



# PSDP—Resources and Tools: Reviewing your supervisory relationship with a supervisee

## Introduction

‘Supervisees report that the quality of the relationship with their supervisor is central to their experience, and is shaped by the supervisor’s professional and personal qualities. This relationship affects the supervisee’s skills and knowledge development, professional growth and sense of support.’ (CWDC, 2009 p21)

Supervision discussions take place in the context of a relationship. Paying attention to that relationship is vital because its quality plays a central role in helping your supervisees to learn and to develop.

In order for the relationship to be effective, it is important to provide regular opportunities for you and your supervisee to review your work together. Seeking narrative feedback can be a helpful way to talk with them about their experiences of being supervised by you, and to identify how you can work more effectively in this area. It also allows you to build, repair and strengthen the quality of your mutual relationship.

This learning tool has been written to support a conversation with your supervisees about your practice supervision, benchmarked against the eight domains of [the knowledge and skills statements \(KSS\) for child and family practice supervisors](#).

Engaging in a discussion that allows both you and your supervisees to review your supervisory relationship allows you to jointly identify what is working well and what could be improved. More specifically, encouraging feedback from a supervisee helps you to understand:

**if the supervision relationships you’ve built are working**

**what factors contribute to this and what you might do differently**

**how you’ll know if supervision is effective going forward.**

## Preparing to have a discussion with a supervisee

Given the difference in role between yourself and your supervisee, it's important to outline your intentions when seeking feedback, and to give permission to share areas for development as well as identifying what aspects of your relationship is working well. This allows you to 'warm the context' and to ensure that both you and your supervisee can agree ground rules about how you will work together.

You might want to begin by using the same strategy as Mason (2019), a family therapist who became dissatisfied with asking the question 'How can I be helpful to you?', which closed down discussion when working with families. He started to ask instead, 'How could I be least helpful to you', and found that this was much better for eliciting responses.

A number of questions are provided in the next section, an extensive list you can draw on when reviewing your supervisory relationships.

We recommend you choose one or two questions per domain when seeking feedback. You might also want to show the list to your supervisee and choose the questions together.

## Domain one: promote and govern excellent practice

Thinking about your experience of being supervised by me, can you tell me about how I influence your practice? Can you give me any examples that highlight where I have done this well and where I could improve?

How do I motivate you and encourage high standards? How might I do this more effectively?

How do I support you to feel optimistic with the challenges of the work?  
How could I do this better?

Can you identify how I help you use research and evidence to support your practice and decision-making? Do you have any suggestions about how this could be improved?

What is your experience of my approach to working with children and families?  
What works well for you? What would you like me to do differently?

Do I talk to you enough in supervision to draw out what excellent social work practice looks like? How we can find out if what we are doing is achieving the right outcomes?

Can you see links with research and evidence in my decision-making?  
How could this be improved?

## Domain two: developing excellent practitioners

How do I recognise and actively appreciate your learning style and practitioner experience?

Do I give you enough opportunities in our supervision discussions to review how your skills and knowledge are developing?

Do I give you enough feedback about your practice and your work in the organisation?

What is your experience of me introducing and working with practice frameworks and supporting you to work within them? How can I support you to work more effectively using a practice framework?

How do I encourage and model seeking feedback from children and families in developing your practice? How might I do this better?

How do I include feedback from children and families in our supervision conversation to support developing your effectiveness as a practitioner and, also, the service as a whole?

## Domain three: shaping and influencing the practice system

Am I able to model using strengths-based, creative (family and community) solutions to difficulties?

Do I challenge you to think more critically and reflectively about your practice?  
How might I do this more effectively?

How do I support you to work with other professionals and agencies?

Do you think I understand the 'big picture' and what concerns might be influencing the thinking of others in the professional network?

How does my approach support continuous learning and feedback about practice within the system? How might this be improved?

How do I encourage and model sharing practice knowledge across our organisation and with peers?

## Domain four: effective use of power and authority

How do I support you to respectfully involve children and families in decisions we make? Do I do this enough?

Is my knowledge of legislation and case law sufficiently up-to-date to support proportionate and appropriate decision-making?

Do we talk enough about the impact of poverty on the lives of children and families in supervision?

