



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

## This method is particularly useful for:

- > enabling reflection on 'unprocessed' practice material
- > group thinking and reflection to lead to the emergence of better understanding and decision-making.

## Rationale

The framework creates a space to learn from experience, to think and feel, and to slow down thinking. The process of recording enables the slowing down of thought. This method tries to explore the unspoken and unconscious processes involved in our work.

## Theoretical concepts

By discussing distressing and emotionally disturbing feelings, the worker is offered containment (Bion, 1962), which makes them more likely to then be able to contain families. Emotional containment refers to the process of being emotionally receptive to another's troubled, perturbed, anxious or turbulent feelings or states of mind, and responding in a way that helps that person to feel more settled and to understand their own emotional state.

## Principles

The facilitator's task is to provide a non-judgemental atmosphere of enquiry in the group - characterised by curiosity, scepticism, fellow-feeling, debate and difference - so that the unknown can become less unwelcome, and new thoughts, feelings, questions and perceptions are able to find space. Beware of a premature rush to conclusions, actions or decisions. And watch out for the impact of the anxieties aroused by the material in the account.

It is important that the facilitator highlights to the group that they are encouraged to freely share their emotional responses to the material presented.

**Ground rules should be established before the session starts.**

## The process

### Step 1

Presenters should write up an account of a direct practice encounter in as much detail as possible, without interpreting or theorising it, and ideally in the form of 'direct speech' (rather than reported speech). This should include all their contributions to the interactions, as well as behaviours, gestures, body language, facial expressions, private feelings, thoughts and responses in the course of the encounter. Any sense of what the child, family or colleague seemed to be feeling is also helpful. Presenters can choose whatever practice material they wish, but it's often most helpful select something they are wrestling and want help with, as opposed to something they are already 'safe' with.

This needs to be completed in advance of the group supervision session. You might wish to ensure that you can check in with any practitioners who are doing this after they have written their account, in case it left them with any unsettled feelings they wish to share straight away.

### Step 2

The group and the facilitator sit in a circle. The presenter reads their account of the practice situation for 10-15 minutes. It's helpful but not essential if all other participants have a copy.

### Step 3

The facilitator invites the group to engage with the material and asks the presenter to remain silent for 15-20 minutes, and to listen to the group who are prompted to reflect on any thoughts, feelings, questions, concerns or anxieties they might have.

The group is then asked to consider what sense they might make of the processes presented, including the practitioner's own feelings and responses. This includes being encouraged to reflect on any emotional impact on the presenter and group members, and whether there is evidence of a variety of different responses.

Additionally the group can be invited to consider whether anything seems to be missing from the 'picture' presented (for example demographic details such as age, 'race', ethnicity, culture, religion, immigration status, sexual orientation etc. of those involved, or feelings or communications one might expect to be evident but which are not obviously present)?

### Step 4

The facilitator should join the group thinking process, working collaboratively rather than from a position of authority; the central task at this point is to support 'wondering' and making sense. If group dynamics need help then the facilitator should attend to these (one member may be silent, one too dominant, etc.) Diversity dynamics may also be present, possibly reflecting on those present in the account itself.

## Step 5

At a suitable point, the facilitator should invite the presenter to re-enter the discussion, and to comment on:

> what they have heard

> what new thoughts this gave rise to

> ways in which their perspective on the material may have developed or changed.

The discussion can now move more purposefully towards ‘sense-making’, grounded theorisation, reflections on how knowledge or research might be helpful, and suggestions about ways in which to intervene and engage with the child and family in future.

## Ground rules

The work discussion model depends on participants being encouraged to simply ‘tell it like it is’. It is often a new experience for people to be encouraged to write in the first person, and to include subjective thoughts and sometimes acutely painful and troubling feelings.

There is no commitment to finding an answer, only a commitment to facilitate thinking.

At times the group might feel that it is being invited to participate in a process of ‘unlearning’. But the task of the group is to be supportive of a process that will result in fresh thinking around what may have otherwise been left unexplored and unquestioned.

## References

Bion J (1994) *Cost containment: Europe. The United Kingdom*. NCBI. Available online:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8087594>



**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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