

Effective supervision in social care, early years and childcare

How to provide effective supervision and appraisal in social care, early years and childcare settings.

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Find out how to provide effective supervision and appraisal in social care, early years and childcare settings.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone responsible for carrying out supervision in an organisation ('supervisors'), such as:

- managers
- assistant managers
- mentors
- team leaders
- responsible individuals
- committee members.

What is supervision?

Supervision is an accountable, two-way process that motivates workers and supports the development of good practice. It gives workers a chance to:

- reflect on their practice
- focus on their strengths
- receive feedback, guidance and support
- identify and review areas for personal development.

Supervision should be helpful and enjoyable, so that workers have the support they need to carry out their role to the best of their abilities.

It also:

- helps workers develop and build on their skills and knowledge, which can have a positive effect on their practice and well-being, and result in positive outcomes for those they provide care and support to
- supports workers to feel safe in their practice, especially when faced with complex and challenging situations
- lets managers and organisations monitor and review workers' progress
- helps organisations make sure people receiving care and support have the support they need to achieve their outcomes or goals.

What is appraisal?

Appraisal is a more formal review of a worker's performance and improvement over a period of time. Appraisals are usually carried out annually, but may be supported by a mid-term review. It is an opportunity to:

- re-evaluate the worker's objectives
- re-evaluate their job description
- recognise and celebrate their success and achievements
- motivate workers and build on their strengths
- identify areas for improvement and how their training needs will be met.

The objectives set in the appraisal should be discussed during supervision meetings with the worker to make sure they are being met.

Workers at all levels have a right to supervision and appraisal.

Top tips for supervision

How to develop a positive relationship with your supervisee

To form an effective relationship with your supervisee, you must have mutual respect for each other – you can't, as a supervisor, be viewed as having 'power over' your supervisee.

Having mutual respect means valuing each other's input and ideas – if you both feel respected, valued and listened to, you are more likely to develop a positive relationship.

Trust, openness and honesty lead to open and frank discussions. If you are open and honest with your supervisee, they will value this and will usually behave and respond to you in an open and honest way.

Working on developing a positive relationship with your supervisee will also help them develop positive relationships with people, children and families in their own practice.

To provide honest and meaningful advice and support, you will need to have the right experience, knowledge and skills, otherwise it could have a detrimental effect, leading to a lack of trust and respect. It could also have a negative effect on staff morale, productivity, staff well-being, workplace culture and the quality of care and support being provided.

Why emotional intelligence is important

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise, understand and manage emotion in an appropriate way, and is essential to forming effective relationships.

It involves:

- **self-awareness** - being aware of and understanding your emotions, and recognising the effect they can have on you and others around you
- **self-management** - being able to manage your emotions so they do not have a negative effect on a situation or those around you
- **social awareness** - the ability to understand other people's emotions and the effect they can have on them and on group dynamics
- **relationship management** - the ability to handle and influence other people's emotions by the effective use of interpersonal skills, empathy and conflict resolution.

Being able to effectively manage your emotions, and interpret and respond to other people's emotions will help make you a better supervisor. It will help teams work effectively and motivate people to work to the best of their ability to achieve the organisation's outcomes or goals.

Reflection will help increase your self-awareness and develop a better understanding of others. To help you do this, you should critically evaluate your practice to identify actions that have had a positive or negative effect or outcome.

You can ask your supervisees for feedback about their supervision experience by using the following template:

[Example - Staff evaluation of supervision](#)

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How to communicate effectively with your supervisee

As a supervisor, good communication skills are essential, and you will need to provide information in a confident, clear, concise and accurate way.

Communication should be a two-way process and involve:

- listening to what your supervisee says
- paying attention to your supervisee's non-verbal communication
- being clear
- being friendly
- being empathetic
- being open-minded
- being respectful.

Here is a checklist you can use to support you to communicate effectively:

[Effective communication checklist](#)

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The most effective conversations are those where people feel heard, so you should make sure you pay attention to your supervisee, listen to what they have to say and don't become distracted by other things.

