

research  
in practice



**Developing a culture of  
excellent supervision**  
*Post Qualifying Standards for  
Practice Supervisors*

Supervision is an essential part of developing and ensuring good practice, supporting practitioners, and aligning practice with the organisation's vision. It influences the outcomes for adults and carers.

The *Post Qualifying Standards for Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care* (PQS) set the standard for good supervision. The PQS highlights important elements for building a positive supervision culture, including:

- > values and ethics
- > trusted relationships
- > positive use of power and authority
- > setting expectations
- > professional development
- > quality assurance
- > learning and improvement.

These align with the evidence base about how organisations can build a positive supervision culture. The Research in Practice *Knowledge Briefing: Building a positive supervision culture* states that:

*Focusing solely on the quality of interaction between supervisor and supervisee is unlikely to maximise the effectiveness of supervision. Due attention must be paid to the broader organisational system, which exerts a powerful influence on what happens in the supervision room.*

#### Key messages from the Knowledge Briefing include:

- > Promoting a positive supervision culture demands reflection on where contradictions or mixed messages may be hindering supervision practice - whether through visible elements, beliefs and values, or deeper assumptions.
- > Those responsible for developing the supervision culture within an organisation need to be mindful of how well the organisation provides a safe, contained environment within which supervision can flourish.
- > Where disconnects and tensions are perceived, those with responsibility for 'creating the conditions' need to acknowledge these tensions and move beyond blaming 'the other' to demonstrate curiosity about how the organisation behaves; relationships within the system are central to this work.
- > Promoting a positive supervision culture is most likely to be successful when:
  - there are consistent messages, and congruence between them, about what good supervision looks like
  - expected behaviours for everyone responsible for good supervision are communicated
  - a whole-system approach is employed, paying attention to both what is said and what is done at organisational, team and professional practice levels.
- > Promoting a positive supervision culture may be more successful when supervision is recognised as a golden thread that aligns policy, values and practice.

Areas to consider are listed below, together with resources that can support your organisation to **develop a culture of excellent supervision**. They are resources that have been created with practitioners and managers, and that organisations involved in the Practice Supervisor Development Programme (across adults' and children's services) have identified as valuable and likely to have impact.

There is an **Implementation Pathway** for the PQS that includes an Action Plan. You can use this to capture what you will do, including to develop your supervision culture.

Area of cultural improvement	Resource
Understand the experience and outcomes of supervision in your organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 35:</b> Supervision evaluation framework</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 31:</b> Reflective supervision audit tool</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 32:</b> Supervision self-audit</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 33:</b> Supervision audit</li> </ul>
Set clear expectations about the purpose and practice of supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 42:</b> Supervision policy outline</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 40:</b> Supervision agreement</li> </ul>
Identify barriers and enablers to positive supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 44:</b> Organisational culture</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 30:</b> Audit of supervision principles</li> </ul>
Ensure practice supervisors receive positive supervision.	<i>Knowledge Briefing: Meeting the supervisory needs of practice supervisors</i>
Ensure supervisors and supervisees possess appropriate capabilities.	Model Learning and Development Programme
Empower diverse members of staff to become practice supervisors.	<i>Addressing barriers to the progression of black and minority ethnic social workers to senior leadership roles</i>
Improve trust between supervisors and supervisees through building positive relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 1:</b> Social Graces</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 36:</b> Supervision relationship</li> </ul>
Promote wellbeing through supervision discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Blob Tree</b> (see following page)</li> <li>&gt; <b>Four strategies for reducing stress and building resilience</b></li> </ul>
Embed critical reflection in supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 11:</b> Levels of reflection</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 12:</b> Wonnacott's Discrepancy Matrix</li> </ul>
Ensure appropriate and proportionate discussion of work in supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 46:</b> Workload considerations</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tool 47:</b> Case prioritisation</li> </ul>
Enable professional development in supervision.	> <b>Tool 28:</b> Coaching
Embed opportunities for peer or group supervision.	> <b>Tool 9:</b> Group reflection
Celebrate and build on strengths in supervision.	> <b>Tool 27:</b> Appreciative Inquiry

## Blob Tree

[www.blobtree.com](http://www.blobtree.com)

Supervision provides a safe and trusted space to reflect on the emotional impact of the work (Hawkins & Shoheit, 2000) and an environment for individuals to explore what is happening for them and how to thrive in their role.

This tool supports supervisors to have discussions with supervisees about how they are feeling and to give permission to talk about a range of experiences.

- Q. Looking at the tree, which of the blob people do you identify with at the moment?
- Q. What might be some of the reasons for where you are on the tree?
- Q. How is this changing or staying the same?

You can also have conversations about how the organisation feels.

And you can talk about how things could change.

- Q. Where would you like to be on the tree?
- Q. What might help you to feel more like that?