



PSDP—Resources and Tools: Seeking evidence of the quality and impact of supervision

Introduction

‘Effective supervision relationships allow practitioners to develop **personally and professionally** through trust, honesty and empathy. When done well, supervision contributes to how staff performance is managed, and includes practice development and teaching and coaching.’
(Stanley, 2018)

This learning tool builds upon ‘Reviewing your supervisory relationship with a supervisee’, available from the ‘Your journey to being a practice supervisor’ section of the website.

If you haven’t already, please read the ‘Reviewing your supervisory relationship with a supervisee’ tool before completing the activities in this one. It highlights the importance of regularly reviewing your supervisory relationship with supervisees in order to understand their views and experiences about the supervision sessions you provide. It also provides a range of questions aligned with each of the eight areas of the [knowledge and skills statements for child and family practice supervisors](#), which you can use to guide ongoing discussions that seek feedback from your supervisees.

This tool focuses on how you can seek evidence of the quality and impact of supervision. It is inspired by:

- > a blog by Yvette Stanley, National Director of Social Care for Ofsted, in which she reflects on the importance of learning more about the quality of supervision and its impact on practice
- > an open access research paper by Wilkins et al (2018) which explores how we can learn more about the effectiveness of supervision in child and family social work.

This tool presents ideas and questions that can help you learn more about the effectiveness of supervision in order to contribute to the development of supervision policy and practice within your organisation. Seeking feedback from the people you supervise is key to this.

Focusing on the quality and impact of supervision is helpful as it challenges us to move beyond thinking about individual supervision sessions with team members to think strategically about the:

- > role of supervision in supporting effective practice
- > need to systematically review the effectiveness of supervision with your supervisees, and within the organisation.

Seeking feedback from your supervisees

In order to learn more about the quality and impact of your own supervision it is important to create opportunities to review your supervision relationship, the effectiveness of supervision discussions, and to support the staff you supervise.

The reflective prompts below are designed to help you do this strategically.

Reflective prompts:

How often will you review your supervisory relationship with supervisees?

How will you make sure that you schedule a regular review process to seek feedback from supervisees and review the supervisory relationship?

How will you address issues of power and difference in these discussions to ensure that supervisees are given permission to share their experiences and perceptions freely when giving feedback?

If you have already accessed the tool 'Reviewing your supervisory relationship with a supervisee', and used this with your supervisees, what have you learnt about how you can support effective practice through supervision discussions?

The importance of evaluating the quality and impact of supervision in child and family social work

Yvette Stanley, National Director for Social Care at Ofsted, has written [a short blog](#) on the importance of supervision in child and family social work practice. If you have not already done so, please click on the above link and read it.

In the blog, Yvette identifies that supervision needs to provide emotional support for the practitioner, and must provide opportunities to challenge and reflect on practice. She argues it's important that:

'Supervision takes place in an environment and relationship that feel safe, both to the supervisor and the supervisee. It is **emotionally supportive**, but challenges practitioners to truly **reflect on their practice** and on the needs of the children and families they are supporting.'

Notably, she highlights that: 'Inspectors will always look for evidence of the **quality and impact** of any supervision.' Practice supervisors should also do the same and, in order for this to have maximum impact, they must be supported in doing so by senior leaders within the organisation setting this as a clear expectation and indicator of quality assurance.

We recommend that you also ask your supervisee additional questions as suggested by Yvette Stanley in her blog, which seek to learn more about the quality and impact of supervision. These are reproduced below.

Additional questions to ask your supervisee when reviewing your work together:

Does the way I am supervised contribute to my job satisfaction and make me want to continue to work for this organisation?

Does it make me feel that my employer cares about me and my practice?

Does it increase my confidence, competence and critical thinking? Does it make me a more effective advocate for children?

Does it help me make better decisions for children? Am I able to change my direction of thinking when that is the right thing to do?

Learning from research about evaluating the effectiveness of supervision in child and family social work

Next, please read the open access paper ['Evaluating the Quality of Social Work Supervision in UK Children's Services: Comparing Self-Report and Independent Observations'](#) by Wilkins et al (2018).