Use open questions to get the discussion going, such as those beginning with 'what', 'how', 'why' and 'when', and avoid using questions that lead to 'yes' or 'no' answers.

The word **OARS** can help you remember the skills needed to have a good conversation:

- **O**pen-ended questions
- **A**ffirm - notice strengths
- Listen **R**eflectively
- **S**ummarise in an empowering way.

How to involve and engage your supervisee in supervision

Supervisees should be involved and engaged in the supervision process.

While supervision plays a part in checking if objectives are being met, it's also how organisations make sure workers are properly supported to carry out their role to a high standard and develop new skills to work in an outcome-focused or child-centred way.

As a supervisor, you should encourage your supervisees to:

- prepare for the supervision session by:
- attend and prioritise all planned supervision sessions
- approach the sessions with a positive attitude
- use the session to discuss and reflect on their work, and share thoughts and ideas
- critically reflect about what has worked well, what hasn't and discuss anything they are worried about
- identify any situations that are beyond their ability or they're unsure about
- read and agree the supervision record
- act upon any actions, including completing any training or learning and development activities
- reviewing the notes of your previous meeting
- making a note of things they would like talk about
- reflecting on how the learning and development activities they carried out have changed their practice.

You should make sure your supervision meetings take place in a quiet, private space and that there are no interruptions (you should switch off your phones and update your calendar so your colleagues are aware you're unavailable). If you need to cancel or rearrange the meeting, make sure you do it in a timely manner and you both agree the new date and time.

Giving constructive feedback

You will need to provide your supervisees with constructive feedback on a regular basis.

- Having a relationship based on trust will help you give feedback effectively and means your supervisee will be more likely to take your suggestions forward
- Don't avoid problems relating to work or other issues affecting your supervisee – be honest and upfront when giving constructive feedback
- Mention the positives (such as talking about your supervisee's positive attitude or how well they have performed in the past) – it can motivate your supervisee to reflect and think about what they need to do to improve
- Help the supervisee reflect and think about what they could have done differently, and to think innovatively – this will allow them room to grow and develop
- Be specific! Telling someone their work needs improving and not giving any detail isn't helpful. Your supervisee may end up feeling frustrated, which won't lead to an improvement.

What is reflection and how can it help?

Reflection gives supervisees an opportunity to think about their practice, attitudes and values.

It's a chance to:

- evaluate how well your supervisee is doing, including what's working well and what's not working
- discuss any problems or difficulties, and how they can be avoided
- identify any stresses or worries relating to work

- make sure they are achieving the best possible outcomes for people, children and young people
- identify any learning and development opportunities to improve practice
- think about potential barriers to different ways of working and how they could be overcome.

You should create a safe environment for your supervisee to bring any uncertainties, issues or dilemmas they may have to your supervision session.

Encourage your supervisees to reflect on a day-to-day basis when carrying out their work and not just during supervision sessions.

How to use a strengths-based approach

Using a strengths-based approach means supporting your supervisees to find solutions themselves and become more confident in their own abilities based on their strengths, skills and earlier experiences.

Try to avoid:

- **the expert trap** - you may want to fix some situations with your knowledge and expertise, but you should listen to your supervisees and let them use their own expertise and strengths
- **the problem-solving trap** - try not to come up with all the ideas, instead ask your supervisee “what have you tried?”, “how did it help?” and “what can you do differently?”
- **the ‘it will be okay trap’** - instead, listen to your supervisees.

Using strengths-based approaches with your supervisees demonstrates good practice, which you should see reflected in their own practice.

Supporting your supervisee's continuing professional development

Depending on the experience and ability of your supervisee, the supervision will need to involve some teaching and mentoring. It should contribute to your supervisee's continuing professional development (CPD) and they should be able to draw on your knowledge and expertise. Supervision should also help further develop an experienced worker's knowledge and skills.

