



SSSC

## 9. Making the transition from frontline worker to supervisor



New supervisors often talk about feeling unprepared for their new role and responsibilities.

**'Moving from direct practice into first line management in social services is a common transition. It is not a trivial change of role however and evokes challenges on both a personal and professional level.'**<sup>40</sup>

One of the features of this transition is that for many people moving into a supervisory position can feel like stepping from a role where they felt confident and 'accomplished'<sup>41</sup>, into a post where they feel unsure of themselves and still need to find their feet. For those contemplating a transition into a supervisory role, or who have recently been promoted, it may be reassuring to know others share your experiences.

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

- have reflected on the complexities involved in shifting professional identity from a practitioner to a supervisory role
- have considered how your learning and development needs as a new supervisor might be addressed.

Davys and Beddoe<sup>42</sup> highlight how there can be expectations that people will learn how to supervise 'by osmosis' and they will know how to supervise because 'they have been supervised'. They identify the different phases associated with this transition as those in a supervisory role move from uncertainty, anxiety and possible ambivalence to a space where they are more able to trust their own judgement, be aware of their limits and use authority appropriately and consistently.

In the following exercise think about the kind of learning and development opportunities which would support your transition into a supervisory role and how you might progress these.

### Exercise 11

What kind of learning and development opportunities might help you with the transition into a supervisory role?

How will you take this forward?

<sup>40</sup>Patterson, F. (2015) Transition and Metaphor: Crossing the Bridge from Direct Practice to First Line Manager. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(7) pp. 2072-2088

<sup>41</sup>Scottish Social Services Council (2008, updated 2014) *The Continuous Learning Framework*, Dundee, SSSC

<sup>42</sup>Davys, A. and Beddoe, L. (2010) *Best Practice in Supervision: A Guide for the Helping Professions*, London, Jessica Kingsley

Some organisations have developed their own learning and development programmes for people moving into a supervisory position. This may include mentoring by more experienced supervisors. Having conducted a survey of supervision experiences across the service, Fife Council highlighted below and in (Appendix 7) re-designed their training to match the professional development needs of supervisors with different levels of experience.

### **Fife Council's supervision training**

We developed a suite of training for supervisors with three separate modules:

- a half day for new supervisors focussing on the supervision policy and paperwork for recording supervision sessions
- a half day focussing on the performance management element of supervision, including the benefits of performance management systems, setting SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely), the importance of recognising good performance
- a full day looking at supervision practice skills.

Skills identified for the one day course were:

- leadership: what is the difference between being a manager and a leader, what are the different leadership styles, identify what kind of leader they are, recognise the need to use different leadership styles with different staff or situations, French and Raven's theory of power in relation to themselves and the informal leaders in the team
- communication: including questioning techniques, active listening, giving positive and constructive feedback rather than accolades or criticism, having difficult conversations and being assertive
- empathy
- motivation: introducing motivational theories, identifying their own motivation drivers and how understanding of other's drivers can support motivation
- decision making: being aware of different fallacies and looking at the decision making process
- group supervision: discussion on the benefits of group.

There are also continuing professional development courses available, some accredited by universities and recognised by the SSSC as an approved award for supervisors or for registered managers. Depending on your work setting, your specific role and the requirements for registration you will want to consider what kind of ongoing professional development best meets your needs, either as a new or an established supervisor in social services.