



SSSC

## **6. Different types of one-to-one supervision**



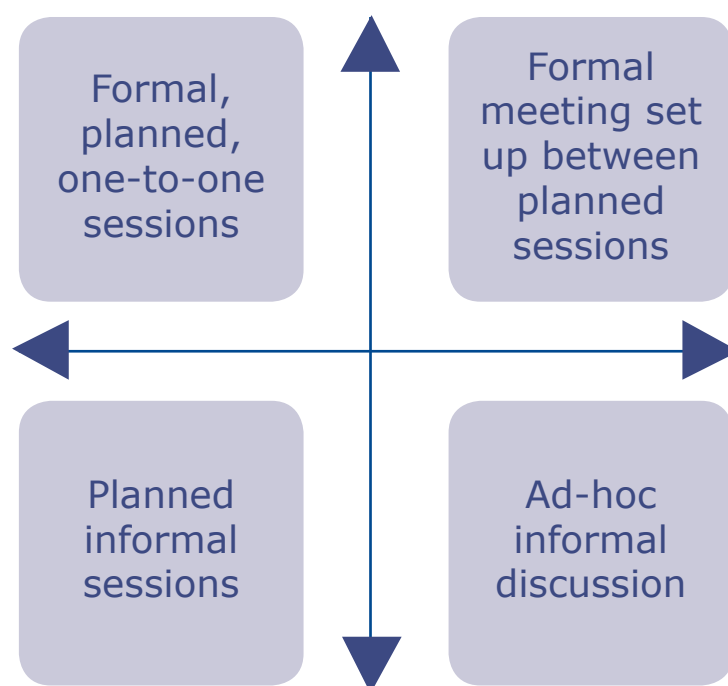
This resource clearly explains supervision is a process, not an event. In the previous section, we asked you to think about a range of approaches to supervision and in this section you will look in more depth at different aspects of one-to-one supervision.

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

- critically reflect on the benefits and drawbacks of a number of types of one-to-one supervision and the possible implications where one method is used to the exclusion of others.

As you will know from your own experience working in social services involves dealing with situations which can be unpredictable and challenging. As a result it is important supervision can be responsive and flexible. This means that although structured planned one-to-one supervision sessions are important, there will be times when an issue needs to be discussed more urgently. Wonnacott<sup>30</sup> describes four different types of one-to-one supervision (below), all have benefits and drawbacks. When reading about these you might find it useful to reflect on your own supervision discussions over the last few months and consider whether one kind of discussion tends to dominate and if so, why does that happen? Think about the possible implications of this for you, for the organisation and for people who use services.

### Formal and informal supervision



<sup>30</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

- **Formal planned one-to-one sessions**

These provide consistency, predictability and regularity and are likely to facilitate the development of a positive relationship. They allow for the ongoing review of practice issues linked to supervision records (managerial function), as well as maintaining a focus on developmental needs.

But there are drawbacks to relying solely on formal sessions, particularly in situations where there are fast moving practice developments. They may not be sufficiently responsive in unpredictable, challenging situations.

- **Formal meeting set up between planned sessions, often to discuss a specific issue.**

These are responsive to immediate need and likely to be important in debriefing incidents or when making urgent decisions. They are an important aspect of management accountability and support.

But relying on this form of supervision alone is unlikely to address ongoing professional development needs and may result in long gaps between sessions.

- **Planned informal sessions for example arranging a discussion at the workers desk or speaking on the telephone after a visit.**

This may provide support in circumstances where a more formal discussion is not possible.

But there is a tendency to record these discussions poorly. There may be issues relating to the supervisee's support or development needs that need to be noted in their supervision record. It may also mean significant risks and concerns are not formally recorded and there may be lack of clarity regarding roles, responsibilities and actions.

- **Ad-hoc informal conversations (in his report into the death of Victoria Climbié, Lord Laming<sup>31</sup> referred to these critically as 'corridor supervision')**

These may have some limited value in giving reassurance to the supervisee that their issues/concerns are heard.

But it is far more challenging to record important issues relating to the development needs of the worker and/or practice issues, may get lost, with repercussions for plans and decision making in relation to people who use services, carers and/or workers.

Discussions may breach confidentiality and it is likely that supervisee and supervisor move straight to action and overlook reflection and analysis. This may lead to flawed

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<sup>31</sup>Laming, W.H. (2003) The Victoria Climbié Inquiry: report of an inquiry by Lord Laming

decision making, with consequences for all stakeholders. The status of the decision may be unclear.

### **Exercise 9**

Do an informal audit of the kinds of supervision discussion you have at work.

Think about the different kinds of supervision you experience. Does one approach tend to dominate and if so, why?

Thinking about formal and informal supervision and about planned or ad hoc discussions what impact does each of these have on outcomes for:

- the people you are working with
- you as a worker
- your supervisor
- your organisation?

How might you raise this issue in supervision and what changes, if any, would you like to make?