Supervision should provide an opportunity for you and your supervisee to discuss their CPD needs, and any training and development they need or may want to do. You can help your supervisee identify their learning and development needs, and review if those needs have been met.

If your supervisee is undertaking a qualification, it's an opportunity to discuss their progress and any support they may need. The supervision should also make time to consider any registration requirements your supervisee may have and the expectations set out in the Code of Practice (where relevant).

How to have outcomes-focused supervision

To encourage your supervisees to work in an [outcomes-focused](#) way, you should demonstrate and reinforce this way of working during your supervision sessions.

In the same way we work with people, children and young people to identify the outcomes that are important to them, you should work with your supervisees to identify the outcomes that matter to them and focus on their strengths and skills:

How to have an outcomes-focused supervision meeting

- **Two-way approach:** you and your supervisee prepare for the supervision meeting, decide the agenda, discuss and reflect, and agree the actions together
- **Role modelling:** interact with your supervisee in the way you want them to interact with people receiving care and support, by recognising their strengths and resources
- **What matters conversations:** find out what matters to them – use open questions and encouraging words, pay attention to what they say, reflect and summarise
- **Protected thinking time:** people need time and space to think about how they can best work **with**, and not **do for**, people. Don't rush in with answers – give your supervisee time to think and find their own solutions
- **Reflective discussion:** encourage and help your supervisee think about how people might view their care and support. What worked well to help people achieve their outcomes? What could you do differently?
- **Future focus:** encourage your supervisee to describe the person's outcomes, goals and hopes for the future. Help them form a clear picture of the steps required and the resources needed to achieve those outcomes. What are the supervisee's outcomes and hopes for their future, how will they get there?

You can use the following discussion points to help you plan an effective, outcomes-focused supervision session:

- What are we working towards (outcome)?
- What is working well (strengths)?
- What are we worried about (priority tasks)?
- What needs to happen (what options are we exploring)?
- Where are we now (what has been the progress so far?)
- Where do we want to be (what are the next steps)?

How to prepare for your supervision meeting

Supervision shouldn't be a 'tick-box' exercise that's based around completing tasks. You should prepare for the sessions and make sure you know enough about the areas of work you will be discussing to have a reflective conversation about them with your supervisee. If you don't, the supervision process will lack any real value.

You should also:

- prioritise what needs to be discussed during the session
- review the notes from your previous session and make a note of the items and actions you need to follow up
- set the dates for your supervision meetings in advance so they are planned and valued
- check if there are likely to be any unavoidable interruptions (these should be exceptional)
- make sure the physical environment is laid out so your supervisee feels comfortable expressing their feelings and worries, and be mindful of confidentiality issues.

Developing a supervision agreement

Policies, procedures and supervision record forms set out what you and your supervisee can expect from supervision. They also give your organisation a chance to audit and monitor supervision performance.

It is a good idea to have a written agreement with your supervisee about your supervision sessions. The agreement should include:

- how often the sessions will take place
- how long the sessions will be (approximately)

- where the sessions will take place
- the main areas for discussion/agenda items
- confidentiality issues
- when the notes will be written and who will write them
- procedure for complaints or reconciling differences.

Here is an example of a supervision policy and supervision agreement.

[Example - Supervision policy](#)

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[Example - Supervision agreement/contract](#)

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Supervision and confidentiality

Your supervisees should be comfortable discussing all aspects of their work with you. To encourage this, you should be clear with your supervisee about what will happen to the information you discuss.

You and your supervisee should be able to access the supervision record at any time. Although it's a confidential document, it's also an organisational document that doesn't belong to you and your supervisee, so it's neither secret nor private. Any supervision policies should set out the situations in which others can access the record and you must both be aware of them.

The situations could include:

- auditing
- grievance

- discipline
- internal or external inquiry
- complaints.

Performance management

What is performance management?

Effective performance management helps workers achieve their professional and personal goals, as well as the organisation's goals.

Performance management is the process of:

- setting performance expectations, objectives and goals
- monitoring progress
- measuring results
- appraising and rewarding or correcting workers' performance.

