



Practice Tool

Key principles of effective supervision

Wilkins (2019) highlights that during his research, he encountered many examples of practice supervisors providing helpful and reflective supervision in child and family social work.

Having explored this further, he concluded that when supervision discussions are effective, practice supervisors are working skilfully in seven key areas:

We have adapted the principles to be used in all practice contexts.

Seven principles for effective supervision	Tips for practice supervisors
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Agree the overall aim of supervision. > Be clear about what each specific practice discussion is trying to achieve. > Think about how each decision is made. > Ensure all contributions are valued and accepted.
Thinking aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Remember that the best thinking happens in conversation with others. > Be curious and ask open questions. > Help to unpick assumptions and examine them in a spirit of curiosity. > Share your thoughts.
Emotional reflection in relation to practice with people who draw on care and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Name emotions when you notice them. > Seek to learn more about whether emotions relate to any actions and behaviours encountered in practice.
Identification of need, risk, harm, and strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Remember to also ask about strengths as well as needs, risks, and harms.
A focus on what is important to people who draw on care and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ask about what kind of help is important to people who draw on care and support and what they want to happen. > Talk about how these ideas can inform what happens next, so that practice has a clear purpose.
Exploring multiple perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Remember there is always more than one way of thinking about any practice situation. Ask questions which reflect this. > Avoid reaching for consensus too soon.
Planning for the whys and hows of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Don't just discuss what practitioners need to do. > Remember to focus on the hows and whys of practice too, so that practitioners are clear about what practice skills are needed and why.

Adapted from Wilkins (2023)

We recommend talking to your supervisees if you start to use these principles in supervision, so that they understand what you are doing differently and why. It is also useful to seek feedback from them about how supervision changes as a result.

These findings are mirrored in other work. Bostock and Kinman (forthcoming) reviewed learning from several research studies of supervision. They argue that when supervision is effective practice supervisors are working skilfully in six key areas (which they call domains).

Domains of effective supervision	What this means?
Voice of those whose lives are the focus of service involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The perspectives of people who draw on care and support are considered. > There is strengths-based approach to facilitating change.
Risk talk and authoritative doubt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Practitioners are supported to work with uncertainty and risk as well as being open to possibilities for change. > The central purpose of work with people who draw on care and support is held in mind.
Curiosity and hypothesis generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Practitioners are encouraged to explore different possible explanations and hypotheses. > This includes considering how practitioners' own thoughts, feelings and experiences impacts their practice.
Practice shaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > There is a focus on the 'what, why and how' of practice. > Supervision discussions help practitioners plan purposeful conversations with people who draw on care and support.
Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The emotional impact of practice and practitioners' wellbeing is explored.
Anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The context in which practitioners work, and the impact of racism and discrimination is considered. > There is support and challenge to work in an anti-racist way.

Both research studies provide a helpful framework for practice supervisors to use in supervision discussions. We have merged findings from both studies below:

For supervision to be effective it needs focus on:

- > the views and ideas of people who draw on care and support
- > needs, risk, harm and strengths
- > curiosity and exploring multiple perspectives
- > rights and equity-based practice
- > emotional reflection and wellbeing
- > planning for the how's and whys of practice

And lastly don't forget that you need to work collaboratively with supervisees for them to get the most out of these discussions,

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References

Bostock, L. and Grant, L. (forthcoming). *Supervision Tool Assessing Reflexivity (STAR)* Research in Practice.

Wilkins, D. (2023). *Seven Principles of Effective Supervision for Child and Family Social Work. Practice*, 36 (3), 213–229.