



Children, Young People  
and Family Services



# Supervision

## Best Practice Guidance and Policy

### Foreword

Supervision is a critical component in supporting excellent practice with children and young people and as an organisation we are committed to ensuring that all members of the children's workforce in Hull receive regular high quality, critically reflective and relational supervision.

As a learning organisation we value critical thinking and analysis in strengthening our core function of reducing risks and increasing safety for children and young people. We also recognise the emotional impact of this work and are committed to enhancing the emotional wellbeing, resilience and leaning of all our workers, in all roles.

Learning by our experiences, using feedback from a variety of sources and helping individuals and teams to review how effective they have been, all contribute to our learning culture and in embedding supervision as the cornerstone of what makes a positive difference to families. This also supports our vision of 'Making Improvement Happen Together'.

### Introduction

In Hull, we want all practitioners to be ambitious for children and young people and supervision is an integral part of promoting strengths based, relational approach to our work with families, whilst ensuring that our statutory duties are met. Reflective supervision guides ethical and proportionate state intervention into family life within the legal, regulatory, practice and performance framework in which we operate and are accountable for.

Reflective supervision is also an integral element of staff motivation, wellbeing and resilience as well as a means of furthering personal and professional development. We want workers to feel valued, confident and supported in achieving excellent standards of practice

for families and to experience fulfilling and rewarding careers in Hull Children Young People and Family Services (CYPFS).

High quality reflective supervision helps practitioners to be curious and to forensically reflect on their work with families, improving the identification of harm and adopting an approach that is proportionate to risks and needs. It can help practitioners to prepare for their engagement with families and respond with greater pace or assertion where needed, supporting reasoned and timely decision making.

We recognise that work in CYPFS can be emotionally difficult. Supervision has a role to help manage and reduce this type of stress, but it should also play a role in analysing information emerging from emotional experiences generated by engagement with children and families. This 'emotional' information can sometime be lost without opportunities to reflect on, analyse and learn from the experience.

This policy provides a framework for supervision so that workers can understand organisational expectations, what support they can rely on, and that the authority has a systematic approach to ensure work is of the highest possible quality and good outcomes for children and families are achieved. It should be read in conjunction with the [Social Work Practice Standards](#) which set out key practice expectations in respect of supervision.

## **Definition and Purpose of Supervision**

There are numerous definitions of supervision and perhaps the most widely used within social work theory and practice is that of Tony Morrison who describes it as “a process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another to meet certain organisational and personal objectives which together promote the best outcomes for service users.” (Morrison, 2005 p32).

Carpenter, et al (2013) suggest that most descriptions of social work supervision include common functions - administrative case management, reflection and learning from practice, personal and emotional support, mediation between the staff member and organisation and professional development.

In the context of Hull CYPFS, this means that supervision is the primary support mechanism available to practitioners to enable the authority to carry out its statutory functions and manage risks to children. That said, we are equally keen to emphasise the importance of reflective, curious, analytical supervision in creating a protected space for practitioners to explore and develop their practice further.

## **Reflective Supervision**

Reflective supervision is a distinct learning process by which the supervisor and supervisee engage to explore practice and the contextual factors influencing responses. Reflective supervision is characterised by context, the experiences of the worker, with the supervisor in the role of facilitator rather than expert, creating space to encourage on-going learning.

Skills in critical analysis are crucial as is the ability to use best evidence, research and theory to develop interventions and make decisions. Ultimately, reflection helps the worker to make links between their experiences, knowledge and skills, whilst also integrating thinking, feelings and actions. Within the context of our work, this all contributes to improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children, young and families in our community.

## **Individual Reflective Case Supervision**

Case supervision should be enabling, focusing in detail on the direction of the work and adopting a critically reflective and curious approach. A trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee will help identify and reduce dilemmas whilst providing an opportunity to recognise and commend good practice, and challenge complacency. High quality supervision also safeguards against over optimism, drift and risk averse practice.

Case supervision should make use of best evidence, theory and research and contribute to the goals of the family whilst ensuring that the child's safety remains our highest priority.

Effective, critically reflective supervision is above all a learning process in which the supervisor engages with the supervisee to:

- Explore a supervisee's practice, including direct work with children and young people and factors influencing their responses;
- Develop a shared understanding of the knowledge base informing their analysis and the limitations of their thinking;
- Deepen and broaden workers' knowledge and critical analysis skills;
- Enable confident, competent, creative and independent decision making;
- Help workers build and drive forward clear plans that seek to enable positive change for children and families;
- Help staff feel valued, supported and motivated whilst also increasing emotional resilience and self-awareness;
- Promote the development of a learning culture within the organisation.

Decision-making is frequently an output of supervision and the long-term, life-long consequences of decisions made in supervision should be fully considered at all stages of the work. The supervisor and supervisee should always interrogate how current practice is achieving long term outcomes for children and young people.

