

Supporting individuals, teams and organisations

Tool: Supervision in a time of crisis - Covid-19

At the time of writing this, much of the world is in a state of crisis and various degrees of lock down due to the Coronavirus – Covid-19. Health services are overloaded and in chaos, many health and social service professionals and practitioners are working long and exhausting hours. Some are at the front line and others are working from home.

In Aotearoa New Zealand we have just completed Week Two of a four week lockdown which is aimed to eradicate Covid-19. Whether that will be successful and when the lockdown will be lifted remains uncertain. To date in Aotearoa New Zealand the health crisis has not hit as it has in other countries but preparations are in place. Life as we knew it, particularly professional life, is not the same as it once was. Many professionals are working from home using electronic means to connect with their clients and to facilitate those clients to access the services they need and to keep them and their families safe. Reports of domestic violence have increased whilst reports of concern for children have reduced. These factors create additional concern and anxiety for those who work at these interfaces.

Recurring themes which practitioners from all different professions are putting onto the ‘lockdown’ supervision agenda include:

- > self-care
- > managing the home/work balance
- > feeling like a failure - letting themselves down at work, at home and personally,
- > being confronted by the tension between the ‘service’ value and ‘self-care’ value

It is interesting to speculate what is going on - are these tensions always present but more easily addressed, dismissed or disguised in ‘normal times’? Is this a reflection of the gendered helping roles and parenting roles coming together abruptly in lockdown?

In a recent article Schwartz & Pines (2020) describe two contagions: the *virus* and the *emotions* it generates. Specifically naming fatigue, fear and panic, Schwartz and Pines note how these undermine our ability to:

- > think clearly and creatively
- > manage our relationships effectively
- > focus attention on the right priorities
- > make smart, informed decisions

It is common knowledge that in times of crisis one of the professional activities which is frequently cancelled is professional supervision. We also know that it is precisely at this time when professionals and practitioners most need a space to pause, to reflect, to attend to themselves emotionally, to marshal their thoughts and to plan.

The following are some thoughts and checklist points for supervisors and supervisees at this time.

<i>Supervisor</i>	<i>Supervisee</i>
1. Prioritise supervision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Consider, and articulate to yourself (and/or others), the role that supervision plays to support and to 'hold' practitioners at this time. > Communicate to supervisees the importance of on-going supervision. > Ensure that you get your own supervision. > What are you modelling about self-care and supervision? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Know that supervision is one form of resource and support which is there for you. > Resist being the 'hero' who doesn't have time for, or need, support and a space to regroup their resources. > Ensure that you get the supervision you need and are entitled to
2. Be Flexible	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Check what the supervisee(s) wants from supervision at this time and how they would like it. > What access and frequency is needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shorter sessions more frequently? - Drop in times? - When are you available/not available? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What do you want/need from supervision in these times? > Ideally how often and how frequently would supervision be helpful? > How would you like to contact your supervisor outside of supervision times? > What do you need to 'flex' in order to ensure you get supervision?
3. Supervision – the Medium	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What on-line vehicle(s) is available for supervision? > Which is the supervisee's choice? > How secure is this medium? > What privacy issues may there be?* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What is your ability to access on-line media? > What are the constraints to your privacy at home?* > What would be a good medium for supervision for you?

* The use of online audio visual platforms such as Skype and Zoom allow for effective visual face to face communication. However individual situations and privacy need to be considered. Many professionals working from home will be sharing with family and may not have available space to ensure confidentiality. For many other reasons individuals, supervisors and supervisees, may also want to protect their privacy and not to display their home environments or situations to work colleagues. Relationships in lock down may be stretched and supervisees may not want to be heard discussing issues which disclose their vulnerability or concerns. One size does not fit all and it is important that the medium for supervision is comfortable and safe for both parties. Alternatives to video links could be connecting with audio only (camera off) or old fashioned phone calls. Mobile phones provide more choices for where the conversation takes place.

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Supervisor	Supervisee
4. Supervision Session Self-care and reflection Problems cannot be solved when emotion is high	
Ensure time in supervision for supervisee self-care and reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Assist supervisee to identify and to name the feelings which they are feeling at this time > Assist the supervisee to ground themselves in the moment (mindfulness, breathing) > Affirm and normalise the feelings, emotions > Help supervisee to develop tools for self-management which they can access on a daily basis 	Ensure that supervision allows for your self-care and reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Allow yourself to become aware of, and to acknowledge, what you are feeling at the moment > Affirm and accept those feelings as valid and real > Ground yourself in the present > Develop a self-care plan which you are willing to commit to
5. Supervision Session One Step at a Time – one day at a time	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Focus on what the supervisee wants to address in the session > Identify what outcome the supervisee wants from supervision > Keep a focus on, and build on, the things which the supervisee can control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Identify how you want to use supervision > What is the issue(s) you want to discuss? > What do you want to take away from supervision? > Allow yourself to realistic about the things you can and cannot change
6. Supervision Session Systems and professional values	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > In this time of uncertainty do not give up professional standards and values > Use supervision to help supervisees think professionally and broadly about systems which exist and those systems which have been put in place in this new situation. > What is the community/collective response? > What creative options are there? > How can we cooperate with and support other professionals? > This is not the time for individual heroes and rescuers whose actions may put someone else at risk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Remind yourself of the professional values which underpin your practice > What systems and processes are there which support practice in the current climate? > How can you work creatively and collaboratively with others? > How can you ensure that you are safe, professional and do not put others at risk?

Davys, A & Beddoe, E (2010) *Best Practice in Professional Supervision*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Schwartz, T & Pines, E, (2020). Coping with fatigue, fear, and panic during a crisis. *Harvard Business Review*.

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/coping-with-fatigue-fear-and-panic-during-a-crisis>

Dr Allyson Davys, University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

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