

SUPERVISION IN CASE PRACTICE

POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT

Staff supervision is an essential part of supporting staff and promoting good service delivery. All field service staff should have regular supervision, with the focus and content varying to reflect the position.

Supervision in case practice has an essentially two fold function: case planning and supporting workers' growth and development.

Case planning encompasses both progressing individual cases and managing workload. Supporting workers growth and development encompasses both building emotional and psychological health and resilience and promoting learning and development.

Supervision occurs either individually, between the worker and their supervisor, or in a group, generally with one's team.

Supervision, of one form or another, either individually or in a group, should occur frequently. Over time, an individual's supervision should include a mix of individual and group sessions.

On at least an annual basis, supervision should involve a substantial individual review of work performance and identify learning and development goals and strategies for the next year. This is the 'Reaching Forward' session.

POLICY PURPOSE

This policy describes the focus and modes of case practice, so that it is well understood by all staff and occurs regularly.

The accompanying standardised forms capture the variations in content for case practice worker and case practice leader positions.

FOCUS FOR SUPERVISION

The focus for supervision in case practice is:

- **Case planning**
 - *Progressing individual cases*
 - *Managing workload*
- **Supporting workers' growth and development**
 - *Building emotional and psychological health and resilience*
 - *Promoting learning and development*

Case planning

Supervision is an essential strategy to assist workers, team leaders and the Department as a whole to manage casework, both to progress individual cases and to manage workload.

Progressing individual cases through supervision can involve:

- maintaining an overview of the status of all cases in a worker's caseload;
- reviewing issues and canvassing strategies in current cases;
- making decisions and providing direction to progress individual cases; and
- collectively practicing and reflecting on aspects of case practice in live cases.

Managing workload through supervision can involve:

- making assessments of the workload involved in cases and the worker's capacity, to inform the team leaders allocation of cases and the support provided to manage particular cases; and
- setting task priorities in and between cases.

Case decisions or directions determined in supervision are recorded on Assist under Case Plan Supervision, Approved Outcome Report (or referenced in Assist to attached notes in Objective).

Supporting workers' growth and development

Building emotional and psychological health and resilience

All departmental work with children and families carries inherent stresses including the vicarious trauma of working with vulnerable and at risk children, young people and families. Anxiety is inherent in child protection work due to the potential danger for children and working with uncertainty. Supervision is a primary means of ameliorating the stress and anxiety of the work.

Managing the work on an ongoing basis requires workers to be emotionally and psychologically healthy and resilient. Building emotional and psychological health and resilience is a core focus of supervision.

Building emotional and psychological health and resilience, including ameliorating stress and anxiety, interacts with progressing individual cases and managing workload as supervision should support workers to have a sense of being organised and focussed, and bring workload to within their capacity.

The Department's corporate health framework, wellness@work, has three pillars that lie at the intersection of work and personal life that the Department looks to support. These are physical health and activity, personal responsibility, and PERMA - positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment - for positive workplaces. These may be a useful focus for identifying steps to building emotional and psychological health and resilience.

Building emotional and psychological health and resilience needs to have a deliberate focus on ameliorating the stress and anxiety of the work which will involve:

- sharing the anxiety inherent in cases upwards through the organisation (with the team leader in supervision who in turn will advise director(s) as necessary);
- providing personal emotional support; and
- identifying and practicing strategies to manage stress and anxiety.

Building emotional and psychological health and resilience may also benefit from a periodic discussion of:

- physical health and activity;
- personal responsibility; and
- PERMA - positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment - for positive workplaces.

Learning and development

Learning and development, becoming better at the work one does, should be continuous for workers.

The 70:20:10 learning model underpins the Department's People Development Framework. The 70:20:10 learning model recognises that most learning (the 70) occurs through daily work tasks. Therefore, the role of supervision in setting work tasks that expose the worker to expanding experiences and helping the worker to manage their workload is critical to learning. A significant amount of learning (the 20) occurs through networking and collaboration. This illustrates the importance of receiving advice and direction through supervision, and working collaboratively on cases through group supervision. The 70:20:10 learning model recognises that the smallest amount of learning comes from formal training (the 10), though it is essential, and the content of this training is critical for informing the deliberate focusses of work based learning and networking and collaborative learning.

Learning and development involves some key interactions with building emotional and psychological health and resilience, and draws fundamentally on case planning.

Learning and development can provide a sense of empowerment that is essential to building emotional and psychological health and resilience.

Both effective case practice and emotional and psychological health and resilience rely on developing and maintaining sound working relationships. While relationships are multi-faceted, they rely substantially on communication skills, and these can be a focus of learning and development through supervision.

As the most effective learning occurs in relation to real day to day work, reflection, skills practice and problem solving on real cases in supervision informs learning.

Supervision should promote reflection so that it becomes ingrained in day to day work and thus drives continuous learning. Reflective practice is generally understood to encompass being able to identify the feelings aroused by the work and specific work issues, consideration of the attitudes that might underlie those feelings, and analysis,

both to put attitudes and feelings into appropriate perspective, and to drive “thinking critically, fostering a stance of inquiry” in case work.

