



PSDP—Resources and Tools: Using a research- informed approach to evaluate the quality of supervision

Introduction

The purpose of this learning tool is to help you evaluate the quality of your supervision and the difference it makes for supervisees, children and families. It will help you consider the different elements of effective supervision and the extent to which your current approach reflects contemporary theoretical and empirical ideas about 'what works'. As part of using this tool, you will be asked to seek feedback from supervisees in order to help you identify areas for development in relation to your and your organisation's provision of supervision. While many of us regularly seek feedback from colleagues and other people we work with, this tool should help you do so in a more focused way, informed by some of the latest findings from supervision research. You will find a blank questionnaire to seek feedback from your supervisees at the end of the tool, along with guidance about how to analyse the results. The questionnaire is informed by recent research findings about the key elements of effective supervision in child and family social work.

What is 'effective supervision' for child and family social work?

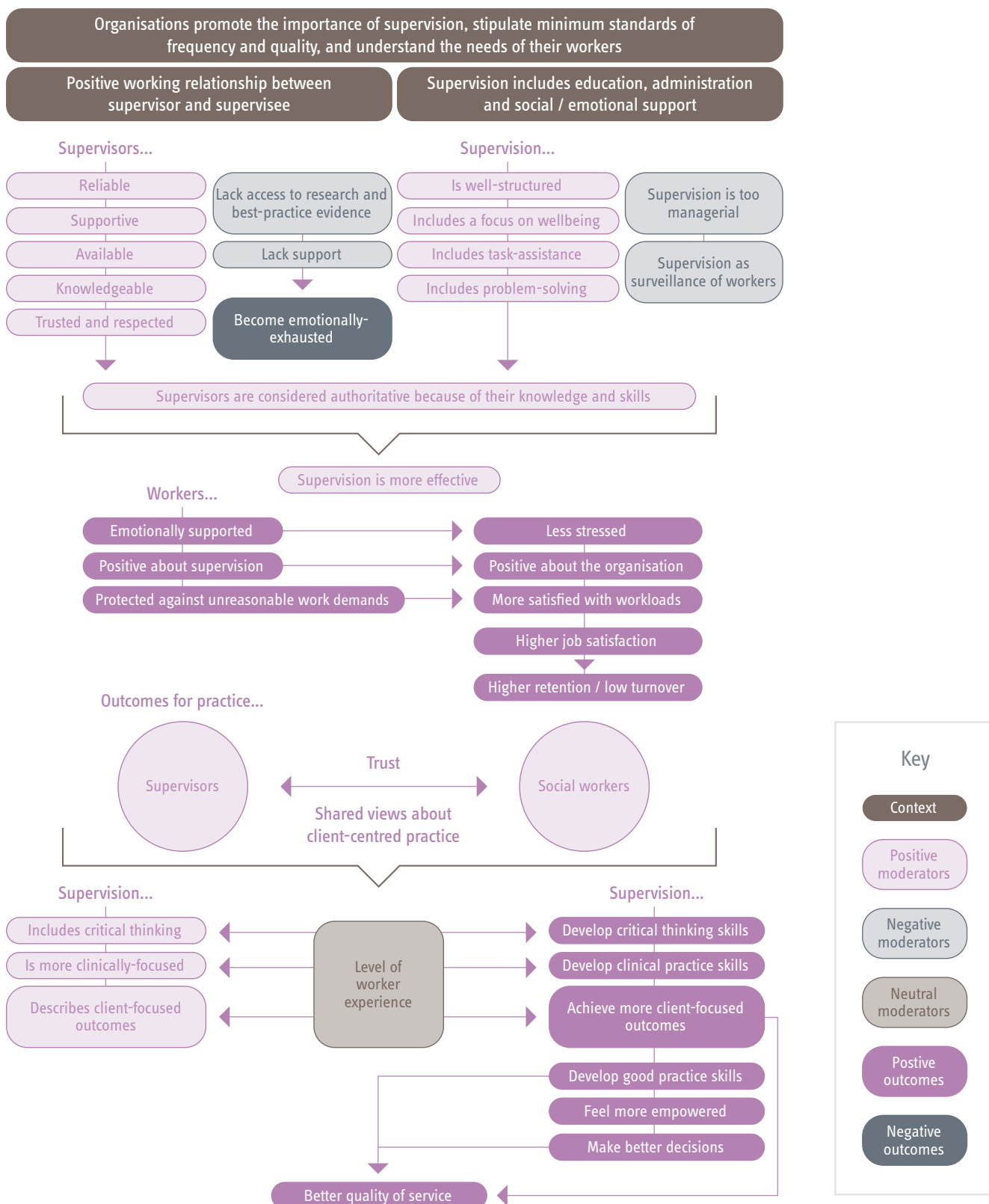
How does effective supervision work, for whom and under what circumstances? Despite a growing interest in supervision research in recent decades, we have only just begun to theoretically and empirically address these questions.