By focusing on issues faced by each unique child and young person, understanding their lived experience and incorporating the family's views and goals, it is more likely that practice will achieve better outcomes.

Practitioners may wish to explore:

- What are the best outcomes for the children and family in this situation?
- What research and other knowledge has been considered in relation to the circumstances of this practice?
- How does it inform our understanding of this situation and assist our intervention?
- How will we evaluate and monitor progress towards the best outcomes for the children?

In all case discussions, supervision should reflect on issues of power, and underlying assumptions related to diversity, as highlighted by the Social GRRRAACCEEESSS (Burnham 2013). Have practitioners fully considered issues of sameness and difference such as gender, class, ethnicity, culture, religion and education that inform our contextual thinking and responses? How do we remain alert to bias that may subconsciously influence our practice and the experiences of families?

Other concepts such as 'safe uncertainty' can help practitioners critically analyse their work and what factors may be influencing their perceptions of risk and how much uncertainty they may tolerate (Mason 1993).

Good quality supervision should also forensically examine the plan for each individual child in each case discussion and drive this forward, ensuring effective assessment, intervention and review. We need to ensure that family members, including fathers, have been actively engaged in shaping plans and that practice is aimed at empowering families to make positive changes. Supervisors and supervisees may wish to explore:

- Have we captured the child's voice and unique experience within their plan?
- Have we used appropriate direct work tools such as the Fairy/Wizard tool or Mind of My Own statements to inform the assessment and subsequent plan?
- Are safety plans, Children in Need (CIN), Child Protection (CP), Child Looked After and Pathway Plans relevant to risks and needs, co-produced, shared and effective?
- Is contingency planning robust and clear?
- Are we rigorously pursuing permanence at the very earliest opportunity?
- Are we compliant with regulations and fulfilling our statutory duties in an ethical way?

We need to keep these plans constantly under review, consider progress made and adapt our intervention accordingly. We also need to use our professional judgement to consider if there is a need for ongoing social care involvement and, if we no longer have a role based on established thresholds for intervention, we should carefully plan ceasing our involvement in a timely manner, whilst ensuring that families have long term support plans in place via targeted or universal services.

Good supervision mirrors effective practice with families and the supervisor should engage with supervisees to help build professional self-knowledge and emotional resilience.

This supervision guidance is also aligned to our Social Work Practice Model – Signs of Safety. The framework maps harm, danger, complicating factors, strengths, existing and required safety, and a safety judgment in situations where children have experienced or are at risk of harm.

Further specific supervision guidance associated with the model will be made available as we progress on our organisational learning journey with Signs of Safety. At this stage of implementation, supervision discussions should start to incorporate the three column approach to aid case discussion and planning, whilst also supporting the workers growth and development. At a most basic level we need to consider:

- What are we worried about? (Past harm, future danger and complicating actors.)
- What is working well? (Existing strengths and safety.)
- What needs to happen? (Future safety/Future success.)

As we progress with the implementation of our practice model, additional guidance will also be issued regarding group supervision. This is essential in undertaking or reviewing case mapping or strengthening particular areas of practice, e.g. analysis or working on a particular aspect of our work where practice appears ‘stuck’. This method benefits from the collective skills, analysis and experiences of the whole group and can help in enhancing skills in working with uncertainty, building emotional resilience and facilitating a sense of empowerment.

Whilst a critical element of the model, group supervision **does not** replace individual reflective case supervision which must take place at the stated minimum frequency.

Individual supervision should not focus solely on case work and case management issues. The professional development of the practitioner should also form part of the supervisory discussion particularly when learning needs arising from case work have been identified. Other matters concerning time management, the management of annual leave and any health concerns should also be discussed when necessary.

This element of individual supervision provides the opportunity to bring together organisational and individual objectives in non-case related discussion and may include:

- Hull CYPFS updates and priorities, including service improvements;
- Updates and discussion on research, policies, procedures, legislation and case law;
- Discussion regarding findings from Serious Case Reviews, Lessons Learned Reviews, Learning from Individual Cases and Inquiries;
- Feedback from the workers audits, observations, complaints and compliments, and feedback from families, children and young people ;
- Providing personal support which could include responding to and supporting individuals with personal difficulties and signposting to appropriate support;

- Promoting positive wellbeing and use as appropriate of support tool such as Wellness Actions Plans (from Mind), Individual Workplace Stress Risk Assessment and other Hull City Council wellbeing resources that can be accessed via this link [Wellbeing](#);
- Professional development including constructive feedback on performance and appraisal objectives identified in the workers Personal Development and Performance Review plan;
- Discussion of evidence collection of CPD activity for Social Work England if appropriate;
- Training, learning, development and briefing sessions – delivered, attended or planned and how learning is being implemented and the impact on practice;
- Opportunities for wider learning e.g. shadowing, internet research, reading, involvement in specific projects, service development or group work;
- Career aspirations and opportunities for progression, including coaching, mentoring and acting as a ‘champion’;
- Ensuring that the worker has a broad range of experiences and knowledge of the child’s journey from point of initial contact to adoption or leaving care and the specific services throughout the journey.

