



Practice Tool

A short guide to observing supervision

Introduction

Observations provide a unique opportunity to give tailored and specific feedback that helps practice supervisors develop confidence and skill in facilitating reflective supervision discussions.

This learning tool has been developed to support managers of practice supervisors in this task. It includes sections on:

- > preparing to observe supervision
- > learning from research on observing supervision
- > managing feedback
- > a template to guide you when observing supervision.

Preparing to observe supervision

Preparation is key when observing supervision. It is important to plan it well in advance and give yourself enough time to talk it through with a practice supervisor before it goes ahead.

You should discuss:

- > Any concerns that the practice supervisor may have and how these will be managed.
- > The practicalities of how the observation will be conducted.
- > What areas you will focus on during the observation.
- > How the giving of feedback will be managed.

You will find out more about the last two points as you read the tool.

Working collaboratively

Any observation will always feel artificial and can cause both the practice supervisor and the supervisee to feel anxious and in a 'goldfish bowl'.

To offset this, it is helpful to position the purpose of observation of supervision as a constructive and supportive developmental process (and to ensure that these principles are modelled throughout).

Be curious about any differences in power or privilege between you, the practice supervisor and supervisee and how this might affect engagement in the process.

Remember to make space to explore the practice supervisor's experiences of delivering supervision before you undertake an observation. For example:

- > What is working well when they facilitate supervision with the people they line manage.
- > Anything they struggle with or would like to do differently.
- > Areas for development that the practice supervisor would like feedback on after the observation.
- > How they facilitate effective supervision discussions in diverse teams where they may be working across race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality etc.
- > How their own line management supervision sessions can support them in their role as supervisors.

Tip- If you are the line manager of the practice supervisor you're observing, this discussion is a great opportunity to learn more from them about **their** experience of supervision with **you**.

Thinking about the person whose supervision session will be observed

Don't forget to talk to the practice supervisor about making sure the person whose supervision is to be observed is fully prepared for this.

Prior to the observation, it is important for the practice supervisor to:

- > Provide information about what will happen during the observation so that the supervisee can ask questions and voice any concerns.
- > Make clear that the purpose of observation has nothing to do with the quality of the supervisee's work.
- > Explain that the observer will ask the supervisee if they would like to give feedback at the end of the observation and how this can be helpful.

Tip- Don't forget to remind the practice supervisor that this is also an opportunity for both to review how they work together in supervision and think about whether they want to do anything differently.

Key principles of effective supervision

Learning from research studies suggests that for supervision to be effective it needs to focus on:

1. The views and ideas of people who draw on care and support

- > The perspectives of people who draw on care and support are considered.
- > There is strengths-based approach to facilitating change.

2. Needs, risk, harm and strengths

- > 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.

3. Curiosity and exploring multiple perspectives

- > Practitioners are encouraged to explore different possible explanations and hypotheses.
- > This includes considering how practitioners' own thoughts, feelings and experiences impacts their practice.

4. Rights and equity-based practice

- > 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.

5. Emotional reflection and wellbeing

- > The emotional impact of practice and practitioners' wellbeing is explored.

6. Planning for the hows and whys of practice

- > 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.

And lastly don't forget about the importance of practice supervisors:

7. Working collaboratively

- > so that supervisees can get the most out of supervision discussions.

Tip:

It is important to discuss these principles with the practice supervisor prior to the observation. This provides an opportunity for you to jointly consider why they are important and how they might be demonstrated in supervision.

Tip:

When observing supervision focus on how the key principles can be integrated into discussions within the time available.

Managing how you give feedback

- > Include time for a short debrief after the observation itself to share initial learning and reflections (and get feedback from the supervisee).
- > Write up feedback as soon as you can after the observation. It's much quicker and easier to do this with the experience fresh in your mind.
- > Make time for you and the practice supervisor to meet and discuss the feedback at a later point. Share this beforehand so they have time to think about it ahead of the meeting.
- > When giving feedback, it is important to ensure that you focus on what went well as well as any constructive feedback. Try and give specific examples.
- > After you have discussed the feedback with the practice supervisor, prompt them to think about how this might shape their thinking about supervision.
- > Your focus in the discussion is on helping the practice supervisor identify areas they would like to develop further in supervision, and an appreciation of what they do well.

Resources for practice supervisors

Practice supervisors can access six open-access online chapters exploring different elements of supervision if they would like to develop their skills further as part of their Continuing Professional Development.

1. [What is the purpose of supervision?](#)
2. [Putting reflection at the heart of supervision](#)
3. [Building effective supervision relationships](#)
4. [Emotional resilience and containment](#)
5. [Supporting critical analysis](#)
6. [Using group supervision](#)

Resources for managers of supervisors

[Meeting the supervisory needs of practice supervisors](#) explores ways in which managers of practice supervisors can support them in their role.

A template to guide your feedback when observing supervision

You may find it helpful to use the template we have provided to jot down your thoughts and guide your feedback. You can type directly into the boxes.

Name of practice supervisor

Observer:

Date:

1. The views and ideas of people who draw on care and support	<div>> The perspectives of people who draw on care and support are considered.</div> <div>> There is strengths-based approach to facilitating change.</div>
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

2. Needs, risk, harm and strengths	<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.
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

3. Curiosity and exploring multiple perspectives	<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.
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

4. Rights and equity-based 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.
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

5. Emotional reflection and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The emotional impact of practice and practitioners' wellbeing is explored.
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

6. Planning for the hows and whys of practice	<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.
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

7. Working collaboratively so that supervisees get the most out of supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Agree the overall aim of supervision. > Agree what each specific practice discussion is trying to achieve. > Think about how each decision is made. > Ensure all contributions are valued and accepted.
What did the practice supervisor do well?	
What could be developed further?	

Feedback from supervisee

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.

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