

SUPERVISION PRACTICE GUIDANCE

RELATED CHAPTER

Supervision Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Supervision within a Specialist Children's Services setting is an accountable process, which supports, assures and develops the knowledge, skills and values of an individual, group or team. The purpose is to improve the quality of the work being undertaken to achieve agreed objectives and outcomes. It is also central to the effective management of risk within the service. Being a supervisor is a significant responsibility and one, which needs to be taken seriously. This guidance document will be implemented alongside training, support and monitoring of actual practice through audit.

1.2 This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Kent Supervision Policy and Practice Standards for Supervision

This guidance primarily addresses issues relating to the supervision of casework including the management of risk and the provision of services. It is not intended to incorporate detailed advice about staff development, training, support or any of the other components of the supervision process. It is intended to give guidance to Team Managers and supervisors (and can also be used by Practice Educators) in the supervision of all staff employed, agency or consultants who are dealing on a daily basis with children and families for whom the Local Authority is providing social care services. It can be used to inform the supervisory practice in all teams and units, but should be applied routinely by the fieldwork teams within children's services.

1.3 While the guidance does not specifically address the issue of professional development, supervisors must be clear that the assessment of a supervisee's level of functioning, competence and learning needs must be integral to the supervision process. It is the manager's responsibility to consider whether practitioners have the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfil their casework responsibilities and that, where necessary, they are supported to develop these in accordance with the needs of the service. Without explicit evaluation of the practitioner's competency and capabilities, it will be impossible to avoid the risk of allocating staff tasks beyond their ability. It will also be impossible to assess whether or not an adequate and safe service is being delivered.

1.4 Professional supervision can make a major contribution to the way Specialist Children's Services ensure the achievement of high quality provision and better outcomes for children and young people who are the recipients of our services. High quality supervision and managed caseloads are vital in the support and motivation of workers undertaking demanding jobs and are a key component of Kent's retention strategy. Supervision will contribute to meeting performance standards and the expectations of those who use our services. *'People who use children's social care services say that the services are only as good as the person delivering them. They value professionals who*

have the combination of the right human qualities as well as the necessary knowledge and skills'. (CWDC 2007)

2. Context

Managers very often rely on second-hand accounts of the situations in which the practitioners are involved. Managers will to some extent, be relying on the judgment and opinions of the practitioners to aid their decision making and they must be confident that they know enough about the competency of staff in order to know what weight to give those opinions. Regular observation of the practitioner's practice should be undertaken. As a minimum, the supervisor should undertake one observation of practice during the first six months of the practitioner's employment and at least one formal direct observation each year thereafter, which will form part of the annual performance review. This observation will also provide evidence and support for the competency assessment.

2.1 Supervision must aim to:

- effectively manage the risk in individual cases
- develop good practice
- produce sound and informed professional judgment
- develop the practitioners ability to exercise safe discretion in decision making – defensible decision making
- ensure continuous professional development
- enable and support workers to build effective professional relationships

For supervision to be effective, it needs to combine performance management with an approach which is both searching and reflective. Supervision should contribute to the development of a learning culture by promoting an approach that develops the confidence and competence of all managers and staff.

2.2 This guidance is intended to assist in making supervision a dynamic process where supervisor and supervisee engage in mutual learning. Supervision should provide valuable insight into the situations of children and their families or carers and the role of the practitioner in those situations.

2.3 The overall aim of this guidance is to ensure that supervisors are aware of their duty to make certain that supervision is as comprehensive and as objective as possible

2.4 Supervision is an important right and benefit for all working in children's social care, it is therefore important that staff make the most of this opportunity to develop their skills.

2.5 Specialist Children's Services are committed to delivering positive outcomes to the children, young people and the families we work with.

All managers and supervisors will have the safeguarding of children as the central objective of the supervision process.

3. Planned Supervision

- 3.1 Supervision should be planned protected time and should be in a private location, it should not be rushed and a proper amount of time should be allocated for the purpose which, if possible, should allow time before and afterwards for the supervisor to prepare and reflect. Supervision is probably the most important function of Team Management and if there is not sufficient time to do it properly then the District Manager needs to be made aware.
- 3.2 There is an expectation that all practitioners (and Managers) will receive formal supervision appropriate to their experience and needs as outlined in section 6.2 of the Supervision Policy. It is for the Manager to judge if this frequency will meet the practitioner's needs. There may be occasions where a supervision session may be missed because of illness and/or holidays. If it cannot be rescheduled within the same month then the reason for this should be recorded on the following supervision note. No practitioner or Manager should go for longer than 8 weeks without a formal supervision session. If this is likely to be the case, then either the Manager or Practitioner must bring the situation to the attention of the District Manager.
- 3.4 It is important to have an agenda for supervision sessions, which provides an opportunity for both parties to raise matters of importance. Given that time will always be a factor, it is important to prioritise the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. In addition to the focus on individual allocated cases the agenda will usually focus on:
 - Line management
 - Professional supervision
 - Continuing professional development

