



PSDP—Resources and Tools: Giving feedback to social workers in your team

Introduction

As a practice supervisor, giving clear, constructive feedback to a supervisee about any aspect of their work or practice that requires improvement can be challenging.

As a general rule, feedback should be balanced and focus on areas where the supervisee is working well and also areas for development. Other tools in this section of the website highlight the importance of creating a culture within a team or organisation in which excellent social work practice is recognised and appreciated. However, practice supervisors may also be faced with situations in which they need to provide more formal feedback to supervisees, identifying areas where their work needs to improve.

For example, tackling sensitive issues about a supervisee's attitude at work, interactions with team members, standard of written work, or not completing tasks within timescales. These kinds of conversations require careful planning, sensitive delivery and clear, targeted developmental feedback.

This learning tool has been written with these kinds of conversations in mind. Working through it will help you to review how effective you are in setting standards and guidance about how you want social work with children and families to be carried out in order to ensure they receive an excellent service.

There are four sections in the tool which take you through a structured process of assessing your own performance in relation to providing constructive feedback to supervisees, reviewing your learning, and action planning areas for your own development.

The last section of the tool introduces you to a model for giving feedback, i-Perspective, which was developed by Charlotte Calkin, Director of the Restorative Engagement Forum. This model provides an easy-to-follow structure for delivering feedback clearly.

Section one: reviewing how comfortable you find giving developmental feedback

There are many different ways practice supervisors can give feedback. You could be providing feedback on written work, in supervision, or after a meeting or visit. You may be giving feedback to workers who are new to your team, who used to be your peers in previous roles, or who you do not have a regular supervisory role with (e.g. if you are covering for another practice supervisor).

These discussions may be planned, private, or in a team room or car at an opportune moment. They may highlight areas of excellent practice or achievement, or identify development needs.

Task one

Please spend a few minutes thinking about how you provide feedback to staff you supervise.

Where do you tend to give feedback? Do you do this formally or informally? What are the strengths and limitations of formal and informal feedback?

What do you do well? Is there any aspect of giving feedback that frustrates you? How do your staff react to feedback? If you ask for something to be done differently, does it happen?

In reflecting on your own work in this area can you identify any patterns or themes in relation to giving feedback?

For example, some practice supervisors say their preferred approach is to focus on praising good work rather than identifying areas for improvement. This can lead to putting off direct conversations in which they're required to challenge supervisees. Or leaving those conversations to the end of supervision and then being rushed for time.

Task two

Please read the information in the table below, which provides a range of suggestions about different issues you may need to raise with your supervisees. As you do so, decide how confident you feel about providing feedback for each of the statements in the box using the continuum below. Some boxes have been left blank so you can identify additional issues that are relevant to you.

Supporting people to work in areas that are new or outside their comfort zone



Inviting and integrating feedback from children / families / professionals for team or individual development*



Providing opportunities for staff to give and receive constructive feedback on performance*



Challenging complacency or poor practice and making plans for improvement*

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I feel uncomfortable giving this sort of feedback and haven't developed a plan for how to have this conversation. I haven't yet found resources within my organisation to help.

I feel skilled in this area and can manage this aspect of my role with confidence. I've had good results and support others to develop this capability.

Making time to give prompt feedback

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Explaining practice standards*

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Identifying learning and training needs*

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Feeding back on written work, assessments or court reports



Giving compliments and highlighting worker's strengths or encouraging them to develop specialisms



Discussing direct practice which you have observed e.g. meetings, home visits, telephone calls



Talking about recording timescales and performance report data*



Identifying and developing people with emerging leadership talent*

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Setting clear (SMART) targets in appraisal or supervision

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Reviewing development on targets previously set

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Celebrating good practice with individuals and the team*

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Discussing social work values*



Being visibly influential on practice standards*



Asking for feedback about the efficacy of your supervisory role



Identifying organisational resources to support development



Using national and local frameworks for practice standards to be specific about developmental goal setting*



Building social worker's confidence*



Supporting workers to maintain high practice standards throughout stages of their career or personal life



Responding to complaints and mistakes and translating these into opportunities for learning for yourself, your staff and your organisation.*



Establishing feedback and developmental discussion as a routine element within supervision*



Ensuring that feedback about research knowledge is integrated into a worker's practice and written work, as well as how this can be improved.

