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Senior
Managers'
Briefing



PSDP - Resources and Tools: Your journey to being a supervisor


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This short briefing is written specifically for senior managers and strategic leads and provides summary information about:

- > how to support practice supervisors to make the transition from social worker to first line manager, and develop opportunities for peer support and staff progression
- > how the wider organisation can support practice supervisors to be effective in their role.

1. The importance of having a clear developmental pathway for staff progression

The transition from social worker to practice supervisor can be as challenging as it is rewarding. These transitions are best enabled through a strong professional development pathway in each local authority (LA) / Trust.

Regardless of the route to qualification, the recognised post-qualifying pathway for social workers starts with the assessed year in employment (ASYE) programme. With a reported national turn-over rate which increased by 16% in 2019, retention is a key factor for most if not all LAs / trusts (Community Care Online, 2019).

Retaining and promoting social workers through a robust succession planning route provides for a strong and stable workforce where, in return for investment in the organisation, they are provided with varied career opportunities.

As experienced social workers move through the organisation, the development pathway should provide opportunities for them to develop specialisms and expertise in themed areas of practice, practice education and front line management. This approach provides opportunities for social workers to continue to build on their practice expertise, whilst taking on more responsibility and contributing to organisational leadership.

More specifically, the professional development pathway should make explicit how social work practitioners can be supported to build on their knowledge and consolidate their skills in practice through:

- > training
- > development
- > research
- > observation
- > consultation
- > supervision
- > emotional, professional and managerial support.

2. Supporting the transition from social worker to practice supervisor

The transition to management is significant. Practitioners move from spending the majority of their time working with vulnerable families (as should be the case for social workers in direct practice), to spending the majority of their time supervising social workers.

Many of the exploratory skills needed in reflective supervision are consistent with good social work skills, which now need to be reframed in the context of the supervisory relationship. Practice supervisors also have an additional focus on strengthening supervisee skills and enabling high-quality practice, which may include addressing poor performance.

These areas are often the most challenging for new practice supervisors and require good practical support regarding performance management procedures, as well as support in constructively challenging another professional through high-quality reflective supervision.

The first 12 months in post are critical in supporting new practice supervisors to move from a practice focus on their own work with children and families to a broader service-wide perspective.

The experience of managing budgets and monitoring data, which are key elements of this role, may be new to them. Understanding the significance of this transition and providing the necessary support is essential to rewarding and retaining talent.

Senior managers are responsible for creating a culture in which all staff are supported during this transition with particular focus on:

- > Using appraisal and performance management to identify potential practice supervisors of the future, looking at their particular strengths and where they may be best placed in the organisation.
- > Producing a plan to address any gaps, including providing training, mentoring and shadowing. Where possible, providing 'acting up' opportunities to cover short breaks in employment. Some LAs have [succession planning programmes](#), which focus on developing diversity in the workforce.
- > Monitoring this process through regular recruitment and retention oversight meetings, which should include a focus on monitoring equal opportunities and creating a culture in which all staff are supported.
- > Ensuring there is a professional development pathway that specifies support and training when moving from social worker to practice supervisor.

3. Ongoing training and development needs for practice supervisors

It should not be assumed that internal promotion, where a social worker becomes a practice supervisor within their existing team, is an easier transition. Nor should it be assumed that an excellent practitioner will automatically have the necessary skills to be an excellent supervisor.


Once in position the practice supervisor will benefit from being able to access:

- > Bespoke training which introduces the supervision model used in that LA, reflective supervision skills, and roles and responsibilities as laid out in the LA's supervision policy.
- > High-quality supervision which allows the expression and containment of anxiety and addresses skill development. There should also be a focus on supporting practice supervisors to consider issues of diversity and power in relation to staff they supervise and children and families
- > A thorough induction plan introducing / establishing their new professional identity with their team, colleagues, managers and partners, as well as key people like finance officers, data analysts, and the IT department.
- > High-quality training and support regarding performance management issues.
- > Built-in support mechanisms such as peer supervision and action learning sets. New supervisors may find it helpful to share problems and dilemmas with peers, building a network of support that can contribute to consistent practice and shared ownership.
- > Coaching / mentoring support which helps new practice supervisors to build on their skills and set ongoing goals for development in role.
- > This will include a focus on evaluating learning needs and capability using the [Post-qualifying standard: knowledge and skills statement for child and family practice supervisors](#). Any coaching or mentoring offer should specifically support new practice supervisors to develop strategies in making prompt and evidence-informed decisions about ongoing work with individual children and families at times of high operational demands, while continuing to monitor the overall standard of service delivery provided by the team.
- > The coaching offer should also support marginalised groups within the workforce stepping up into a practice supervisor role.
- > Performance information training and support that helps practice supervisors understand what data is collected and why. There should be a focus on supporting practice supervisors to develop competence in interpreting data, in order to be able to analyse performance and service delivery, thereby anticipating future problems and building a response into their team plans.
- > Partnership working opportunities that build on the extensive inter-agency working experience which practice supervisors will have gained as practitioners. New practice supervisors need opportunities and support to step up to more strategic partnership working. This can be facilitated by building a portfolio with additional partnership responsibilities e.g. membership of multi-agency safeguarding partnership sub-groups, membership of housing partnerships, or inter-agency partnership responses to criminal exploitation etc.

References

Community Care Online (2019) *Number of children's social workers leaving their jobs up 16%, statistics show*. Blog article. Available online: www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/03/01/number-social-workers-leaving-jobs-16-statistics-show

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