4 The Management of Allocated Cases

- 4.1 Managers must ensure that all cases held by practitioners are addressed in supervision. It is understood that all cases may not be able to be addressed in detail on each occasion. The cases of children who are subject to a [Child Protection Plan] or in Court proceedings must always be discussed in sufficient detail to ensure that risks are properly understood and managed. There will need to be agreement about how cases not addressed in detail will be picked up at the next or future sessions.
- 4.2 Managers must ensure that they are apprised of the nature and extent of the practitioner's caseload at every supervision, the use of the ICS caseload report is essential.

5. Newly Qualified Social Workers and Overseas recruits

5.1 The needs of NQSW's will be different depending on their previous experience, background, training, confidence and ability. Social workers from overseas may also have particular needs in terms of language, culture and different professional practice, which will require adjustments to the new professional role. Guidance regarding the frequency and considerations regarding supervision of this specific staff group is detailed within section 6 of the Supervision Policy.

6. Supervision recording

6.1 Supervision is a private but not a confidential process. This means that the records are the property of the organisation and not the individual. Supervision notes on individual cases should be recorded on ICS as a case supervision record. Supervision notes not placed on ICS should be in an employees file locked away in a secure place. When a staff member leaves the organisation the file notes should be sent to Human Resources for amalgamation with other records.

6.2 It is the social worker's responsibility to prepare for supervision and where appropriate to bring a written update to supervision, outlining significant changes for each child/young person to be discussed at that supervision session.

a) First supervision session on the case.

The date of the session should be recorded. Following this, the significant events since the referral was made should be noted including a brief outline of the circumstances of the case recorded.

An analysis of the risk to the child / young person should be completed highlighting to the manager any areas of concern.

b) Subsequent supervision sessions.

Again, the date of the sessions should be recorded.

In subsequent sessions, a synopsis of the progress of the case with evidence of changes of circumstances or parental behaviour should be clearly identified and recorded, including dates of meetings and decisions noted and 'risks' or causes for concerns. In addition to the recording of factual information, the analysis of the harm to the child / young person must be noted in and can be used to summarise reflective discussions, professional analysis and manager's and practitioner's opinions about the case.

The process of recording in this manner should help the practitioner to formulate their thoughts about the case and in particular identify issues that they want to explore or raise with their supervisor. Where children are the

subject of court proceedings managers should use supervision to check on the progress of cases. Where children are looked after, reference should be made to the care plan, any changes noted and reasons recorded. Where children have disabilities, any changes to their conditions should be noted.

When recording key issues and actions, it should be made clear from reference to the previous supervision notes which of the agreed actions have been completed and which remain yet to be undertaken. Reasons for failure to undertake actions should also be recorded.

The date that the child was last seen **must** also be recorded as part of the supervision record.

- 6.3 It is the manager's responsibility to update themselves on the case notes and information on ICS prior to the supervision meeting to assure themselves that statutory processes have been carried out and to identify any issues that need to be picked up during the supervision session. The supervisor will discuss in supervision, the information brought by the allocated worker and identify the key issues and actions required to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child / young person. The supervisor is also responsible for ensuring that supervision recording captures the salient points considered during the session and that the actions are clear with timescales noted.

The record must list the actions that need to be undertaken with timescales so the practitioner is very clear about what is expected and by when. As with other recording in Specialist Children's Services cases, it is important that the notes convey the rationale behind decisions about proposed actions. This is particularly pertinent when recording decisions to intervene in a child's life or indeed not to intervene. (*Munro – Risk Principle 4 – Harm can never be totally prevented. Risk decisions should, therefore, be judged by the quality of the decision making, not by the outcome.*)

The supervisor will be responsible for finalising the case note on each individual file record following the supervision session.

Ideally, an independent auditor should be able to examine supervision notes accrued over time and be able to ascertain from these alone an understanding of the pertinent issues and how the case has been managed.

7. Supervision Checklist for Supervisor

- 7.1 The content of this section of the policy is for guidance only and it will not be feasible or necessary to apply this to every case during each supervision. However, it would be good practice to run through the list from time to time for cases that are ongoing. It may help to prevent drift and ensure that intervention is purposeful and has not lost focus.

7.2 Supervisors may wish to identify two or three key areas to explore with practitioners and perhaps choose different issues for different cases.