A structured performance management process includes supervision, appraisal and professional development programmes. It plays an important part in staff retention and well-being, and the quality of care and support provided.

How often should you hold supervision meetings?

The frequency of your supervision meetings will depend on:

- your organisation or setting's supervision policy
- the experience, confidence and competence of your supervisee
- your supervisee's support needs
- if there is a performance issue
- your compliance with regulatory requirements.

Agreeing actions with your supervisee

During the supervision session, you may set actions with your supervisee. Here are some of the things you should think about when doing this:

- create the actions with your supervisee and focus on goals
- listen to your supervisee's ideas and solutions
- make sure the actions are achievable
- agree a timeline for completing the actions
- record any challenges, dilemmas and strengths you discuss and the details of the plan you have agreed.

Discussing health and well-being with your supervisee

Staff health and well-being is essential to providing high quality care and support. In the same way you have 'what matters' conversations with people, children and young people who receive care and support, you should make sure you have 'what matters' conversations with your supervisees during your supervision sessions.

How to have difficult conversations with your supervisee

There will be times when you will need to have difficult conversations with your supervisees. Being able to talk about sensitive and emotive issues is an important part of the job, but it's also one of the toughest.

A difficult conversation may include one where you discuss:

- poor performance or conduct
- personal matters
- investigating complaints or grievances
- sensitive matters, such as turning down annual leave.

Badly handled difficult conversations can have negative consequences, such as damaging team dynamics, lower morale and a negative effect on attendance and performance.

Workers will value supervisors who can address difficult issues in an open and honest way rather than focusing on blame and criticism. You should create a safe environment for your supervisee where they can learn from their mistakes.

You can find a list of things to think about when having difficult conversations here:

[Managing difficult conversations](#)

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Recording feedback

Recording is important because it means you:

- have an accurate record of what was discussed and the actions agreed
- have a record of any disagreements
- can benchmark and audit the quality of supervision
- can use the information for performance management.

Be specific when you record your supervision sessions as it's a great way to make sure you capture the evidence effectively.

At the end of each session, or as soon as possible afterwards, you and your supervisee should sign and date the record to confirm it's accurate. You will both need to keep a copy of the record – it can be a hard or electronic copy. You may want to keep your copy in a supervision or personal staff file.

Here is an example of an outcome-focused supervision record:

[Example - Agenda and outcome-focused supervision record](#)

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Supervision standards and regulatory requirements

Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016

[Regulation 36 of the Act](#) states that: “The service provider must ensure that any person working at the service (including a person allowed to work as a volunteer):

“receives appropriate supervision and appraisal”.

The [accompanying guidance](#) provides more information, stating:

“Staff receive supervision in their role to help them reflect on their practice and to make sure their professional competence is maintained. This includes feedback about their performance from individuals using the service

“Staff meet for one to one supervision with their line manager or equivalent officer, or a more senior member of staff, no less than quarterly”.

National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare

While not all early years and childcare settings are regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales, it’s good practice for settings to follow the guidance set out in the [National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare](#).

The guidance states: “All paid staff receive regular one-to-one supervision which encourages them to think about the quality of their practice and raise any safeguarding concerns. They also receive formal appraisal at least once a year”.

Code of Professional Practice

The [Code of Professional Practice for Social Care Workers](#) tells social care workers: “you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and developing knowledge and skills”.

The Code tells managers they must provide “supervision and appraisal to support and motivate staff to meet their role, responsibilities and accountabilities”.

While supervision is essential, its quality and ‘feel’ are shaped and influenced by workplace culture. Staff can view supervision negatively if they associate it with fear and blame.

Code of Practice for Social Care Employers

The [Code of Practice for Social Care Employers](#) states that employers must:

- “Have effective arrangements for management and supervision of workers to promote best practice and good conduct and support workers to improve their performance. This includes making sure that workers are fit to practice.
- “Provide effective, regular supervision to workers to support them to develop through reflective practice.”