In a recent [paper](#), I analysed the findings from six major reviews of the social work literature in order to develop a 'programme theory' about supervision in child and family social work (if you have time, it would be useful to read the full paper which is available open access).

A programme theory is a description of how an intervention is believed to result in a series of planned outcomes, and the different factors which may help or hinder it from working effectively. Programme theories such as this one can help us to understand when something is working well, and what outcomes we should expect to see when it is. Developing a programme theory for supervision in child and family social work is an important step towards developing a more robust understanding of the key elements of effective supervision.

Figure 1 (on the next page) shows the programme theory about supervision in child and family social work created as a result of this research. It would be useful to spend a few minutes thinking about the different elements identified in the programme theory and your response to these.

Figure 1. Initial working theory of supervision in child and family social work (reproduced with permission)



The programme theory described in figure 1 is also summarised in a narrative format below:

A programme theory for effective supervision in child and family social work

Effective supervision is predicated on a positive working relationship between the supervisor and the worker. The supervisor will be reliable, empathetic, supportive, available and knowledgeable. They will be considered authoritative because of their personal and professional qualities and, as a result, will be trusted and respected. The wider organisation will recognise the importance of supervision and ensure it happens often and to a high standard. Supervisors will be well trained and share an understanding of workers' different needs (including those related to diverse backgrounds and expertise of staff). Supervision will be frequent and well-structured to provide education, administration and social and emotional support. The supervisor will provide guidance on work-related issues, including problem solving, task assistance and by helping to define desirable outcomes for children and families. As a result, workers will feel emotionally supported and positive about their supervision, their supervisor and the wider organisation. Workers will be protected against unmanageable workload demands and will feel less stressed. This will ensure workers have higher rates of job satisfaction and the organisation overall will have good rates of retention and low turnover of staff. Workers will operate more autonomously, they will develop professional competence and practice skills, they will make better decisions, they will focus on client-related and client-defined outcomes and will provide an effective service for children and families.

Key elements of the programme theory

As you can see from figure 1, there are six key elements of the programme theory, each of which can be briefly described as follows:

1. Organisational context

The extent to which supervision is valued and supported by the wider organisation. For example, are supervisors provided with sufficient training and access to resources, are there clear expectations about minimum standards and are there enough meeting places for supervision discussions to be undertaken in private and without interruption?

2. Working relationships

The extent to which there are positive working relationships between supervisors and supervisees, based on mutual trust and respect, with supervisors recognised for their expertise, knowledge and skill.

3. Quality of supervision case discussions

The extent to which supervision case discussions include elements of emotional and social support, administration and education, and are not simply dominated by managerialism.

4. Impact on supervisees

The extent to which supervision makes a positive difference for supervisees, in relation to their wellbeing and their ability to manage workloads and work pressures more generally.

5. Impact on practice

The extent to which supervision makes a difference to the quality of supervisees' practice, including their development and use of skills for practice and critical thinking.

6. Outcomes for families

The extent to which supervision makes a difference for families, improving their experiences of social work intervention and contributing to positive outcomes.

Seeking feedback from your supervisees about the six key elements of effective supervision

In order to learn more about the effectiveness of supervision in relation to the six key elements outlined above, it is important to seek structured feedback from your supervisees. At the end of this tool you will find a blank questionnaire which you can ask supervisees to fill out. Before doing so, it is important that you take time to explain the purpose of the exercise and ensure that your supervisees understand what you are going to do with their feedback. You also need to set aside some time for yourself to analyse the results and think about what to do next.

Preparing your supervisees

You should discuss the tool with your supervisees before giving them the questionnaire. It may help to show them a copy of the programme theory and ask them what they think about it. It is also important to consider issues of power and diversity – as well as being a supervisor, you are likely to also be a line manager with formal authority in relation to your supervisees. Different supervisees will feel more or less comfortable with giving feedback in this way. Be sure to make it clear that you welcome such feedback and that the aim is to create a safe space for a constructive discussion about the effectiveness of supervision and different perspectives, including those related to values, ethics, power and culture. You might decide that the questionnaires should be completed anonymously. If so, make sure that all of your supervisees take the same approach.

Preparing yourself

You will need to set some time aside in your diary to analyse the results of the questionnaires and to consider next steps. You may find that some of the feedback is less positive than you expected. If so, remember that the quality of supervision is the responsibility not simply of individual supervisors, but of whole organisations, including senior managers, supervisors and supervisees. Asking for feedback about oneself can be anxiety-provoking, but is also one of the best ways of identifying both areas of strength and areas for development. Make sure your own supervisor knows you are doing this and ask for their support as and when you need it. You can share the results with them, both to debrief and to get their input on possible next steps.

Filling out the questionnaire

Once you have prepared your supervisees and set aside sufficient time for them and you to consider and discuss the feedback, you can now ask them to complete the questionnaire. Give one copy of the questionnaire to each of your supervisees and set a deadline for their completion. If they are being completed anonymously, you will also need to nominate one supervisee to collect all the questionnaires before returning them to you in one go.

