



# PSDP—Resources and Tools: The reflective case discussion model of group supervision

## This method is particularly useful for:

- > creating an emotionally informed thinking space
- > encouraging thinking before taking action
- > promoting respectful uncertainty and healthy scepticism.

It is also useful for discussing issues where the professional system is mirroring what is going on in the family.

Using this form of group supervision is helpful in that it steers social workers away from:

- > being too certain of a specific outcome
- > feeling individually responsible for an outcome
- > feeling undervalued, helpless or hopeless
- > blaming or pathologising.

## Rationale

This method of group supervision draws on the collective resources of a team to provide support and reflection. Research into the impact of reflective case discussion has shown that this model can offer a positive contribution to practice through promoting communication and collaboration, co-working, consultation and case discussion (Ruch, 2007). It sees the team as a further form of support, encouraging multiple perspectives and the valuing of diverse world views.

## Theoretical concepts

Reflective case discussion draws on psychosocial and systems theory, both of which explore how our sense of self is influenced by social interaction. Concepts such as 'mirroring' and 'repetition compulsion' can help us understand behaviour and responses that might feature in supervision. Mirroring describes what happens when the, 'dynamics in one relationship or setting [are] acted out in another' (Ruch, 2007, p172). Repetitive compulsion describes how traumatic experiences can result in avoidant behaviours, which allow a person to engage in 'doing' rather than connecting with their feelings about a traumatic event. In other words, what can't be thought about gets repeated, resulting in avoidance - 'doing' rather than thinking and feeling.

## Principles

A reflective case discussion model of group supervision:

- > encourages reflective conversations
- > invites thinking below the surface and 'outside of the box'
- > resists problem-solving (encourages 'being' rather than 'doing')
- > fosters professional curiosity and multiple perspectives
- > facilitates no-blame cultures and the idea of 'vulnerable competence', which does not expect workers to get it right all the time, given the complexity of practice.

## The process

The session is structured in three stages.

### Stage 1: presentation (5-8 mins max)

The group members and the facilitator sit in a circle of chairs with no tables between them. The presenter takes 5-8 minutes to outline work with a specific child and family, and summarises the current professional preoccupations.

The group is asked not to take notes and to simply listen instead. They are also asked to avoid interrupting or raising questions at this stage. If questions do arise, the facilitator invites the group members to explore them in stage two.

### Stage 2: group discussion (approximately 20 mins)

The presenter moves to sit outside of the group circle and listens to / observes the ensuing discussion but does not participate. The group is encouraged to talk about what struck them from the presentation, and to reflect on what it brought up for them.

The facilitator's role is, firstly, to keep the group from 'wondering' amongst themselves and to help the group avoid the temptation to 'interrogate' the presenter with questions.

