasible or fall within professional boundaries. Supervision can assist supervisees in identifying and negotiating feasible ways of moving forward. Supervisees can explore methods of asserting themselves, raising issues or challenging rules or requirements. Alternatively, supervisees may need to find a way to work within constraints that is compatible with the profession and resources.

A useful tool to structure reflection on practice could be Johns (1995) series of questions based on Carper's four 'ways of knowing' (cited in Johns). The questions are designed to facilitate learning from experience in a process of defining and understanding practice that liberates an individual from previous ways and empowers action to effect changes. Box 13.6 outlines Johns' questions.

Box 13.6 Johns' (1995) reflective tool

Aesthetics	What was I trying to achieve? Why did I respond as I did? What were the consequences of that for the young person/colleague/ member of the community directly concerned? Others? Myself? How was this person (or these people) feeling? How did I know this?
Personal	How did I feel in this situation? What internal factors were influencing me?
Ethics	How did my actions match with my beliefs? What factors made me act in an incongruent way?
Empirics	What knowledge did or should have informed me?
Reflexivity	How does this connect with previous experiences? Could I handle this better in a future similar situation? What would be the consequences of alternative actions for: The young person/colleague/member of the community directly concerned? Others? Myself? How do I now feel about this experience? Can I support myself and others better as a consequence? What have I learned from this experience? (Have I changed my ways of knowing?)

EVALUATING YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

A review of a specific piece of work can evaluate practice in relation to youth work aims and values. A supervisor can provide questions that supervisees apply to a project, event or provision to identify whether good youth work practice has been carried out. Box 13.7 provides some examples of how to stimulate a professional analysis of participation. Through analysis, supervisees begin to identify issues and problems.

Box 13.7 Evaluating supervisees' practice

A supervisor could invite supervisees to review a piece of work through asking:

- How do members participate in decisions made about the design, management and evaluation of this provision?

- Who would feel unwelcome or excluded from this group?
- How was this piece of work inclusive?
- How would the current members react to new members?
- How would (a specific group, such as wheelchair users, younger members, non-readers) participate in this activity?
- What are the reasons for targeting this specific group? Does this relate to issues of exclusion or oppression from other activities?
- How does this work fit into organisational priorities, your job description, anti-oppressive practice?

A supervisor encourages a supervisee to examine issues from the perspective of groups and individuals in the community, the agency and the profession. Planning and prioritising will need to balance various considerations or needs, such as young people's needs, organisational priorities and youth work values. Organisational priorities will often impact on planning. Whether the priorities have been formally set, evolved through habit or discussed with managers, the process of identifying problem areas and making plans may challenge existing ways of working. Supervisees need to think about the impact of changes they plan and how to involve others in that change.

Role clarity is an important outcome of supervision. Evaluation is based on an understanding of youth work roles and practice. A supervisor assists supervisees to come to an understanding of how the aims of the profession relate to their work practice. Supervisees examine underlying principles as well as the overall aims of their job, project or placement. The evaluation identifies practice that conforms to the aims, as well as practice that conflicts. Practice Example 13.3 illustrates instances of a supervisor using supervision to address a supervisee's poor practice.

Tackling poor practice through supervision

Supervisee doesn't address own power

Supervisee: I can't believe the attitude of workers in this organisation. They have such low expectations of the young people and they speak to them really disrespectfully. No one plans anything and there is no structure to the sessions.

Supervisor asks questions: *What is your response when the issues arise (in the immediate or short term)? Where could you raise these issues? How could you influence positive change?*

Supervisee finds a worker incapable

Supervisee (a manager): I've told the youth worker that she needs to distance herself more from the young people. When we discuss different options with the young people, she intervenes with her opinions. The idea is to offer them the opportunity to make

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their own decisions, not to influence their choices. Despite several review sessions where I have pointed out that she needs to be a worker offering options, not a member of the group stating opinions, she seems unable to grasp her role.

Supervisor raises possible underlying causes: Before we dismiss her capability to understand the need for distance, we could consider other possible explanations. (If necessary, the supervisor could also prompt: She could need further clarification or more specific instruction. Perhaps she is not listening to you. She may disagree with you or have a different perception of their needs.)