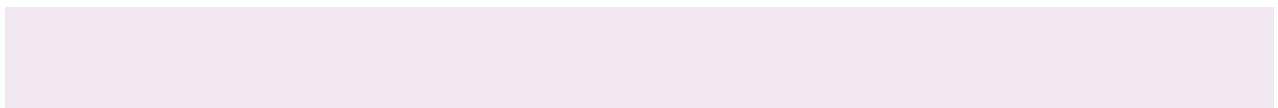




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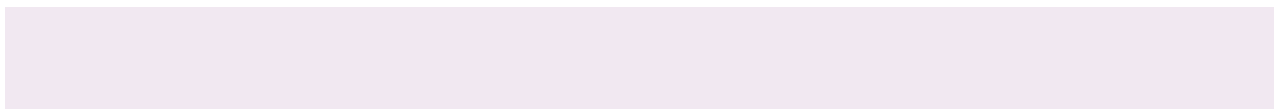
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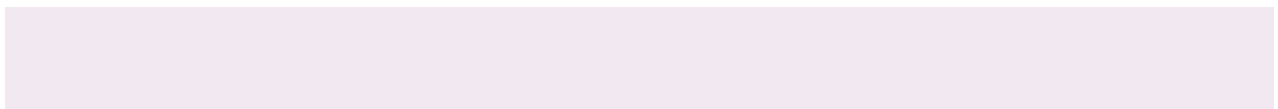
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*Adapted from the Post-qualifying standard: knowledge and skills statement for child and family practice supervisors (2018)

Section two: reflection and analysis

Having completed the activities in section one, please spend a few minutes working through the following questions:

<p>What do you notice about your responses to these different areas?</p>	<p>Were there any that surprised you?</p>	<p>Are there areas that you are going to prioritise for development? What resources do you have available that could help you do this? What support would you need?</p>
<p>Are there any barriers to you moving forward in any areas? Where do they come from? Does a sense of security or authority in the organisation affect your confidence?</p>	<p>What would your supervisory practice look like if these barriers were not there?</p>	<p>Do any of the social GRRAAACCEESSS (a model that describe aspects of personal and social identity such as gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality – Burnham, 2013) influence how you approach or deliver feedback? How might your own line manager support you and give you feedback on your development in this area?</p>

Section three: action planning

The questions below will help you develop a personal action plan that can improve how you deliver developmental feedback:

What stands out to you as your priority area for development as a result of completing these exercises?	What are you going to do to become more confident or effective?	What strengths can you teach and share with other people?
What would you like more feedback about?	Who would you like support from to get stronger in these areas?	When will you know that you have achieved your goals?
When will you review this action plan, and who with?		

Having reflected on these questions, you might want to develop an action plan that includes the following sections.

<p>Stop</p> <p>What things would you like to stop doing in relation to giving developmental feedback?</p>	<p>Start</p> <p>What would you like to do differently when you give development feedback?</p>	<p>Continue</p> <p>What currently works well that you'd like to continue when giving development feedback?</p>
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Section four: using the i-perspective restorative questions for delivering feedback

It can be hard finding a way to give someone feedback, especially if you are not sure how they'll respond. It's likely that both parties will have some heightened anxiety in this conversation, even where the feedback is positive. This can lead to situations where you reflect back and realise that you did not cover all the areas of feedback you wanted to raise or, alternatively, may have brushed more lightly over the discussion than you would have liked.

The tendency to 'airbrush' concerns or minimise issues when giving feedback is common. It can, therefore, be helpful to follow a simple approach that helps to focus on delivering the key messages that are important for your supervisee to hear.

The i-perspective approach was developed by Charlotte Calkin (Director Restorative Engagement Forum [@CharleyCrowther](#)). When using the i-perspective approach, you are asked to work through three questions when providing feedback. The questions are adapted from those used in restorative practice and provide a structure that allows you to share feedback in an organised way:

What happened/is happening?	What has the impact been?	What would you like to happen next?
This gives you an opportunity to provide information about what the key issue is from your perspective.	This allows you to share what the impact of the issue you are addressing and identify why this needs to happen.	You can share exactly what you feel needs to happen to address the issue and improve the situation.

