



PSDP—Resources and Tools: Your supervision history

Introduction

This learning tool is based on an activity devised by Tony Morrison, who wrote extensively on social care supervision (2005, 2007). It has been widely used in supervision training (CWDC, 2009) and is designed to encourage you to think about your experience of being supervised.

In working through the tool, you will be encouraged to reflect on your own history of being supervised. The tool has been designed to prompt you to be curious about the impact of supervisors who have guided your practice. It will also ask you to evaluate their impact and to identify particular strategies employed by your supervisors which helped you to develop as a social worker.

We recommend an optimal time of 40-50 minutes to work through the tool and reflect on the questions. Thinking time is important here. If you don't have that time available right now, it's still worth reading the questions to reflect on them and work through as much of the tool as you can.

Section one: my supervision history

Before reading further, have a look at the questions below and think about whether the work of a previous supervisor comes to mind:

Can you identify a supervisor who has been helpful to you in the past?

What was it about that supervisor that you found particularly helpful? Did demographic factors such as similarities or differences in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability etc. play a part in the level of trust established?

What did they do that was helpful?

Why was that important to you?

Have you had experience of supervisors who worked ethically and collaboratively with you or did they misuse the authority of their role? If so, how?

Have your views about what makes a 'good' practice supervisor changed since you moved from being a practitioner to a first line manager?

What has influenced that?

The table overleaf asks you to think about as many of your previous supervisors as you can, then reflect systematically about your experience of being supervised by them. Please work through the table filling out as much as possible in response to the questions.

Previous supervisor	What did you like about the kind of supervisory relationship they established with you?	What didn't you like?	What was your response at the time? How did this affect your practice supervisor?	Looking back, how has this relationship influenced you and the way you work?
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Section two: reflecting on your learning

Now read through your responses in the table (if you have not already done so) and spend a few moments thinking about whether any themes strike you.

Then work through some or all of the reflective questions provided below (depending on the time available) in order to think more about those experiences and what you have learned from them that is still relevant to your supervisory role today.

If time is tight it can be helpful to read the questions and mull them over in free moments before returning to them later:

Was there anything that surprised you about this activity?

What have you learnt from your reflections on being supervised?

What have you learnt about power (personal or professional) and using role authority in supervision?

Have any of your experiences of past or present supervision been shaped by the interaction between your and your supervisor's social GRRRAACCEEESSS (aspects of personal and social identity that include gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality – Burnham, 2013)?

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When you were a practitioner, did what you needed from supervision change over time? Why do you think that was?

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How have your experiences of supervision shaped your own ideas about the kind of supervision you want to offer to your team?

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What is it important for you to know about the people you supervise?

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Have you ever asked your supervisees about their supervision histories?
What might you learn that could help you in your work with them?

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Having done this activity, is there anything you might want to do differently as a practice supervisor?

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The benefits of charting our supervision histories

Understanding our supervision histories helps develop awareness about the power and impact of supervision. Supervisors who know that they have benefited from a range of different experiences are more likely to recognise that their style needs to adapt to what their supervisee needs, and to recognise when those needs are changing.

A key element of working effectively as a practice supervisor is seeking feedback from the staff you supervise about their experience of working with you and how to get the best out of them. Asking your supervisees to engage in a supervision history review as part of a supervision discussion with you is a helpful way of starting to seek that feedback, and to explore how each supervisee learns best in supervision. Importantly, this also allows you to learn more about any adverse experiences that might influence how your supervisee uses the supervision space or interacts with you.

Having undertaken your own supervision history, you will recognise that this is both a personal and professional activity that has real impact. This needs to be acknowledged in any preparatory discussion before undertaking it with people you supervise.

Exploring your supervision history with someone else necessitates having trust in each other about what happens as a result of sharing the information. It is essential that an expectation of confidentiality is agreed upon in advance and maintained.

We recommend that you start any new supervision relationship by asking your supervisee to reflect on their own supervision history. This allows you to check out what you think your supervisees may need from you. It is a useful first activity also in developing a working agreement about how you will work together, as well as the expectations of each party.

You can access further tools in this section of the website, such as 'Using supervision agreements' and 'Exploring expectations in the supervisory relationship', which give more information about how to do this.

Finally, it is important to note that the reflections you have engaged in throughout this tool are a useful starting point to guide you in thinking about your future development as a supervisor, and being clear about your current needs in your own line management supervision.

For this reason, you may find it useful to talk with your line manager about what this activity has made you think about in terms of your own development, specifically the kind of supervision relationship which would be helpful to you as a practice supervisor.

The questions below might help you to prepare for that discussion:

How have your supervisory needs altered by becoming a practice supervisor?

What do you think your current supervisor needs to know about you so that you both make the best use of supervision?

Other ways you can use this tool

Ask your supervisees to reflect on the supervision history questions in order to prepare for a discussion with you, so they have time to think about these in advance.

You might also want to facilitate group discussions with your team about their supervision histories, and the different needs of team members with varying learning styles, experience in practice etc.



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 I. Krause (ed.) *Cultural Reflexivity*. London: Karnac.

Children's Workforce Development Council (2009) *NQSW Guide for Supervisors*.

Morrison T (2005) *Staff Supervision in Social Care* (revised edition) Brighton: Pavilion.

Morrison T (2007) 'Emotional Intelligence, emotion and social work: Context, characteristics, complications and contribution'. *British Journal of Social Work* 37 (2) 312-329.

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