In support of individual supervision, informal supervision should still be available and prioritised as this supports decision-making in real time and can avoid delays for families. This too must be recorded on the child’s case file.

## Frequency and Attendance

All practitioners should expect to receive supervision as a minimum once a month. Consistency and commitment to planned supervision need to be evidenced by both supervisee and supervisor.

Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) undergoing their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) will receive weekly individual supervision for the first 6 weeks of employment, then fortnightly up to 6 months and monthly thereafter. For detailed guidance please see [Supporting NQSWs in their ASYE](#) document.

Social workers who have undertaken a major change of role in transferring to a different team and practitioners returning to work following a career break or other long term absence should also receive supervision fortnightly for the first 2 months and then a minimum of monthly as for other staff.

The frequency listed is the minimum, in any instance. Individual supervision may be required at a greater frequency. This will be agreed at an individual level and reflected in the [Supervision Contract](#). All supervision sessions should be of at least one and half hour’s duration.

If, for whatever reason, supervision has to be cancelled, it should be re-scheduled to take place within 5 working days. If the cancellation is due to sickness leave, then the session should be arranged to take place within 5 days of the individual's return to work. If the supervisor is absent from work for more than 2 weeks on unplanned leave, it is the responsibility of the Group Manager to make alternative supervisory arrangements.

When arranging supervision, consideration should be given to time and place, aiming to eliminate possible interruptions wherever possible.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Supervision is the responsibility of both the supervisor and supervisee. Below are lists of the minimum expectations of both parties.

### **Responsibilities of the Supervisor**

- Confirm arrangements and expectations through a written contract. [Click here to view a blank copy of the Supervision Contract](#);
- Undertake appropriate supervision training and attend continuing professional development events related to supervision;
- Ensure that supervision is scheduled well in advance and is a private reflective space that should not be interrupted, unless for an immediate emergency;
- Prepare for supervision by reading relevant case notes, reviewing audits and associated actions and observing practice;
- Promote critical reflection and analysis;;
- Deal sensitively and confidentially with any personal information shared by the supervisee;
- Ensure that supervision is a constructive process and use performance information to give the supervisee feedback about their performance;
- Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice and build social workers' confidence in their practice. Conversely, challenge any complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account;
- Ensure supervision regarding a child or young person is recorded on the case record within 5 working days;
- Ensure that a personal supervision record is completed, agreed and signed by the supervisee;
- Make direct contact with the supervisee should a supervision meeting need to be cancelled and arrange a further date to take place within 5 working days.

### **Responsibilities of the Supervisee**

- Prepare for each meeting and identify issues which require attention;
- Ensure that any actions from the previous supervision have been completed;

- Share thoughts and ideas and be open about what has gone well and what has been difficult;
- Be prepared to reflect on, scrutinise and evaluate work that has been carried out, and to be constructively challenged on practice with the aim of improving outcomes or children;
- Identify areas for development and learning needs;
- Speak openly and honestly about the role, the children and families you work with and impact upon self;
- Make direct contact with the supervisor should a supervision meeting need to be cancelled and arrange a further date to take place within 5 working days.

## Recording

All individual supervisions sessions will be recorded in two ways. Whilst the format is not rigid, for all individual children or young people have been discussed supervision recordings should demonstrate:

- Review of previously agreed actions;
- Critical reflection, analysis and challenge (incorporating what we're worried about and what's working well);
- The child's voice and understanding of their lived experience;
- Progress made against the plan, including direction of risk;
- Management direction, decisions and actions to drive the plan forward (incorporating what needs to happen), including timescales for completion.

This should be recorded by the Supervisor on the child's record in Liquidlogic. Supervisors are required to ensure that all cases are subject to their regular oversight and thoroughly discussed at a minimum frequency of bi-monthly. Those children who are identified as particularly vulnerable should be discussed at least monthly and professional judgement will be required to determine which children and young people fall within this cohort. Supervisees and supervisors will also need to be alert to changes in vulnerability that will increase the need for more frequent supervision.

Management oversight should also take place in-between supervision sessions and be recorded on Liquidlogic as such, as and when required.

All other recordings should be made on the supervisee's **Personal Supervision Record**. The purpose of the Personal Supervision Record is to maintain an account of the practitioner's on-going professional development arising from the case work with which they are engaged. The completed form should be signed by both the Supervisor and the Supervisee as a correct summary of the supervision discussion. If the record is made electronically then electronic signatures may be used. The Supervision Record is completed within 5 working days of the supervision taking place.

