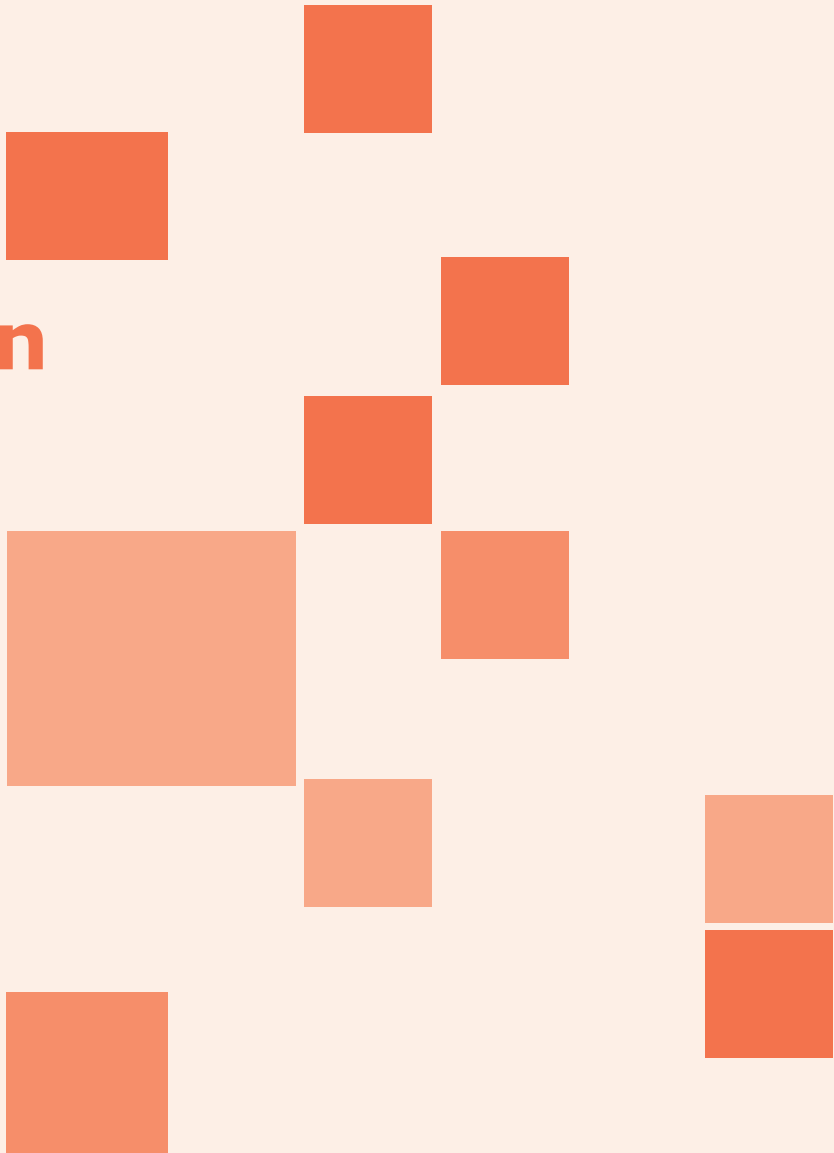




## 4. Supervision contracts



In an earlier section of this resource we asked you to find the current supervision policy in your organisation. One aspect of policy and practice is the use of supervision contracts (also called supervision agreements or working agreements). This section explores the principles which should underpin supervision contracts and how to use them in a meaningful way in the supervision process.

By the end of this section the aim is that you will:

- have an awareness and understanding of the way supervision contracts contribute to the process of supervision and can reflect the values and principles which should underpin supervision
- be able to critically analyse your role and responsibilities in relation to supervision and consider how you can contribute to the supervision contracts.

The literature on supervision highlights the importance of supervision contracts<sup>24</sup>. However, practitioners and managers who contributed to this resource told us their use in practice is variable. Some organisations do not use the contracts consistently with all members of staff; in other instances they are never reviewed after they are prepared at the beginning of a new supervisory relationship; sometimes the supervisee introduces them in response to difficulties in the supervisory relationship or where there are concerns about practice. Even when supervision contracts are in place, they may be viewed as only a 'form filling exercise'<sup>25</sup> rather than being seen as a valuable part of the process of supervision.

There is evidence to suggest processes and dynamics in the supervisory relationship are sometimes mirrored in practice<sup>26</sup> and the converse can also be the case<sup>27</sup>. When critically reflecting on the role of supervision contracts, you might find it helpful to think about agreements or contracts you have with people who use services and how some of the principles underpinning these could transfer to a supervision contract. For example, it would be unusual to draw up a contract with someone using services at the beginning of your working relationship and never review it.

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<sup>24</sup>Hawkins, P and Shohet, R (2012) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 4th ed., Maidenhead, Open University Press

Morrison, T (2005) *Supervision in Social Care: Making a real difference for staff and service users*, 3rd ed. Brighton, Pavilion Publishing

<sup>25</sup>Wonnacott, J (2014) *Developing and Supporting Effective Staff Supervision: A reader to support the delivery of staff supervision training for those working with vulnerable children, adults, and their families*, Brighton, Pavilion Publishing

<sup>26</sup>Munro, E (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report*, London, Department for Education

Ferguson, H (2011) *Child Protection Practice*, London, Palgrave

<sup>27</sup>Hawkins, P and Shohet, R (2012) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 4th ed., Maidenhead, Open University Presse