Supervisee has 'tried everything'

Supervisee: I have an unreliable member of staff who is continually late, makes excuses for missing meetings and leaves early without explanation. I've tried talking with her, recording disciplinary warnings, changing the schedule, trying to find out what's going on... I've no idea what to do.

Supervisor presents an alternative perspective: So your understanding is that the individual is unreliable. Perhaps she sees herself as being put upon, excluded or denied responsibility? She could feel unneeded or under-utilised. What are some of the possible causes of lack of motivation? Addressing the professional development and practice needs arising

Whether issues are identified by supervisees or the supervisor, reflection on practice can assist supervisees to find ways forward. Developing methods to avoid or address difficult situations in the future forms part of learning. A supervisor may use suggestions or invite further analysis to assist supervisees in working on issues. Supervisees can be asked to reflect on discrepancies within their accounts or behaviour. A supervisor may provide factual information, positive suggestions or 'handy hints' from experience or an area of expertise. Supervisors may confront supervisees with an alternative frame of reference or ask the supervisee to look at a situation from another point of view. A supervisee might be engaged in a discussion of the moral or professional questions arising from a situation, or be provided with a parallel scenario for analysis and discussion. Assisting supervisees to 'unpack' or analyse issues and situations is often a useful method of developing practice. Provision of a framework for analysing the circumstances or contributory factors in the situation could assist in the development of requisite skills or strategies to develop a more professional approach.

Supervision can be used to plan specific steps to address barriers and progress work towards long-term goals. Practice Example 13.4 provides an illustration of how supervision can be used to identify an issue and naturally lead on to relevant planning. Supervisees can be encouraged to identify the strengths of a situation to build a solution based on reality, what can be achieved within a specific period

with indicators of achievement, and what resources can be used. Establishing clearly communicable aims can assist the supervisee to see how others might be involved in taking the plans forward. A supervisor expresses interest in supervisees' opinions and takes care not to provide all the answers. Supervisees are encouraged to come up with their own solutions to problems and analyses of situations.

One of our greatest difficulties in any dispute is to recognize or, even more difficult, to accept that the certitude we feel about our own rightness and goodness is equaled by the certitude of the opposing individual or group about their rightness and goodness. If tension is to be reduced, it is this pattern that must somehow be dissolved.' (Rogers, 1978: 123).

This affirmative approach allows supervisees to acknowledge mistakes, present their practice honestly and make practicable plans to address their errors.

Using supervision to address development needs

A Deaf youth worker brought up complaints about her workplace during *external supervision*. She felt unsupported; her hearing manager was prejudiced; she had insufficient assistance to produce reports to schedule. She was on the point of taking out grievance procedures due to what she saw as bullying and oppressive behaviour.

The supervisor listened carefully and then encouraged the supervisee to consider the situation from the manager's perspective. As her written reports were sufficiently coherent for the organisation's requirements and she presented herself confidently and articulately, how was the manager to know that she was having difficulty? The supervisee began to recognise that perhaps she had not sufficiently communicated her needs or her career and professional development aspirations to her manager.

The supervisor was able to assist the supervisee to put together a sensible and costed-out development plan, which would enable her to access available resources for English language support and further career development. The shared perspective of the external supervisor in relation to the importance of enabling Deaf people's participation, along with some ideas about related practice, provided an understanding of the barriers as well as some suggestions for ways forward.

(Note: *Deaf* is capitalised in recognition of the linguistic and cultural identity of Deaf communities.)

IDENTIFYING LEARNING

Encouraging supervisees to recognise their learning in relation to specific pieces of work or recognising what they have achieved is part of the ongoing process of supervision. A supervisor may create opportunities for reflection on specific areas of practice or draw out learning from issues arising. A formal or thorough review

at certain key points can assist recognition of the journey taken and help to identify learning from the process. Acknowledgement of what has been achieved could include going back to the original agreement, contract or ground rules and reviewing progress. Carrying out regular evaluation of professional development assists in the identification of learning and progression.