In addition to the Supervision Record, an individual's **Supervision Log** should also be completed. These can be completed within the supervision session.



## Storage and Retention of Supervision Records

The Supervisor should store records securely in a supervision file. The Key documents that should be kept in each Supervisee's supervision file are:

- Supervision Contract;
- Supervision Records;
- Supervision Log;
- Continuing Professional Development Log;

There are a number of other documents relating to employment which may be kept in the Supervision File. For a list of these and other location information see [Location of Supervision and Other Related Documents](#).

The supervision file can be a paper file, stored securely in the building where the member of staff is located. Alternatively, an electronic file may be used. Electronic supervision files should contain the same documents as paper files. The same principles of confidentiality apply to paper and electronic supervision records. The only persons that should have access to these files are the Supervisor, their line manager and the Supervisee, unless required for one of the purposes described below.

If a member of staff moves to a different team within Hull CYPFS, the supervision file will be transferred from the previous supervisor to the new supervisor. This file will then form a sub section within the new supervision file and should be entitled Previous Supervision and state the name of the previous supervisor. In addition, a three way 'hand over' meeting with the new supervisor is good practice.

If a member of staff leaves their employment with Hull CYPFS the supervision file should be archived with Human Resources where it will be retained for 7 years after employment has ceased. Following this time the file will be destroyed. The file should be stored with Human Resources within 1 month of the supervisee's termination of employment, and should clearly state the date for destruction.

It is advised that supervisee's store their own copies of supervision records securely.

## Confidentiality

Although supervision is private, it is ultimately a management process; as such, absolute confidentiality cannot be assured. The records that are created are the property of the organisation, not the individual.

There will be times and situations when a supervisor needs to discuss the content of supervision with their own line manager. This ensures appropriate oversight and line of sight from senior management to frontline practice.

Supervisees should also be made aware that from time to time their supervision records may be accessible to others for purposes, including:

- Inspectors (i.e. Ofsted);
- Auditors (i.e. for quality assurance purposes);
- Investigating Officers (i.e. for disciplinary investigation).
- Investigating complaints

## **Resolving Difference**

It is important that supervisees receive quality supervision and that developmental needs are identified and met. If a supervisee feels that this is not the case, then in the first instance a discussion should be held with the supervisor during which perceived difficulties should be shared. If, for any reason, the supervisee feels that they cannot approach their supervisor, then their alternative contact should be the line manager of the supervisor.

If initial discussions have been held between supervisee and supervisor and suitable solutions have not been found, then a further meeting should be held to also include the supervisor's line manager. The line manager may achieve resolution through discussion or may decide to take other action such as observing a supervision session. It will be the responsibility of the supervisor's line manager to ensure that any difficulties are resolved in a satisfactory manner.

High quality, regular supervision is key to ensuring consistently high standards of practice that benefit children and families and if there is a need to put in place additional structured support to help a supervisee to achieve these standards, supervision should be used in the first instance to ensure that problems are tackled openly and in a timely way.

Feedback should provide specific examples, mapped to the CYPFS Social Work Practice standards if appropriate and tailored support, action planning and review mechanisms should be put into place to help the supervisee improve to the required standard. Supervisors should refer to the Council's policy and procedure in relation to **Improving Employee Performance**, if there are continued concerns about a supervisee's performance.

## **Quality Assurance**

It is important that the expectations set out in this policy are met. The practice of supervision requires constant regular attention, and supervisors will need feedback on their performance if that practice is to be consistently of high quality. Observation of practice is a critical element of this and opens practice to wider learning, transparency and scrutiny which benefits practitioners and families alike.

Observations should also be undertaken of the workers direct work with children, young people, their families and carers, and their participation in meetings such Child Protection Conferences, Child Looked After Reviews and core groups. Observation is also a key evidence requirement in supporting those workers who wish to progress via our **Progression Policy**.

Quality assurance arrangements are that:

- The supervisor's line manager should attend and **observe** the supervisor's supervisory practice at least every 3 months. This is in all roles in all service areas. Feedback should be given and incorporated into the supervisor's own supervision.
- The supervisor should **observe** the supervisee's practice at least every 3 months. Feedback should be given and incorporated into the supervisee's supervision.
- The frequency and quality of individual reflective case supervision will form part of the quality **audit** of all children and young people's cases;
- The frequency of individual supervision will be collated through the department's performance monitoring system.

## Supporting Resources

The reader is referred to the excellent and extensive resources available via Research in Practice (RiP) aimed at supporting practice supervisors in their role but accessible and relevant for practitioners in all roles. All members of our children's workforce in Hull are able to use their RiP account to access the tools and other resources from the Practice Supervisors Development Programme by following this link - [open access resources](#)

## Forms - See the [Additional Local Resources Section](#)

Supervision Contract Personal

Supervision Record Supervision

Log Observation of Practice

Observation of Supervision

## References

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