



# One-minute guide for middle leaders: Talking about practice in supervision

## Introduction

The briefing for senior managers '[Talking about practice in supervision](#)' reflects and builds on the LGA standards for employers of social workers in committing to all staff throughout the organisation having the opportunity to critically reflect on their practice through high-quality, reflective supervision.

It highlights the importance of embedding the principles contained in a supervision policy and model, quality assuring its effectiveness and keeping the needs of children and families in mind at all levels of the service, constantly seeking to sustain good practice and improve it through drawing on current research evidence.

In my experience as a Principal Social Worker, and in other roles, middle leaders regularly reported to me that their own supervision experience did not offer a space for reflection but concentrated on performance management and compliance with timescales. This is borne out by research. Wilkins (2018) findings from a series of studies found that 65% of social workers and managers felt the most helpful element of supervision was in performance management, timeliness and task clarity while only 4% found this helped with emotional support.

Performance management is a critical element of supervision, ensuring statutory duties are met and children protected from harm, but outcomes are improved for families by supervision that reflects the relationship-based approach we know works best in enabling families to make and sustain change.

## Are you getting, and do you provide, supervision that:

Mirrors principles of relationship-based practice with families.

Builds professional self-knowledge and considers relational dynamics (i.e. what impact am I having on my supervisees?).

Enables reflection and critical thinking.

Offers emotional support, recognising feelings as valid and considering ways to manage them.

## Or are you getting / giving this message?



Denial, avoidance and defensiveness can feel like a good way of avoiding a difficult conversation.

**But**, as well as having an impact on the resilience of staff, it is worth remembering that:

If practice supervisors do not have opportunities to critically reflect on their supervision practice in their own line management supervision, there is a risk that a process of distancing and depersonalisation can occur between supervisors and practitioners, which in turn impacts on the way practitioners interact with families.

## Quality assuring supervision and its effectiveness

There are almost certainly lots of mechanisms already available to you for auditing supervision within your agencies. Make yourself familiar with your supervision policy, offer feedback to senior leaders where you believe it needs updating, and explain your reasons and offer an evidence base.

As well as making yourself familiar with, using, and encouraging others to use tools like audits and observations of supervision, think about asking practitioners supervised by your practice supervisors some of these questions, and then discussing their responses in supervision:

- > Is your supervision a planned and protected time?
- > Is it a safe and containing space?
- > Do you leave feeling better than when you arrived?
- > Do you always leave supervision with more work to do? Is it purposeful?
- > Does your supervisor know about your background, vulnerabilities and potential areas that may activate an increased stress response?
- > Does your supervisor feel comfortable talking about these areas and confident enough to do something about them?
- > Does your supervisor provide positive feedback with examples in each supervision?
- > Do you and your supervisor discuss professional development on an ongoing basis?
- > Is there a focus on improvements for children and young people in each session?

## References

Wonnacott, J. (2018) *Supervision Practice Essentials*. Pavilion Publishing and Media.

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