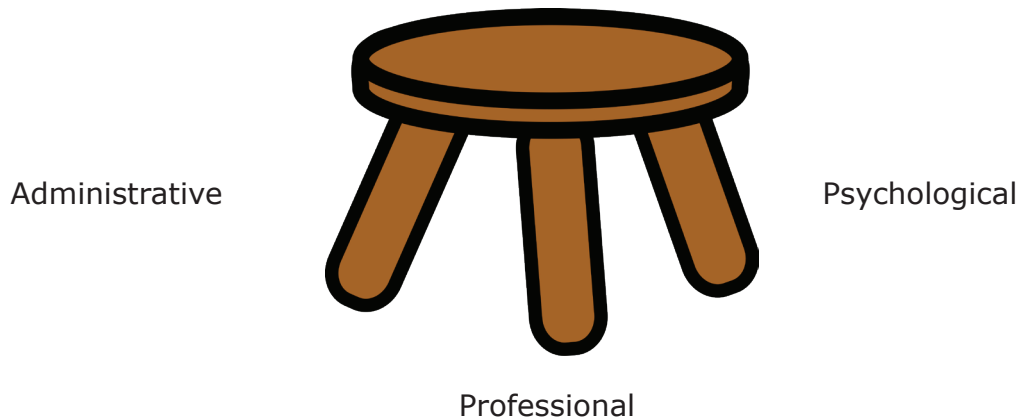
Ofsted (2012) *High expectations, high support and high challenge*, Manchester, Ofsted,

<sup>28</sup>Morrison, T (2005) *Supervision in Social Care: Making a real difference for staff and service users*, 3rd ed. Brighton, Pavilion Publishing [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Morrison<sup>28</sup> uses the analogy of a three-legged stool to think about the different components of a supervision contract. This draws attention to the fact that neglecting any of these key areas will cause the stool to wobble and undermine the foundations of the supervisory relationship.

### Balanced supervision contracts

Three key elements:



#### Administrative

This includes practical details about the frequency, location and recording of supervision, including where supervision records will be stored and what arrangements are made for rescheduling supervision if a planned session has to be cancelled. It should also include a date for review. The importance of this basic information should not be underestimated; it provides a level of predictability and clear foundations for the relationship.

#### Professional

This involves the participants (and the organisation at a wider level) having a dialogue about and explicitly noting the purpose, focus, and principles of supervision. This is to enable clarity about accountability, including the meaning of and limits to, confidentiality. It should outline what participants should do if there are concerns about practice, or about the nature of the supervisory relationship. It may also be helpful to state explicitly what will happen in the event of a dispute between supervisor and supervisee, for example involvement of a third party.

## Psychological

This involves a conversation about the motivation, commitment and shared responsibilities in supervision and is based on the principle that each participant contributes to the supervisory relationship. Negotiating this part of the agreement might include reflecting on expectations; clarifying what each person would like to get from the supervisory process and what a successful supervision relationship would look like. It might also include discussion of how the supervisee likes to receive feedback; what would be the likely warning signs if they were experiencing stress or anxiety for example.

The particular design and content of your supervision contract will vary according to your work setting and the people involved. There are examples of supervision contracts in both Morrison and Wonnacott's publications<sup>29</sup> and some suggested content is below. Jane Wonnacott observes the value of a contract lies less in the paperwork produced than in the process that participants have used to come to their agreement.

A supervision contract might include the following areas (adapted from the Social Care Institute for Excellence website).

**Arrangements for planned one-to-one supervision** – including the venue, frequency, duration and what the arrangements are if supervisor/ supervisee has to cancel due to an emergency.

**Arrangements for complementary methods of supervision** – for example ad hoc arrangements, phone, Skype or group.

**Link between supervision and other management processes** – including appraisal, personal development plans, post registration training and learning (PRTL) arrangements (where relevant) and absence management.

**The purpose and content of supervision sessions** – including agenda items which reflect the different functions of supervision. There will be some routine agenda items and other specific issues brought by supervisee or supervisor. Both parties should be clear how the negotiable aspects of the agenda will be prioritised.

**The expectations of the supervisee regarding supervision** – when drawing up supervision contracts it can be helpful for the supervisee to reflect on their past experience of supervision and how this may affect their current expectations of the process, along with their expectations of the supervisor.

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<sup>29</sup>Morrison, T (2005) *Supervision in Social Care: Making a real difference for staff and service users*, 3rd ed. Brighton, Pavilion Publishing

Wonnacott, J (2014) *Developing and Supporting Effective Staff Supervision: A reader to support the delivery of staff supervision training for those working with vulnerable children, adults, and their families*, Brighton, Pavilion Publishing

**The expectations of the supervisor** – including their expectations of the supervisee and what this is based on, including experience and professional expertise.

**Preparation by the supervisor** – including becoming familiar with the supervisee's current work and previous experiences.

**Preparation by the supervisee** – including how they can contribute to the agenda by identifying issues/practice situations they wish to discuss.

**Factors that you may need to take into account in the development of this supervisory relationship** – for example gender, disability, race, culture, age, sexual orientation. It is also helpful to discuss the learning style of the supervisee and how to give feedback in a way which is most effective.

**Raising and resolving difficulties** – this includes concerns about practice and/or where there are problems in working together and the methods for resolving this.

**Recording supervision** – this should clarify whose responsibility it is to record supervision; where supervision will be recorded; what processes are in place for resolving any disagreements about what has been recorded and access to records. As part of this discussion, the limits to confidentiality need to be explicit.

Appendix 3 includes a list of questions you might find helpful when drawing up (or reviewing) a supervision contract.

### Exercise 8

Think about your current experience of supervision.

Do you use a supervision contract? If not, what benefits do you think it might bring to your supervision? If you already have a supervision contract, do you think it addresses all three elements in an effective way (administrative, professional and psychological)?

A supervision relationship will change over time as you gain experience and develop in your practice. You need to reflect this in your supervision contract. When was it last reviewed? Are there any changes needed and what benefits might this bring?