7.3 The following suggestions cover some straightforward areas of the work that need to be covered in order to ensure that statutory obligations are being fulfilled. These checks can be undertaken both within and prior to supervision taking place. The supervisor should seek evidence both from the practitioner and from casework recording when considering these issues:-

- Where children are subject to a [Child Protection Plan] make sure that you have seen a copy of the Child Protection Plan, the last set of [Core Group] minutes and any written agreements. In other cases ask to see the care plan. Where children are [Looked After] the supervisor should always have sight of the [Care Plan]. Reference should be made to the court timetable where there are court proceedings in process.
- For all cases check when the last Core Group Meeting took place and ensure these are occurring within acceptable timescales.
- Check that children are being seen at least once every six weeks or as is required by their individual circumstance.
- Children and young people should be seen alone whenever possible and if this is not possible, the reason for this is recorded and the line manager informed as is appropriate. This is particularly important for children Looked After who should always be given an opportunity to talk to their social worker away from the placement. Where there are Child Protection concerns or where children have a CP plan supervisors must be confident that children have been seen in a manner or circumstances where social workers can make a judgement about their safety. For example children who are always very dirty around the face may have facial bruising that is being deliberately concealed.
- For Children in Care, check that Education and Health needs are being met and [PEP]'s and [IHA's] have been completed in timescales.
- Ensure the [Child Protection Plan] has clearly set objectives and identified areas where change is required and ensure core group minutes reflect that the plan is being adhered to by all the agencies involved. "The details of the plan are the bench marks against which the progress of the family and the commitment of workers are measured, and therefore it is important that they should be realistic and not vague statements of good intent". (The Challenge of Partnership DoH).

- Routinely review case recording and ensure that recordings are accurate and that fact is distinguished from opinion. Ensure that the referral and recording system have been properly completed.
- Check that statements are not made (verbal or written) that make generalised assumptions or are based on stereotypes particularly in relation to work with families from the BEM communities.
- Check that case recording on ICS have been finalised.
- Are service users aware of access to files policy and complaints and compliments procedures? Are service users being given routine access to recording and assessments? Are key reports shared appropriately and always in advance of meetings? It is important that children and young people are aware of their rights to make complaints independent from their parents/carers.
- Is there evidence that the services being provided for the child and family are the right services and are meeting the identified needs? Is there a need for a Resource Panel application for additional services?
- Has the practitioner taken appropriate steps to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child in respect of the current situation and their future care? Has this been checked back with the child?
- Has the practitioner ensured that they have properly recorded the wishes and feelings of the parents/carers about the current situation and the future care of the children? Has this been checked back with the parent/carer? Is an advocate required?

7.4 The following section relates to the more reflective but equally important side of supervision.

7.5

'Lord Laming reiterated the importance of frontline professionals getting to know children as individual people and, as a matter of routine, considering how their situation feels to them. Ofsted's evaluation of 50 Serious Case Reviews conducted between April 2007 and 31 March 2008 highlighted 'the failure of all professionals to see the situation from the child's perspective and experience; to see and speak to children; to listen to what they said, to observe how they were and to take serious account of their views in supporting their needs as probably the single most consistent failure in safeguarding work with children'. Working Together 2010

In busy pressurised working environments, supervision may be one of the only opportunities for practitioners to be able to reflect upon the extent to which they are seeing the situation from the child's perspective.

The following are examples of questions that *might* be asked to facilitate discussion and exploration of the progress of the case, and of issues that should be considered and explored within the supervisory discussion:

- Ask when the children were last seen and in what context. In **all** cases get into the habit of asking the practitioner to describe for you what it is like to be a child in this family or placement. What is it like to wake up in that house, to eat a meal there, to come home from school there, to go to bed there.....
- Is the practitioner continuing to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child and remaining child centred. Is the practitioner spending time with the child in an environment conducive to talking with them?
- Where there has been actual or likely [Significant Harm], ask what evidence of improvement or change has been identified in relation to each individual child.
- Revisit any written agreement or [Placement Plan] that is in place and ask for examples (evidence) that what has been agreed is being complied with by (a) the carers; (b) the practitioner; (c) other agencies; (d) the child if appropriate. Written agreements should always state clearly (1) what is unacceptable care of the child (2) how non-compliance by any of the participants will be addressed or renegotiated. When using written agreements practitioners must be able to distinguish between compliance and co-operation.
- Ask practitioners to identify the strengths of the family. If necessary help them to do so.
- Ask the practitioner to identify the potential areas where collusion between worker and parents or carers might occur. For example in cases where a parent is particularly vulnerable and needy themselves, workers may be inclined to focus on the adult's needs rather than the child's.
- Ask the practitioner to identify the potential areas where practice might become oppressive or discriminatory and ensure that appropriate regard has been paid to issues of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and disability. Practitioners may need to be reminded that only the child and family can say with certainty whether these issues are relevant to their current circumstances.
- Ask the practitioner to talk about any challenges they are experiencing in engaging and working with the child's parents. There is a lot of emphasis on the need for practitioners to remain child centred, however, care must be taken to ensure that compassion and respect for the parent is not eroded in the process. This is probably the most difficult balance to strike and

Managers (supervisors) are central in this process. The key to striking a reasonable balance is in being absolutely clear about what is bad for children and what constitutes unacceptable care. That line must be held while supporting and enabling parents to do what is required of them to make good the deficits in the care they provide. This can only be achieved by avoiding colluding with damaging behaviour and being clear about what needs to change. Even when change is evidently not achievable it should be possible to make this and the inevitable consequences explicit to parents in a way that is respectful, compassionate and kind.