Student supervision has a clear educative and assessment function. Learning outcomes are generally specified and set by the training and/or professional agency. Part of each supervision session could focus on these outcomes and both supervisees and the supervisor can identify areas of development which are relevant to youth work practice. The evaluation process at the end of a time-specified placement could also focus on what a student has learned and how certain competencies or learning outcomes have been addressed. Additional and related learning outside of specified outcomes can highlight current issues based on actual practice and enhance ongoing reflective practice.

REVIEWING ARRANGEMENTS

A supervisor should encourage supervisees to provide feedback about supervisory practice and address the relevant issues: reviewing whether a supervisory arrangement has been useful and whether the sessions should continue, change or end (see Box 13.8 for some suggested topics for evaluation). Regularly scheduled communication about the arrangements can include formative evaluation to ensure that supervision continues to meet supervisees' needs. Such reviews can also highlight whether issues of power are negatively affecting the supervision. Summative evaluation at the end of an arrangement could include more formal evaluation forms or appraisals of progress if necessary.

Box 13.8 Evaluating supervision

A supervisor could:

- ask how the supervisee is feeling about the supervision at the end of each session
- check whether the suggestions, information and advice discussed during supervision have been followed up
- notice whether the work plans have been implemented
- designate a time for review of the sessions and the supervision records, such as the middle and/or end of a work placement or after the completion of a specific piece of work or project
- invite the supervisee to comment on whether the supervision has covered relevant issues of concern
- use open questions to find out whether the sessions are meeting the supervisee's needs

- review the arrangements for suitability to both parties at regular intervals
- provide opportunities for supervisees to indicate their level of satisfaction with the approach to supervision being used
- review the agenda points that supervisees bring to the session to assess whether they have been fully addressed.

A supervisee could reflect on whether:

- the timing and venue for sessions were convenient
- sessions were uninterrupted
- copies of supervision records were provided, accurate or useful
- enough information was provided
- confidentiality was discussed
- issues could be raised and discussed
- sufficient support was felt
- sufficient challenge or stretch was felt
- plans made in supervision were implemented and practicable
- feedback about the sessions was invited and received well.

ALLOWING THE RELATIONSHIP TO END

Either party may wish to end a supervisory relationship. A decision to end a supervisory arrangement may arise due to external changes or readiness for a change expressed during a discussion and review of the relationship. A supervisee may require a supervisor with a different perspective or understanding of issues, or who is accessible at different times or venues. The type of supervision, the level of agreement or understanding between the supervisor and supervisee, and any of the issues arising may affect whether such changes are possible. Negotiating a change within a large organisation might be agreed, and ending an arrangement with an external supervisor is usually straightforward.

A supervisor may end a supervisory relationship because the supervision is not proving to be effective or feasible. As a supervisor is responsible for supervisees' professional approach to practice, continuing supervision may not be possible with a supervisee who refuses to address concerns raised. If a range of approaches have been attempted and a supervisee remains unresponsive, a supervisor may need to end the arrangement. In internal, particularly managerial supervision arrangements, additional procedures may be required, such as disciplinary procedures. Supervisors of students usually need to alert the training agency about such issues.

The ending of a supervisory relationship generally includes an exit strategy, particularly when the ending is expected, agreed and/or otherwise accepted. Highlighting the positive aspects of the supervision, the learning that has been achieved on both sides and options for future supervision is an important aspect of an exit strategy. Supervisees should be clear about ways to move forward and be provided with contacts and methods to promote their continued professional development.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR USING SUPERVISION

- Having a planned approach to supervision
- Understanding the type of supervision required
- Locating self
- Keeping appropriate records
- Structuring the sessions
- Listening
- Providing feedback
- Reviewing the supervisee's practice
- Evaluating youth work practice
- Identifying learning
- Reviewing arrangements
- Allowing the relationship to end



FURTHER READING

Many books about supervision aimed at nurses, counsellors or social workers can provide relevant frameworks, discussions of issues and methods. A few are suggested here: Brown and Bourne (1996); Carroll and Holloway (1999); Carroll and Tholstrop (2001); Kadushin (1992); Pritchard (1995). Hawkins and Shohet's (2006) book presents a useful outline of supervision from different perspectives, including a 'seven-eyed' supervision model that can be easily transferred to a youth work setting. Tash's (1967) exploration of developing supervisory relationships illustrates the value of regular and continuous supervision.