What is Supervision?

Supervision is a process which aims to support, assure and develop the knowledge, skills and values of the person being supervised (supervisee), team or project group. It provides accountability for both the supervisor and supervisee in exploring practice and performance. It also enhances and provides evidence for annual performance review or appraisal; it sits alongside an organisation's performance management process with particular focus on developing people in a way that is centred on achieving better outcomes for people who use services and their carers.

In this section of the site you can explore four models of supervision. It provides some practical advice to help you decide how the models could work in your own practice, highlighting the main benefits, key considerations and good practice. It is important to note that the advice provided is not prescriptive and should be adapted to the structure and needs of your organisation.

The four models covered are:
1. One-to-one supervision
2. Shared supervision
3. Group supervision
4. Professional supervision

This resource outlines the key aspects of supervision that apply across all the models.

Supervision sessions are regular, pre-planned one-to-one or group meetings where work performance is discussed in a systematic manner. Group supervision can be used to supplement one-to-one supervision which should always be available. The emphasis is on encouraging open dialogue with a view to maximising reflective practice and learning, and supporting supervisees in a way that is appropriate to their stage of progression. The Continuous Learning Framework can be used in supervision to support and facilitate discussion.

Irrespective of the model used, effective supervision and support will generally cover four broad areas:
- Review of a supervisee's current work
- Delegation of work across a team
- Exploring learning and development needs, and plans
- Setting priorities

It should cover both the supervisee's work, the work of the team, and other relevant activities e.g. attendance at working groups.

The format of the session can vary depending on the model and specific needs of the organisation, but typically a session should comprise four broad stages.

1. Recap of previous discussion and agreed action points:
- Explore previous actions and confirm what was agreed
- Summarise discussion

2. Information seeking and exchange:
- Ask for update
- Confirm who was involved
- Ask open questions and reflect on work undertaken
- Use summaries to check understanding

3. Problem solving:
- Identify problem areas
- Explore ideas for resolving problems
- Develop alternatives
- Assess consequences

4. Summary and follow-up:
- Agree action points for both parties
- Agree review arrangements
- Complete support and supervision record
- Give a copy to the supervisee

Why is supervision important in social services?

Effective supervision is integral to the continuous development of social services. Reflecting on practice in supervision provides staff with support in the complex, responsible and emotionally challenging work they undertake. It should be conducted in the context of a supportive learning environment that actively encourages the continuous development of good practice and skills. Regular, high quality, organised supervision is key to developing staff skills, knowledge and values.

Whilst it is important to schedule formal supervision sessions there is also a need for more informal, and sometimes urgent, ad hoc supervision. For example, supervisees may need additional support with complex situations. A supervisor should be aware of such needs, and supervisees should feel confident in raising concerns outwith their regular supervision session, enabling them to get the support they need. Similarly, day-to-day interactions provide an opportunity for informal supervision. It is important to note that details of informal or ad-hoc supervision, including any actions agreed, should be recorded formally in supervision sessions and, where relevant, the support plans of people who are supported by the service.

All of these aspects of effective supervision are reflected in The SSSC Code of Practice for Employers of Social Service Workers which sets down the responsibilities of employers in the regulation of social service workers. The SSSC Code of Practice for Social Service Workers is a list of statements that describe the standards of professional conduct and practice required of social service workers as they go about their daily work.

There are several employer codes which set out requirements for supporting staff including:

1.5 Managing the performance of staff and the organisation to ensure high quality services and care
2.2 Effectively managing and supervising staff to support effective practice and good conduct and supporting staff to address deficiencies in their performance
2.3 Having systems in place to enable social service workers to report inadequate resources or operational difficulties which might impede the delivery of safe care and working with them and relevant authorities to address those issues
3.4 Responding appropriately to social service workers who seek assistance because they do not feel able or adequately prepared to carry out any aspects of their work

Similarly, many of the worker codes set out the responsibilities of social services workers to engage in support processes such as supervision. Specifically, section six of the worker codes focusses on "being accountable for the quality of your work and taking responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills". Specific responsibilities include:

3.4 Bringing to the attention of your employers or the appropriate authority resource or operational difficulties that might get in the way of the delivery of safe care

6.3 Informing your employer or the appropriate authority about any personal difficulties that might affect your ability to do your job competently and safely

6.4 Seeking assistance from your employer or the appropriate authority if you do not feel able or adequately prepared to carry out any aspect of your work, or you are not sure about how to proceed in a work matter

6.8 Undertaking relevant training to maintain and improve your knowledge and skills and contributing to the learning and development of others.

What are the benefits of effective supervision?

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) emphasises how effective supervision is a key component in staff leadership and management which can lead to the following improvements:
o   Greater individual motivation
o   An understanding of how work links into overall objectives
o   More effective time management
o   The ability to plan workload
o   More effective coordination of work
o   Better two-way communication
o   A reduction in conflict/misunderstanding
o   Learning on the job
o   A reduction in stress levels.

The benefits can be enhanced by combining two or more of the models in a way that fits with an organisation's structure and needs. You can learn more about this in the other resources provided in this section of the site.

http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide01/index.asp

Other learning activities that can support and enhance the supervision experience

There are several learning and activities which can be used to support and enhance the supervision experience:

- Mentoring is used in social services and guidance has been developed to support organisations that wish to develop this as a support activity.
- Similarly coaching is often used. The SSSC has been working with Public Services Collaborative Learning (PSCL) which has set up a programme of collaborative coaching. Organisational coaching leads from a number of public services have collaborated to develop an exciting initiative to provide a wide reaching coaching service across public services. The Scottish coaching collaborative is for leaders at different levels from executive level through to first line supervisors and is intended to complement and extend access and coaching provision across the country.
- Work shadowing can also be used and may be set up as a relatively informal activity (e.g. buddying another member of staff for a day) or in a more formal setting. An example of a more formal programme of work shadowing is the Leadership Exchange Programme. Set up by the PSCL group, the exchange programme involves short term secondments arranged by participants and usually spread over six months or so.

What are the key principles of effective supervision?

Whether one-to-one, shared, group or professional, effective supervision should be based on the following principles (from Stirling Council Social Services: Supervision & Practice Development Planning Policy & Guidance):

- Supervision should be centred on achieving better outcomes for service users and carers
- Supervision should promote and evidence accountable practice
- Supervision should establish clear practice roles and responsibilities
- Supervision should build capacity for development and improvement

An outcomes focused approach

It is important that staff reflect on how the service they provide makes a difference to the lives of the people that they support (how it improves their outcomes). Focusing on outcomes in supervision will support staff to reflect on outcomes achieved in practice. Outcomes focused practice is concerned with the social services worker supporting individuals to work towards solutions; outcomes based supervision allows supervisors and supervisees to reflect on practice and be outcomes focused in their work.