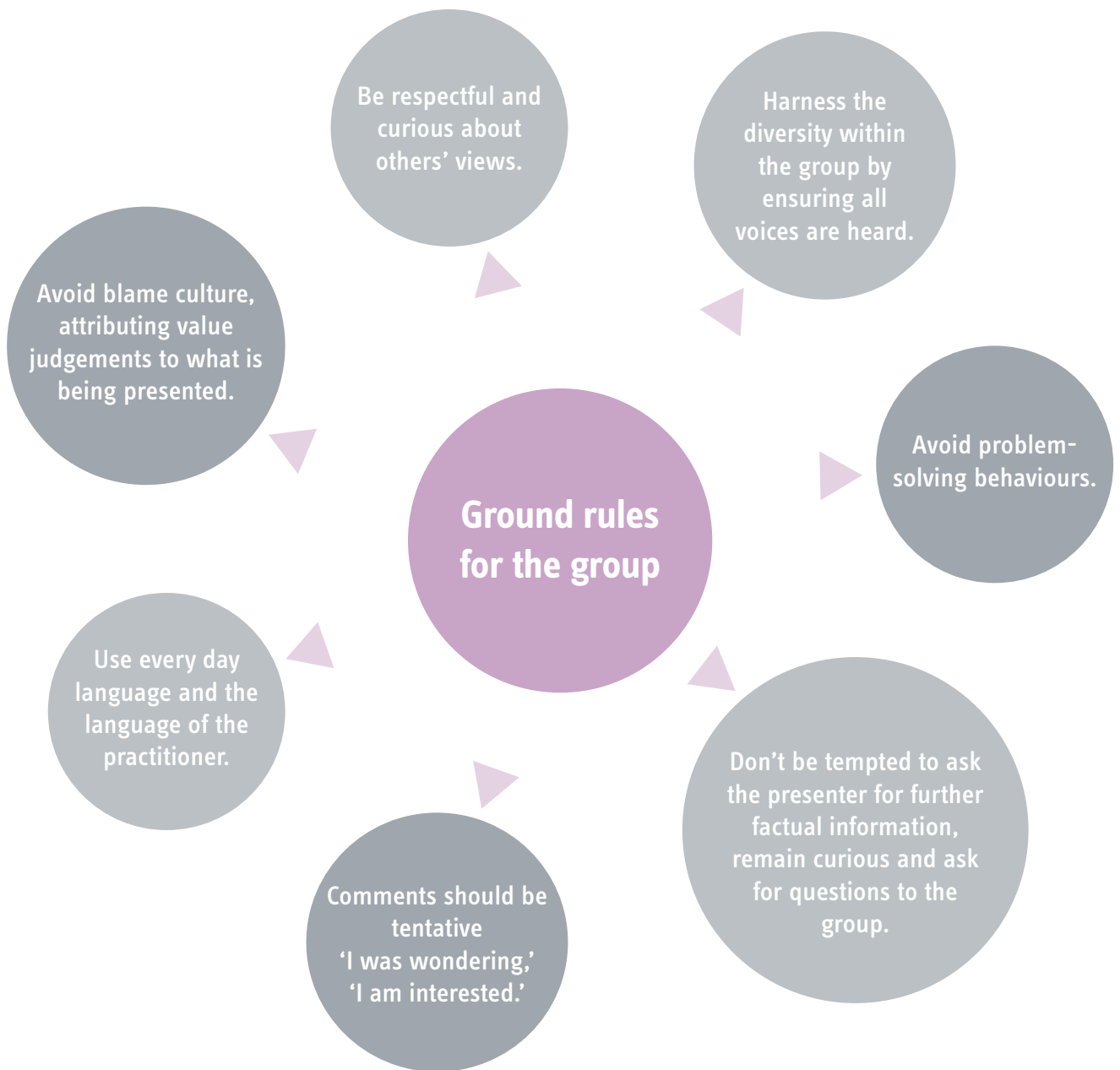
Secondly, they must enable the presenter to adopt an observational listening position, and not feel responsible for the content or direction of the discussion.

### Stage 3: whole-group discussion (approximately 10 mins)

The presenter re-joins the group with the opportunity, should they wish to take it, to say what caught their attention in the group discussion. The focus remains on everyone being curious.

It is important at this stage, in particular for the presenter, not to resort to a 'problem-solving' / action mode that runs the risk of trying to answer the questions raised by the group, or to resolve prematurely the issues being discussed.

This temptation to resort to problem-solving activities is understandable as it mirrors the behaviours most practitioners are familiar with in a practice context.



## Emotional listening

Encouraging participants, in the course of a case discussion, to simply listen and resist taking notes (which can be interpreted as defensiveness) is an important part of the model. Such behaviours facilitate the development of what might be referred to as ‘emotional listening’.

Emotional listening encourages practitioners to explore the depth and breadth of the circumstances of the service user(s) being discussed, as well as its impact on the practitioner.

## References

Ruch G (2007) “Thoughtful” practice: Child care social work and the role of case discussion’ *Child & Family Social Work* 12 (4) 370-379

Ruch G (2007) “Knowing”, Mirroring and Containing: Experiences of Facilitating Child Observation Seminars on a Post-Qualification Child Care Programme 2007’ *Social Work Education: The International Journal* 26 (2) 169-184



**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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This model of reflective group supervision was developed by Professor Gillian Ruch who has written extensively about reflective supervision in social work (2007).

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