In this paper, Wilkins et al (2018) make an important point that the: 'question of how best to evaluate the quality of supervision in different contexts is a complicated and as-yet-unsolved challenge.' The authors also identify that a weakness in the current knowledge base about the effectiveness of supervision is that it relies almost exclusively on self-report from supervisees. Whilst this is an important area of feedback, Wilkins et al (2018) highlight that we need to move to develop more analytical and research-informed methods of learning about the effectiveness of supervision.

In the research study, the authors analysed data from a number of observations of simulated supervision sessions in order to identify which aspects of discussion contributed to its effectiveness. The authors concluded that it's important to consider three core dimensions when evaluating the quality of supervision:

1. clarity about risk or need

2. child focus

3. support for practice.

Table two in the paper presents more detailed information about the core dimensions. Please read through it and reflect on how you might use them to structure your own supervision discussions and learn more about their effectiveness. For example, you could use the rating scale and information provided in table two as the basis of a questionnaire or evaluation discussion with individual supervisees to review your work together. You might also use the ideas presented in the table as the basis for a whole-team discussion about the effectiveness of / how to further develop supervision.

Table three provides a helpful overview of statements covering all three dimensions of effective supervision. These are reproduced below and can be useful prompts for discussion with your supervisees, or used periodically as reminders to check in with them.

You might also find it helpful to use these statements as the basis of a self-evaluation task to reflect on your own role as supervisor in supervision discussions.

Clarity about risk and need

My supervision helps me think more clearly about risk.

My supervision helps me think about immediate risk and longer-term risk.

My supervision helps me think about how risks relate to the service user.

Child focus

My supervision helps me think about how problems in the family might be affecting the child.

My supervision helps me think about things from the child's perspective.

My supervision helps me focus on what is best for the child.

Support for practice

My supervision helps me understand why I need to do things (not just what I need to do).

My supervision helps me understand how I need to do things (not just what I need to do).

My supervision helps to ensure the quality of my practice.

Using this feedback to inform your understanding of the quality and impact of supervision

The feedback you gain directly from supervisees provides important information that can be used alongside data gathered from other quality assurance processes within the organisation in order to improve supervision practice, and to generate new ideas and learning. As well as seeking feedback from supervisees, therefore, it's also important to spend time reviewing themes and ideas that emerge from their input and use this to create a development plan that sets out how you intend to improve the quality and impact of supervision on practice. Finding time to do this in the busy contexts of practice can be difficult but time spent on planning and development activities at a strategic level pays dividends.

Reflective prompts:

How will you minute individual feedback discussions so that they also allow you to review themes and learning, and compare themes from feedback within the team as a whole?

How will you use learning arising from discussions with staff members to inform your understanding about the quality and impact of supervision?

How will you draw together your learning from this process to consider themes, ideas and actions which you can use to inform your approach to supervision?

What other sources of evidence do you need to triangulate your learning from supervision-review discussions to learn about the impact and quality of supervision on practice?

How will you share your developing ideas and learning with your team members to gain their perspectives about how the quality and impact of supervision can be developed further?

How can you build the principles of team consultation and feedback into the ongoing development of any strategic plans?

Reflective prompts (continued):

How can you share learning and ideas about the quality and impact of supervision with peers and senior managers within the organisation, and receive feedback about the experiences of others?

How might a shared approach to learning and a review of the quality and impact of supervision help to inform the ongoing development and effectiveness of supervision policy and practice within the organisation?

What support, training or development needs do you have in order to start thinking more strategically about the quality and impact of supervision in your team?

Discussing every child at every supervision session

There's a common misconception that every child and family allocated to a social worker should be discussed at each supervision session, a theme that's raised often on the Practice Supervisor Development Programme. Many practice supervisors and social workers argue that this factor above all others makes it difficult to have spacious, reflective and analytical discussions in supervision, given that there's insufficient time to do so.

Yvette states clearly in the blog:

'Do inspectors expect every child's experiences to be explored at every supervision session? No. Supervision should always be proportionate to risk: prioritising worker's greatest worries, but over a number of sessions, making space for all children's experiences to be discussed.'

Given this, it is important that any strategic review process you engage in to explore how to develop supervision further also considers whether there are any elements of your organisation's current supervision policy that may require adjustment in order to improve the quality and impact of supervision.

Other ways you can use this tool

You could discuss the ideas presented in this tool with peers in group supervision.

Or, work jointly with other practice supervisors / senior managers in action learning sets to consider how you can review learning about the quality and impact of supervision to further develop organisational policy and practice in this area.



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

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