

## Staff Supervision

### What is supervision?

Supervision is a word commonly used but rarely fully understood. Supervision offers a structured process that supports the development of knowledge, competence and confidence of professionals

Typically, descriptions of supervision focus on the functions of which there is general agreement that there are three: Support, education and management of workload. However, this can all be provided within good line management. Supervision should provide much more.

*Supervision is a joint endeavour in which a practitioner with the help of a supervisor, attends to their clients, themselves as part of their client/practitioner relationships and the wider systemic context, and by so doing improves the quality of their work, transforms their client relationships, continuously develops themselves, their practice and the wider profession. (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012).*

The key distinction between good line management and supervision is that within supervision it is recognized that we can never really have an objective picture. Every person working with the same individual will have a slightly different perspective as they are a different person- we need time and space to reflect on this in order to recognize it and practice most effectively.

Supervision is...	Supervision is not...
Affirming	A performance management tool
About listening and being heard	Therapy (although it may be therapeutic)
A distinct professional learning and development tool	Counselling or an opportunity to practice as a counsellor
A safe space to question and to challenge	Part of the reporting process
A structured framework for process and reflection	A teaching session
Supportive	A judgement or assessment of practice
Self-driven/self-owned by participants	Mentoring or coaching
Supportive of personal accountability	A place for blame
An exploration of the relationship between actions and feelings	

Helen and Douglas House (2014). Clinical Supervision Toolkit

## Why do we need supervision?

For many professionals, including psychologists and social workers, attendance at supervision is a condition of practice. This is a clear indication that supervision is perceived to provide something that those who work in an emotionally demanding environment need; whether that be support to enable better practice or to reduce the risk of burnout.

However, there is an argument that it is not just external professionals who are engaging with emotionally demanding work. Teachers are being expected to manage in environments where there are growing number of mental health needs identified in young people and there is increased responsibility being placed on them, “we want to put schools and colleges at the heart of our efforts to intervene early and prevent problems escalating” (Green paper 2017, Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that staff are reporting higher than ever levels of mental health needs themselves. In an article by NASUWT-The Teacher’s Union (2019) it was reported, “Three in ten teachers (30%) say they have turned to medication in the last 12 months to deal with the physical and mental toll their job is taking on them. Nearly two thirds (65%) of teachers also feel their job has adversely affected their mental health and over half (54%) feel it has affected their physical health in the last 12 months.” Furthermore, the education workforce in England review highlighted that, “in 2015 the number of people leaving the teaching profession was higher than the number entering it for the first time and in 2016 this pattern increased with 2,620 more leaving than joining.”

Whilst supervision is not a magic wand it may offer a mechanism of providing much needed support for teachers.

## Evidence base

### Potential benefits of supervision-what the literature shows

There is a wealth of literature which supports the use of supervision within professions such as clinical psychology because of its role in:

Promoting skill acquisition, transfer and application of learning across contexts.

Enhancing client outcomes through supporting adherence to high quality practices.

Reducing worker burnout through fostering professional and personal engagement.

*(Bambling, King, Raue, Schweizer and Lambert, 2006; Harvey and Pearrow, 2010; Watkins, 2011)*

## What about in education?

Research studies on the process and benefits of supervision for educators are just beginning to emerge. Evidence from three small scale studies of supervision in schools for SENCOs and other professionals supporting vulnerable children reported very positive findings from participants and 'tested' different models/approaches to supervision. Some of the benefits across the three studies included:

- a framework for discussing challenging situations in everyday real-world scenarios
- time to consider and discuss the multitudes of possible avenues available for many complex problems faced by educators
- the experience of supervision as powerful and restorative professionally and personally
- opportunities to foster a greater sense of camaraderie between colleagues

### Practicalities:

#### **How will it be structured?**

Sessions can be one off or a series. Having more than one session offers opportunity for reflection over time and to revisit/build on previous

#### **Is it therapy?**

No. It is up to the supervisee what they want to share, however, the focus is not on their personal life.

#### **What does a session look like?**

Each session typically lasts around 45minutes. There will be a joint agreement of agenda for the session followed by time to talk. At the end of the session there will usually be a roundup of the session including agreement of any actions and arrangements for the next session if needed. Supervision is always confidential, and nothing is shared with the supervisee's line manager unless it was felt there were safeguarding concerns, or the supervisee requested for information to be shared.

#### **Are there set models used?**

There are a number of different models/approaches that can be used within supervision such as 'solution-focused approaches. Many supervisors choose to use a blended approach which best meets the needs of their supervisee. They will typically describe the processes involved within specific models.

#### **Who can deliver supervision?**

Good supervision often looks simple but this is not the case. Anyone undertaking supervision should have undertaken training and have been provided with opportunities to embed their skills. It can be beneficial for supervision to be undertaken by outside professionals as this emphasises its distinction from performance management.

## References

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