You may find it easier to remember this as:

When I saw...
I felt...
Because I thought...
I'd like... to happen next

Giving feedback using the principles of restorative practice encourages conversations which provide high challenge and support while also reducing or resolving conflict.

Here are some examples of ways you might use the i-perspective restorative questions:

What happened	Impact	Outcome
<p>What were you thinking at the time?</p> <p>How did this make you feel?</p> <p>What have you thought or felt since?</p>	<p>I felt... (make sure you identify a feeling!)</p> <p>and I thought... (avoid using 'you')</p>	<p>So I would like... to happen next.</p> <p>Ask not demand</p> <p>(I would like is different to I insist)</p> <p>Keep it simple and clear.</p>
<p>When I arrived at work this morning...</p>	<p>I thought that we had agreed to meet at 9.15. I felt disappointed not to see you and that there wasn't going to be time to meet before you went with Ursula for her visit.</p>	<p>So I would like you to be at work by 9am each day for the rest of this week and for us to meet on Friday at 10am to talk about what support you need.</p>
<p>When I heard you on the phone to Mrs Peterson agreeing to make another visit...</p>	<p>I felt worried that there wouldn't be time to write and review the court report today as planned.</p>	<p>I'd like you to let me know what your plan is for completing the report. I'd like us to talk about Mrs Peterson's telephone call to see if there is another way we can respond to her.</p>
<p>When I saw how Ishmael turned to you in that meeting...</p>	<p>I felt proud. I thought that he really sees you as a supporter and that things have changed so much from when we felt really 'stuck'.</p>	<p>I'd like to spend some time in supervision reflecting how you have got over the barriers and developed that relationship with him so that we can learn from it.</p>

Concluding thoughts

One way of developing your confidence and skills around feedback is to get into the habit of regularly giving it in supervision. It then becomes something both you and your supervisee are more familiar and comfortable with. It can also be useful to frequently ask your supervisee to reflect on areas of their own performance and practice where they consider they're working well or would like support or to be challenged to develop further.

You might find it useful to look at the learning tool 'Reviewing your supervisor relationship with a supervisee' in the 'Your journey to being a practice supervisor' section of the website. This tool highlights the importance of regularly seeking feedback about how you and your supervisee work with each other. Asking questions about how the feedback you offer lands with your supervisee would be helpful as part of this discussion.

Other tools in the same section that may support you to give developmental feedback are, 'Exploring expectations in the supervisory relationship' and 'Using supervision agreements'.

Both these tools highlight the importance of transparently exploring with supervisees what to expect from you in your role as practice supervisor and from your one-to-one discussions. It is useful to explicitly articulate to supervisees that you'll regularly offer feedback and why this is important from the outset.

Other ways you can use this tool

You could work through the tool with peers and engage in a discussion about the questions in part four.

If you do this, consider these extra questions:

Are there areas that you had shared or different feelings about?

Are there any areas that several of you are stronger / weaker in?

What does this mean for the groups of people you supervise?

Does this identify a training need within your organisation?



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

Department for Education (2018) *Post-qualifying standard: knowledge and skills statement for child and family practice supervisors*. London: Department for Education. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708705/Post-qualifying_standard-KSS_for_child_and_family_practice_supervisors.pdf

Burnham J (2013) 'Developments in Social GRRRAACCEEESSS: visible-invisible, voiced-unvoiced' in Krause I (ed) *Cultural Reflexivity*. London: Karnac.

Practice Supervisor Development Programme
The Granary Dartington Hall
Totnes Devon TQ9 6EE

tel 01803 867692

email ask@rip.org.uk

 [@researchIP](https://twitter.com/researchIP) #PSDP

www.practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk

Authors: Anna Wright, Independent
Social Worker and Training Consultant

Alison Domakin, Practice and
Engagement Lead, Practice Supervisor
Development Programme

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Company No. 1485560 Charity No. 279756
VAT No. 402196875

Registered Office:
The Elmhist Centre, Dartington Hall,
Totnes TQ9 6EL