We also suggest that you fill out the questionnaire yourself in order to compare your evaluation of supervision with your supervisees' responses.

Analysing the results

Once you have the completed questionnaires, including your own, you need to analyse the results. For each question, add up the total score then divide it by the number of respondents to find the average. For example, the responses you collect from three respondents in relation to questions 7 and 8 might look like this:

Quality of supervision case discussions						
No.		Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Total Score	Average
7	Supervision discussions include a focus on my personal wellbeing	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Strongly Agree (5)	12	4
8	Supervision discussions are well-structured	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)		8	2.66

Statements 9, 12 and 18 need to be *reverse coded* (so that 5 = 1, 4 = 2, 3 = 3, 2 = 4 and 5 = 1). For example, the responses you collect from three respondents in relation to question 9 might look like this:

Quality of supervision case discussions						
No.		Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Total Score	Average
9	Supervision discussions are mainly a way of my manager checking up on me (reverse coded)	Disagree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	11	3.66

For each set of three questions, you can then add up the average scores to give an overall score for each element. For example, if we combine the responses to questions 7, 8 and 9, you can work out the average overall score for the category of ‘*quality of supervision case discussions*’:

Quality of supervision case discussions						
No.		Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Total Score	Average
7	Supervision discussions include a focus on my personal wellbeing	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Strongly Agree (5)	12	4
8	Supervision discussions are well-structured	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)		8	2.66
9	Supervision discussions are mainly a way of my manager checking up on me (reverse coded)	Disagree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	11	3.66
Overall score for ‘quality of supervision case discussions’ $(4 + 2.66 + 3.66) = 10.32$						

Making sense of your feedback

You will now have an overall score for each of the six elements of the programme theory – (1) organisational context, (2) working relationships, (3) quality of supervision case discussions, (4) impact on supervisees, (5) impact on practice and (6) outcomes for families. The maximum possible score for each element is 15, and the lowest possible score is 1. For elements where you have scored between 11 and 15, you are evidently performing strongly. For elements where you have scored between 6 and 10, you are performing well but with some scope to do even better. For elements where you have scored between 1 and 5, you might want to consider these as priority areas for development. As well as the numerical scores, you should also consider the qualitative comments as well.

Next steps

As a first step, you should think about how best to share the feedback with your supervisees. The aim should be to create a safe space for a joint exploration of the feedback, resulting in a constructive discussion aimed at learning and development. You also need to think about what steps you could take together to address any areas for development. As the quality of supervision is a shared responsibility – between the organisation, individual supervisors and supervisees – you need not feel solely responsible. There may be things you want to change about how you approach supervision but, equally, there might be issues you need to raise with your own line manager, for example in relation to organisational support or the need for further training.

Five-step checklist

- 1. Familiarize yourself with the programme theory (figure 1) and the questionnaire.**
- 2. Give the questionnaire to your respondents and ask them to return the completed form to you by an agreed deadline. Respondents can either put their name on the form or complete the questionnaire anonymously (if the latter, you will need to ensure they can also return the form to you anonymously, by giving it to a colleague to pass on).**
- 3. Complete the questionnaire yourself, before looking at the 360-degree feedback from others.**
- 4. Analyse the results.**
- 5. Decide on next steps (e.g., how you are going to address any areas for improvement).**

Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Organisational context						
1	My organisation as a whole promotes the importance of supervision					
2	Supervision is provided regularly in my organisation					
3	Supervisors in my organisation understand the needs of their workers					

No.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Working relationship						
4	My supervisor is a skilled and knowledgeable practitioner					
5	My supervisor is well-supported by others					
6	I trust and respect my supervisor					

No.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Quality of supervision case discussions						
7	My supervision discussions include a focus on my personal wellbeing					
8	My supervision discussions are well-structured					
9	My supervision discussions are mainly a way for my manager checking up on me					

No.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Impact on supervisees						
10	My supervisor supports me emotionally					
11	I feel positive about my supervision					
12	I feel very stressed at work					

No.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Impact on practice						
13	My supervisor helps me think critically about my practice					
14	I discuss with my supervisor the outcomes that parents and children say they want					
15	My supervisor's main role is ensuring the quality of my practice					

No.	Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Outcomes for families						
16	My supervisor helps me make better decisions					
17	My supervisor helps me practice more autonomously					
18	Having supervision makes no difference for the families I work with					

Finally, please complete each of these statements in your own words

The best thing about my supervision is...

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If I could change one thing about my supervision...

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If I could change one thing in my wider organisation in relation to supervision...

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Families know when a social worker is having effective supervision because...

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Other ways you can use this tool

You could share the six key elements of the programme theory with colleagues who are also practice supervisors and use them as the basis for action learning, a roundtable discussion or as a joint project to further develop your supervision skills.


You might find it useful to check in at the end of supervision sessions to learn more about how the discussion has prompted learning and reflection on each of the six elements.

It might also be helpful to share the programme theory with your own line manager and ask them to observe one of your supervision sessions (subject to permission from your supervisee), then provide some structured feedback based on the relevant key elements.



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.

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