Learning and development will focus on a range of issues depending on the workers’ needs and include:

- working relationships with families and other professionals;
- specific aspects of case practice;
- specific individual and team learning goals;
- 70:20:10 learning strategies; and
- bringing it all together through reflective practice.

MODES OF SUPERVISION

All supervision and the annual performance development session, Reaching Forward, is based on the Signs of Safety three column assessment and planning approach:

- what is working well;
- what worries there might be; and
- what action needs to occur.

Supervision is delivered through a combination of individual and group supervision.

Individual supervision

Individual supervision should always form part of the supervision mix and occur regularly.

Supervision on an individual level is provided by the worker’s line manager and includes both formal scheduled and informal unscheduled supervision sessions.

Formal supervision that involves setting a dedicated time and giving that time, as well as full attention, to the sole purpose of the supervision must be part of individual supervision.

Individual supervision may be most useful for:

- periodic detailed assessments to progress particular cases;
- workload management;
- ameliorating the stress and anxiety of the work; and
- periodic detailed assessments for learning and development.

The annual performance development session, Reaching Forward, is an individual session. Reaching Forward is focused on supporting workers’ growth and development with actions including a learning plan structured in line with the 70:20:10 learning model.

Group supervision

Group supervision is a key strategy for supporting workers’ growth and development.

Group supervision involves multiple people with all participants actively working on aspects of case practice for real, generally currently open cases.

It may involve case mappings or working on particular aspects of case practice. These aspects might, for example, include, with respect to Signs of Safety child protection practice, developing danger statements or words and pictures explanations, or more broadly in Signs of Safety and other work, developing questions for areas of practice that appear stuck.

The group will generally be an established team but cross team group supervision and open sessions for whole districts also provide substantial learning opportunities.

Group supervision will generally be led by the team leader although other case practice leaders might also facilitate sessions.

The case practice learning that can be achieved in a group is generally greater than through individual supervision because it benefits from the skills, analysis and experience of the whole group and involves actively practicing analysis and applied case work skills.

As it can facilitate intense learning and development, group supervision can also provide a sense of empowerment that is essential to building emotional and psychological health and resilience.

Group supervision is also a means of sharing the anxiety inherent in case work, a strategy to deal with working with uncertainty, and sharing the emotional support a team can provide

Consultation is not supervision

Consultation is a day to day activity that is part of progressing case work and supports workers' learning and emotional wellbeing. It is not, however, supervision and the occurrence of frequent consultation should not be cited as having constituted supervision.

Consultation occurs at a range of levels in day to day work.

Informal and formal advice sought from one's supervisor on an ad hoc basis should occur frequently and will usually be in relation to seeking an immediate approval or case direction, and on occasion for personal learning or support.

Meeting the formal requirements for cultural consultation in case management is a requirement set out in the Case Practice Manual.

Formal and informal consultation with specialist colleagues such as psychologists, senior practice development officers, Aboriginal practice leaders, and education officers will occur on a needs basis to inform case practice.

Informal consultation and debriefing with colleagues can enrich experience and learning.

Some staff may choose to consult persons external to the Department on occasion for their own development or to inform particular case matters.

FREQUENCY

Supervision, of one form or another, either on an individual basis or in a group, should occur frequently. Over time, an individual's supervision must include a mix of individual and group sessions.

Individual supervision should occur regularly of the mix. More frequent individual supervision may be appropriate for staff new to the Department or in circumstances where a worker has particular developmental needs at a given time.

On at least an annual basis, supervision should involve a substantial individual review of work performance and identify learning and development goals and strategies for the next year. This is the 'Reaching Forward' session.

DOCUMENTATION

Supervision should be documented. Standardised forms for supervision, based on the Signs of Safety three column assessment and planning approach, are available but not mandated for:

- supervision of case practice workers,
- supervision of case practice leaders (team leaders, senior practice development officers, assistant district directors, district directors), and
- Reaching Forward.

Case decisions or directions determined in supervision must be recorded on Assist under Case Plan Supervision, Approved Outcome Report (or referenced in Assist to attached notes in Objective).

CONFIDENTIALITY

The District Director or other relevant staff may need to be made aware of information arising from individual supervision if it reflects personal safety or persistent problems with performing the job.

DISPUTE AND RESOLUTION

Supervisors and workers are expected to raise and resolve issues proactively and openly within the supervisory working relationship. Where an issue remains unresolved, discussion and resolution should take place with the supervisor's line manager.

RELATED GUIDELINES

- Workload Management Guidelines 2008
- Reaching Forward, Performance Development Draft Policy

RELATED POLICIES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Department's service delivery frameworks, particularly:

- Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework
- People Development Framework
- Aboriginal Services Framework
- Aboriginal Learning and Development Strategy 2012-2014
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Services Framework

RESOURCES

- Standardised Forms for Case Practice Workers and Case Practice Leaders, Reaching Forward Performance Development
- Supervision – Case Planning – Sample Questions
- Supervision – Experience, Reflection, Analysis, Action – Sample Questions
- Supervision – Promoting Reflective Practice
- Reference - Morrison, Tony (2005) Staff Supervision in Social Care, Pavilion, Brighton

EFFECTIVE DATE

9 September, 2013 (previously policy 17 February 2011)

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September 2014

OWNER

Executive Director, Policy and Learning Directorate