- Where children are in care, efforts should be made to ensure that positive contact is promoted between the child and their birth family. This will require the practitioner to engage and work with parents wherever possible.
- Ask the practitioner to tell you about what services to the adults concerned have been considered. This will include ensuring that parents have access to services which will help to address the difficulties they are experiencing e.g. counselling for childhood abuse, treatment for substance misuse services, or services to support women suffering, violence and so on. Many of the abusing or troubled parents that are worked with may have been abused and troubled children themselves and will be experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- Ask the practitioner to identify the potential for 'false optimism' or professional avoidance.
- Ask the practitioner to identify and give examples (evidence) of working in partnership or ensure that they are clear about why partnership is not possible. Check that the practitioner is able to distinguish between passive compliance and active partnership.

'Partnership is not about equal power, but about people working together towards a common goal. It is about empowerment, about families having sufficient information to be able to understand and contribute to planning and having some power to influence the outcome'. (Tunnard and Ryan What Does the Children Act Mean for Family members - Children and Society 1991)

- Identify with the practitioner areas where specialist consultation, specific knowledge or additional training may be required in order that the case is worked effectively and safely. Take care to help the practitioner 'know what they don't know'.

7.6 Practitioners should be able to enter into meaningful discussion about most of the above issues. If this proves difficult the supervisor needs to

be appropriately and constructively challenging. There is potential in all cases for inappropriate, dangerous and oppressive practice and the potential for the focus to shift away from the child.

7.7 It is important to encourage and assist staff to reflect on their own performance and learning needs. This can be supported by helping the supervisee to identify and reflect on their own learning style and barriers to learning. The supervisor should assess development needs and identify learning opportunities. They should give and receive constructive feedback on performance. The supervisor should also ensure that any learning opportunities undertaken are applied in practice. It is important that supervisors will have read and implemented the procedures on my performance, induction and probation.

7.8 The above relates to casework supervision and should be undertaken as a separate exercise from the additional training, professional development, team issues, etc., which should also be part of the supervision process.

7.9 Throughout the supervision process the supervisor should consider and explore what impact the case or cases under discussion are having on the practitioner. The following questions may be useful within this context:

- Are feelings evoked which may cause problems in the practitioner's ability to remain professionally objective?
- Are feelings evoked which are impacting on the practitioner's personal life?
- Does the practitioner require additional support/supervision outside the normal supervision process? If so, where does the practitioner want to get this from?

7.10 The pain of working with abuse should not be overlooked or minimised and practitioners should be enabled to express and explore their feelings. These are likely to be pertinent to the situation which the child is experiencing. Leaving these areas unaddressed may lead to confusion in the practitioner about what is emotional pain and what is stress.

8. The Supervisor

Following each supervision session managers may find it useful to allow a few minutes for reflection and to consider the following questions:-

- Are you comfortable and confident about what you heard?

- Were there any areas which left niggling doubts?
- Is it possible you skated over something you heard because it felt too time-consuming, complex or painful?
- Are you satisfied that you challenged areas of practice where you had doubts about what is being said?
- Was this an active supervision session where you appropriately challenged the practitioner or did you passively listen to descriptions of their recollections and perceptions?
- Did you check out the facts of the case and the evidence that supported the worker's view that the children were safe (or unsafe)?
- Did you actively listen to the worker's concern?
- Is it possible you were defended against hearing that things might not be going well because of a wish to avoid (for multitude of different reasons) the consequences of taking firmer action to protect the child?
- Do you need to take advice from elsewhere or just run a situation past another party? Are you confident you have the appropriate knowledge to supervise alone on this case? Would it be helpful, advisable, to seek specialist advice? Do you know what you don't know?
- Are the agreed actions you have recorded clear and purposeful? Remember you can always re-think and re-visit decisions taken.
- Would a third party, unfamiliar with the detail of the case be able to tell from your supervision notes the rationale behind the decisions taken and actions agreed?
- Are you satisfied that the needs of the child are being given appropriate attention and that services are being provided in this respect?
- Has anything you have heard led you to believe that the social worker requires training or development in a particular area?
- What is the supervisor going to take to their own supervision? Supervisors should not underestimate the impact of the work on themselves. Even though they may not be directly experiencing the emotional content in relation to the child.