Do we talk enough about the social GRRRAACCEESSS – aspects of personal identity like gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality (Burnham, 2013) – when discussing practice with children and families? Do we think enough about how these factors might affect families' experiences, life choices and response to ourselves as social workers?

Do we talk enough about our own social GRRRAACCEESSS and how these impact on our supervisory relationship?

## Domain five: confident analysis and decision-making

Do we spend enough time exploring the context of our work, the chronology of our involvement, family and professional stories about what is going on, and how the professional network is operating?

Can you identify how I help you make sense of a child and family's experience? Is there anything else I could do to help you here?

Do I encourage you to think about a range of hypotheses and how we might test them in consultation with children and families? How can I support you to do this?

How do I make sure we consider both your observation and analysis and the wishes and feelings of children and families when we're making decisions?

Do we think through the pros, cons and potential long-term impacts on children and families when we make decisions in supervision? How could we do this better?

Do our supervision discussions reflect the principles of evidence-informed practice? In other words, do we reflect on practice experience, professional knowledge and research, and feedback from children and families?



## Domain six: purposeful and effective social work

Do I provide you with opportunities to challenge your thinking about how you can work collaboratively with children and families to make changes that keep children and young people safe?

Do I give you enough support and space to work autonomously with children and families?

Do I give you enough support, guidance and direction when you need it? How might I do this better?

## Domain seven: emotionally intelligent practice supervision

Do I support you to reflect on the emotional impact of the work in a way that helps you have a better understanding of the family and your practice? Is there anything I could do differently?

How can I improve the quality of reflection and analysis we are able to achieve in one-to-one and peer supervision?

Am I able to draw on my expertise and knowledge to guide your practice?  
How might I do this better?

Does my practice protect you from unnecessary bureaucracy, so that direct work is prioritised?

Do our supervision discussions focus enough on practitioner wellbeing and resilience? Do I encourage you to talk openly about the emotional impact of the work? How could I be more helpful to you here?

How can I ensure that resilience is understood as not just an individual capacity but something that the organisation is responsible for? Do I do this enough?

## Domain eight: performance management and improvement

Do I ensure you have opportunities for constructive feedback on your practice from a range of sources? How might I improve in this area?

Do I champion a mindset of high ambition for individuals, the team and the organisation? How could I do this better?

Am I able to encourage you and, in doing so, share stories and symbols of success that create pride in achievement?

Do I encourage a climate of high expectations in which everyone looks for ways for service delivery to be even better? How could I improve this?

Do I challenge you to push yourself to be the best practitioner you can be?

Do I support you to focus on the task without losing the space for reflection?  
How can I do this better?

## Other ways you can use this tool

It is useful at times to have a whole-team discussion about supervision, using the KSS for practice supervisors and leaders. You might want to ask:

How well does the KSS for child and family practice supervisors meet practitioners' priorities for supervision? Is there anything missing that could improve supervision discussions?

Which parts of the KSS should be given greater priority in supervision discussions?

How should feedback around supervision be sought from supervisees, supervisors, and children and families?

You could also use the questions as an audit tool to discuss with peers in group supervision. Or, work in action learning sets to evaluate your work against each domain.



**We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.**


## References

Burnham J (2013) 'Developments in Social GRRRAACCEEESSS: visible-invisible, voiced-unvoiced' in Krause I (ed) *Cultural Reflexivity*. London: Karnac.

Mason B (2019) 'Revisiting Safe Uncertainty: six perspectives for clinical practice and the assessment of risk'. *Journal of Family Therapy* 41 (3) 343-356.

---

Practice Supervisor Development Programme  
The Granary Dartington Hall  
Totnes Devon TQ9 6EE

tel 01803 867692  
email [ask@rip.org.uk](mailto:ask@rip.org.uk)  
 [@researchIP](https://twitter.com/researchIP) #PSDP

[www.practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk](http://www.practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk)

**Authors:** Alison Domakin, Practice and  
Engagement Lead, Practice Supervisor  
Development Programme

Penny Sturt, Independent Trainer and  
Registered Social Worker

Research in Practice is a programme of  
The Dartington Hall Trust which is a company  
limited by guarantee and a registered charity.  
Company No. 1485560 Charity No. 279756  
VAT No. 402196875

Registered Office:  
The Elmhirst Centre, Dartington Hall,  
Totnes TQ9 6EL